***News release below and images attached for use by media. Photo captions at the end of release***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: MONDAY 5 DECEMBER**

**SOUTH OF SCOTLAND GOLDEN EAGLE PROJECT SOARS TO SUCCESS AS IT IS NAMED SCOTTISH PROJECT OF THE YEAR**

**A pioneering conservation scheme in the south of Scotland has won a top national award.**

The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project has been named Scottish Project of The Year in the 2022 National Lottery Awards.

Through a series of ground-breaking golden eagle translocations, the project is addressing a previously low population of golden eagles in Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders. Starting out with three breading pairs in 2018, the project has brought the total population to 39, the highest number recorded in 300 years.

The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project beat off stiff competition from more than 1300 organisations to reach the public voting stage in this year’s National Lottery Awards, which celebrate the inspirational people and projects who do extraordinary things with the help of National Lottery funding.

The project has emerged as the Scotland winner following the public vote which was held earlier this year.

Delighted to be voted by the public as The National Lottery Scotland Project of the Year, Michael Clarke, Chair of the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project Board said: “Public support is vital in our work to protect golden eagles in the south of Scotland, so we are absolutely thrilled that they have voted for The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project to win The National Lottery Scotland Project of the Year. The project’s success to date is testament to the hard work of our pioneering team and the mutual trust and positive support they have built among a wide range of partners – including funders like the National Lottery Heritage Fund, ecologists, raptor experts, vets, gamekeepers, landowners, land managers and 14,000 plus community participants.

“From taking the local population of golden eagles to the highest number recorded here since the early 19th century and building a growing appreciation of the importance of golden eagles to sustainable rural conservation management, to creating the UK’s first Golden Eagle Town and Festival in Moffat and opening the first mainland Eagle Information Point in Philiphaugh, the work of the project team really is exemplary. And we’re incredibly grateful to the players of the National Lottery and all our funders for making all of this possible.”

Project Manager, Cat Barlow, added: “It is such an honour to win this prestigious award, a wonderful recognition of the fantastic support the project has received from National Lottery players, volunteers, communities, stakeholders and project partners.”

Jonathan Tuchner, from The National Lottery, added: “Golden eagles are iconic to Scotland. It's exciting to see the numbers being boosted in their natural habitat thanks to the innovative work of the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project, supported with funding raised by National Lottery players. It’s thanks to the project’s ground-breaking achievements that they have deservedly won the public vote to be crowned the 2022 National Lottery Awards Scottish Project of the Year.”

Earlier this year, the project reached a new milestone as six more chicks were relocated to southern Scotland. The chicks were transported from the Scottish Highlands in September to a secret location near Moffat.

Project partners the Southern Uplands Partnership, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, Scottish Forestry and NatureScot worked on the project together for more than 11 years before releasing the first eagle chicks in 2018. Funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, project partners and the Scottish Government, the initiative is a key project under ‘Scotland’s Biodiversity. A Route Map to 2020’, supporting the Government’s ‘2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity’.

National Lottery players raise more than £30 million for good causes across the UK every week, which in turn helps projects like the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project continue to carry out incredible work. For more information about The National Lottery Awards visit [www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk](http://www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk/)

**-ENDS-**

For further information and to arrange interview, photography and filming opportunities please contact The National Lottery Awards: **Sarah Myers on****sarah.myers@lotterygoodcauses.org.uk****or 07828 617 962**

**Photo caption (Credit: Phil Wilkinson/The National Lottery):**

*South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project soars to success to win the 2022 National Lottery Scotland Project of the Year Award. Project Manager, Cat Barlow is joined by Bryan Burrows, Rick Taylor, John Wright and Philip Munro, with National Lottery Awards trophy after winning the public vote.*

***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 NatureScot shows that the local habitat is suitable for up to 16 pairs.
* Earlier this year, the project was awarded the prestigious Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) Tony Bradshaw Award for Outstanding Best Practice.
* Since 2018, the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project has successfully translocated:
	+ 18 golden eagles juveniles collected at around 6- 8 weeks of age from the Scottish Highlands to the south of Scotland.
	+ 7 sub adult golden eagles (aged between 6 months and 3 years)
* In winter 2021/22, the project became the first in the UK to successfully translocate free-flying young golden eagles (aged between 6 months and 3 years) to boost a low population of this iconic bird.
* The birds have now all settled into their new habitats and are fending for themselves.
* During the first Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, 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. She was also later seen demonstrating potential courtship behaviour with Skan, one of the male eagles translocated to the area by the project.
* The project has 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 year, the Project will continue to translocate juvenile and subadult golden eagles under the conditions of the novel research licence.
* For the translocations featured in this news story, the project team:
	+ Used 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.
	+ collected single eagle chicks from broods of young in the Highlands and raised and released them in an undisclosed location in the southern uplands.
	+ focussed 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 is satellite tagged by licensed individuals 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 work 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.
* Over 15,000 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.
* In September 2021, the project worked with Visit Moffat to host the UK’s first ever golden eagle festival to celebrate the town of Moffat becoming the country’s first official Eagle Town. The programme included a keynote speech from Gordon Buchanan.
* In May 2021, the project opened the UK mainland’s first ever golden eagle information point. Designed by award-winning exhibition designers Studioarc, in partnership with the project team, the new Eyrie: Eagle Information Point is located in the new Waterwheel Tearoom in Philiphaugh Estate, near Selkirk.
* 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.
* 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:
		- £1.5 million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund;
		- the Scottish Government; and
		- Scottish Power Renewables.
	+ licenced to undertake the work by NatureScot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage).
* The project also previously received more than £150,000 match funding from the Scottish Government and the European Union – LEADER 2014-2020 programme.
* The Project’s Scientific Advisory Panel provides the project with expert scientific, veterinary and technical advice (particularly to ensure eagle health and welfare). Members also advise on wider specific scientific and land management/land use issues. Members include:
	+ Dr Neil Anderson (Chair), The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh
	+ Dr Rob Ogden (Deputy Chair), The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies and The Roslin Institute, University of Edinburgh, and SNH Scientific Expert panel
	+ Dave Anderson, Scottish Raptor Study Group
	+ Roy Dennis MBE, Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation
	+ Professor Miguel Ferrer, Spanish National Research Council
	+ Dr Alan Fielding, SNH Scientific Expert Panel
	+ Dr Gidona Goodman, The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh
	+ Professor Anna Meredith FRCVS, University of Melbourne Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences, Australia
	+ Stephen Murphy, Natural England
	+ Professor Ian Newton OBE FRS FRSE
	+ Lorcan O’Toole, Golden Eagle Trust Ireland
	+ Professor Chris Quine, Forest Research
	+ Chris Rollie, RSPB and Scottish Raptor Study Group
	+ Dr Ewan Weston, Scottish Raptor Study Group
	+ Dr Phil Whitfield, Natural Research
	+ Ray Lowden, Falconer, Kielder Bird Of Prey Centre
	+ Dougie McKenna, Senior Ecologist and Falconer, Stones Wildlife Management
	+ Robin Reid, Scottish Raptor Study Group
* Using money raised by the National Lottery, The National Lottery Heritage Fund **inspires, leads** and **resources** the UK’s heritage to create **positive and lasting change** for people and communities, now and in the future. [www.HeritageFund.org.uk](http://www.heritagefund.org.uk/).
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