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New Scottish Scouts initiative to safeguard the future of Golden Eagles hailed a success



The first ever Scouts Golden Eagle Champions initiative to safeguard the future of Golden Eagles in the UK has been hailed a success by project founders and the volunteers and Cub Scouts from the Scottish Borders who piloted the initiative.

The project, led by the groundbreaking South of Scotland Golden Eagle project, features on BBC Scotland's Landward this week (Thursday 16th May on BBC Scotland at 2030 and Friday 17th May on BBC1 Scotland at 1930).

Working closely with the Project team, The Scottish Borders Innerleithen Scout Group became the UK's first ever Golden Eagle Champions, learning from experts and meeting one of the iconic birds for themselves. Henry Happer (10) from the Borders' Scouts group also designed a special badge for each of the group members to earn as part of their work on this project.

Speaking as the first Cub Scouts were presented with their badges in the grounds of Traquair House in Innerleithen, following a day of tree climbing and eyrie (nest) building on the estate with Wild Tree Adventures, Philip Munro, Community Outreach Officer for the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project said: "It was fantastic to work on the UK's first ever Golden Eagle Champions initiative with the Scottish Borders Innerleithen Scouts Group and their inspiring volunteers. The future of conservation depends on initiatives like this that encourage young people to get involved and make a difference. Volunteers with the Scottish Borders Scouts make a huge contribution to helping to safeguarding the future of iconic species like the Golden Eagle in the south of Scotland and beyond. We would encourage anyone interested in supporting their local community and conservation initiatives to get involved with the Scouts. It is an incredibly fulfilling and worthwhile cause.

“There will also be some opportunities to volunteer with the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project and we would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in getting involved.”

Chris Kennedy, a volunteer with Scouts Scotland, currently leading their Innerleithen Scout Group, added: “We are really excited to be part of this incredible project to help protect Scotland’s Golden Eagles. This has been a fantastic opportunity for our Scouts to take a hands-on approach, working together with other people across our community as well as some of the country’s leading wildlife and raptor experts on such a hugely important issue. The young people involved will impact on our natural heritage for generations to come. It is a real example of how Scouts can make a difference in the communities they live in.

“It was also a great opportunity for our adult volunteers at our Innerleithen Group to get involved in the project. If this sounds like something you would like to help with then we’d love to hear from you.”

“Learning about the Golden Eagles has been an honour,” said Jeigha McCulloch-Graham, a 10 year old Cub Scout from Innerleithen. “It’s been a big opportunity for Innerleithen Scouts to actually get to meet a Golden Eagle, and it’s been so much fun.”

Also speaking about the project Steve Backshall, BAFTA-winning naturalist, writer and television presenter, and Scouts Ambassador said:

“This is an amazing opportunity for Scouts in the Scottish Borders to be a part of the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project. They will be playing a vital role in the continued protection of many unique and important species, such as Scotland’s Golden Eagles.”

Francesca Osowska, Scottish Natural Heritage’s Chief Executive, said: “Congratulations to Innerleithen Scout Group for being the UK’s first-ever Golden Eagle Champions! This is a wonderful programme. It was fantastic to hear that the children really relished seeing and learning about these magnificent birds right in the Borders. We’re delighted that the golden eagles are doing so well in South Scotland, and thrilled to help them return to places where they were once an important part of our wildlife.”

The pioneering South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project has been set up to address low numbers of Golden Eagles in the South of Scotland. Project partners RSPB Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, Forestry Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, and the Southern Uplands Partnership, have been working together for more than eleven years to bring it to fruition. Funded by The National Lottery, project partners, the Scottish Government and local LEADER Programmes, the initiative 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).

The Scouts and Cubs Golden Eagle Champion:

- learn about Golden Eagles from wildlife professionals at the South of Scotland Golden Eagles Project.

- got out and about in the countryside discovering first-hand how these magnificent birds of prey live and survive, including tree climbing and eyrie (nest) building with Scottish Borders based, Wild Tree Adventures.
- Built their knowledge of the local environment and the abundance of wildlife on their doorstep.

For the latest news on the project visit: www.goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk

For more information about Innerleithen Scouts plus our other thirteen groups across the Borders, visit www.borderscouts.org.uk

Ends

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Notes to Editors

About the South of Scotland Golden Eagles Project

- In the first of a series of groundbreaking translocations, conservationists at the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project successfully transported three Golden Eagle chicks (named Edward, Beaky and Emily) from the Scottish Highlands to a secret location in the Southern Uplands of Scotland in August 2018.
- The young birds have settled into their new homes and are now beginning to fend for themselves.
- The £1.3 million project, hosted by the Southern Uplands Partnership, is now calling on volunteers across the south of Scotland (locals and visitors alike) to support project staff and Scottish Raptor Study Group members in monitoring and recording sightings of the birds.
- Children and young people in schools across the South of Scotland adopted the birds, naming them Edward, Beaky and Emily.
- Currently there are only between two and four pairs of Golden Eagle 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 two 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 has been 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, Scottish Natural Heritage and The Southern Uplands Partnership.
 - funded by:
 - £1.37 million from The National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund;
 - the Scottish Government;
 - more than £150,000 match funding from Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders LEADER programmes .
 - licenced to undertake the work by Scottish Natural Heritage.
- 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.

About Scouts Scotland and the Scottish Borders

- Around 1000 young people enjoy Scouting in the Scottish Borders supported by 400 amazing volunteers, but they are always in need of more supporters. Several of their groups have waiting lists as so many girls and boys want to enjoy the fun, friendship and adventure Scouting offers.
- Scottish Borders Scouts have a variety of roles either working directly with the children or behind the scenes making everything come together. They offer flexible volunteering so volunteers only give the time they can afford. Whether that's a few hours a week, a month or even a year.
- As Scouts, we believe in preparing young people with skills for life. We encourage our young people to do more, learn more and be more.
- Each week, we give almost 40,000 young people in Scotland the opportunity to enjoy fun and adventure while developing the skills they need to succeed
- Innerleithen Cubs will design a special Golden Eagle Champions badge.
- For more information about Innerleithen Scouts plus our other thirteen groups across the Borders, visit www.borderscouts.org.uk
- Adventurer Bear Grylls is the UK Chief Scout - <https://scouts.org.uk/about-us/organisational-information/chief-scout/>
- Other high profile Scout Ambassadors include Olympians, Astronauts, Explorers and TV presenters including Helen Glover, Ellie Simmonds, Tim Peake, Steve Backshall and Warwick Davies -: <https://scouts.org.uk/about-us/ambassadors>

