



**Immediate release**

## **Love may be in the air for groundbreaking conservation project**



A pioneering conservation charity addressing low numbers of golden eagles in the south of Scotland has reported that a pair of eagles translocated to the area in 2018 and 2019 have exhibited potential courtship behaviours. This is the first time such behaviours have been witnessed since the groundbreaking South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project began.

Raptor expert and Eagle Officer for the Project, John Wright was lucky enough to witness the iconic birds displaying behaviours that golden eagles often use to communicate with each other prior to mating. He watched in awe as female Beaky (who was translocated to the area in 2018) and male Skan (who arrived a year later in 2019) performed an undulating flight together.

Explaining what he saw, John said: “I could see from the tag data that Beaky was in an accessible position, so being careful not to disturb her, I went to check how she was doing. When I got there, I was delighted to find both eagles sitting a few metres apart on the fence, looking like they’d both just had a good feed.

“As the cloud cleared, they took to the skies, shadowing each other, wing-tip to wing-tip. Skan (the male) appeared more dominant. Beaky rolled on to her back several times, legs outstretched and talons splayed, as Skan closely tailed her. It was an absolutely spectacular display which lasted about eight minutes before they went their separate ways.

“While it’s difficult to say for sure, and Skan in particular is very young for an eagle to settle down, these amazing behaviours had elements commonly associated with eagles attracting a mate. It was a truly beautiful sight and such a privilege to witness it first-hand.”

The interaction is potentially a significant milestone for the project and partners RSPB Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, Scottish Forestry, NatureScot and the Southern Uplands Partnership.

Francesca Osowska, NatureScot's Chief Executive, explained: "Golden eagles are one of Scotland's most majestic birds and used to be plentiful across Scotland. We work to enrich nature across Scotland, including returning wildlife to places where it used to thrive. This is a brilliant project which does exactly that, increasing breeding pairs of golden eagles in south Scotland. I am absolutely thrilled to hear of this spectacular interaction between Beaky and Skan, and I hope that this is a further indication of golden eagles establishing a strong base in the south of Scotland."

Speaking about what the latest news means to them Julia Stoddart, chief operating officer of GFG Alliance's JAHAMA Highland Estates, where Beaky was reared by her parents before being carefully translocated to the south of Scotland, said: "We are privileged to foster a strong population of golden eagles and are keen to play our part in re-establishing this iconic bird in areas where it should not be absent. It is incredibly exciting to hear that an eagle hatched on our estate, Beaky, is one of the first birds translocated by the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project to display courtship behaviour."

Support from funders, volunteers, land managers, raptor specialists and other participants plays a pivotal role in helping the iconic species continue to grow in numbers and thrive in the area. Over 10,000 people have participated in the initiative to date.

Before the project began, there was only between two and four pairs of golden eagles across Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders, however a supporting study by NatureScot shows that the local habitat is suitable for up to 16 pairs.

Since 2018, the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project has successfully translocated four golden eagles from the Scottish Highlands to the south of Scotland. The four birds have all settled into their new habitats and are fending for themselves. The Covid-19 restrictions prevented the charity from translocating eagle chicks in 2020, but they plan to translocate more in 2021.

Earlier this year, Beaky was the first of the project's eagles to venture south of the border and visit the North Pennines area, where there have been no breeding pairs of eagles for many years.

The project is funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, project partners, Scottish Power Renewables and the Scottish Government. It also received funding from the Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway LEADER 2014-2020 programme. The charity's work is a key project under the Scottish Government's 2020 Challenge for Scottish Biodiversity (which sets out a route map to protect and restore Scotland's biodiversity).

For the latest news on the charity and a range of engaging resources visit:

[www.goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk](http://www.goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk)

**Ends**

**For further information contact:**

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**Images:** the images of the courtship behaviour are not available in high resolution, but other high-resolution project images are available from [add Dropbox link].

## Notes to Editors

### About the South of Scotland Golden Eagles Project

- Before the project began, there was only between two and four pairs of golden eagles across Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders, however a supporting study by Scottish Natural Heritage shows that the local habitat is suitable for up to 16 pairs.
- The project has also identified that the best way of enhancing this fragmented and vulnerable population of golden eagles is through increasing the supply of young eagles, which will eventually recruit into the breeding population. Recent satellite tagging work of golden eagles in Scotland has shown that the south of Scotland golden eagle population is greatly isolated from larger populations of this species from the Highlands.
- For the next four years, the Project will bring between three and ten young eagles south.
- The project team is using tried and tested methods for rear and release of the young golden eagles derived from previous white-tailed eagle and red kite reintroduction projects, and through the cooperation of raptor experts and estates.
- The project team has collected single eagle chicks from broods of young in the Highlands and raised and released them in an undisclosed location in the Moffat Hills area.
- Work is focussing on ensuring former and potential nesting sites are re-occupied; to identify any additional habitat management measures that will bring further improvements in food supplies in these areas; and wider work with local communities, schools, and enterprises to bring much wider benefits.
- Each released golden eagle will be satellite tagged to ensure the project team builds up as much information as they can on the ranging behaviour, survival, and health of the birds.
- Project staff are working with a variety of expert advisers, including specialists from the Edinburgh University Dick Vet School, and from Ireland and Spain who have been heavily involved in successful raptor reintroduction programmes.
- The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project is:
  - supported by Scottish Land & Estates, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Forestry, NatureScot, and The Southern Uplands Partnership.
  - funded by:
    - £1.37 million from The National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund;
    - the Scottish Government; and
    - Scottish Power Renewables.
  - licenced to undertake the work by NatureScot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage).
- The project also received more than £150,000 match funding from the Scottish Government and the European Union – LEADER 2014-2020 programme.
- The [Scottish Raptor Study Group](#) are supplying considerable expertise of golden eagle conservation to the project.
- Thanks to National Lottery players, the Heritage Lottery Fund invests money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife.
- In 2019, the project revealed that over 10,000 volunteers and special project participants of all ages (aged 4 to 92) have taken the golden eagles under their wings, as they've supported the project through a wide range of tasks and initiatives.
- Those who have participated in the initiative to date come from a range of backgrounds and organisations, including: the UK's first ever Golden Eagle Scout Champions at the Scottish

Borders Scouts; over 360 pupils from primary schools across the south of Scotland and one in the Scottish Highlands; Borders College; the Scottish Raptor Study Group; Kielder Bird of Prey Centre; HMP Dumfries; and local businesses like Wild Tree Adventures. Earlier this year, the Philiphaugh Estate near Selkirk also announced that it plans to open a Golden Eagle Centre which will support the project's conservation and community engagement work.

