

SOUTH PEAK RAPTOR STUDY GROUP (SPRSG)

&

PEAK DISTRICT RAPTOR MONITORING GROUP (PDRM)

ANNUAL REPORT 2011

FOREWORD

The two Raptor Groups operating in the Peak have decided to publish a joint annual report covering the whole of the Peak District and surrounding areas, thus enabling us to give a more comprehensive overview of the successes, failures, conservation and persecution news affecting birds of prey, owls and Raven. The tables, where applicable, show combined results from both groups; individual statistics can be extrapolated from the relevant species' reports. Regrettably the common theme apparent from each group's findings appears to show that persecution of the larger raptors (Goshawk, Peregrine, Hen Harrier) continues, particularly on and around driven grouse moors. This unfortunately is not just a local problem, but is prevalent throughout the UK uplands, and unless and until the law makers and enforcers adopt a higher profile to tackle this disgraceful state of affairs, the public at large will not have the enjoyment of seeing these magnificent birds of prey achieve their full potential breeding populations. Both groups are working within the Northern England Raptor Forum to address these problems at the highest level.

PDRM covers the Dark Peak excluding the Upper Derwent Valley; the Goyt Valley and the Macclesfield Forest, including two Hobby study areas outside the Peak in low lying mixed farmland in Cheshire and South Yorkshire.

SPRSG recording area covers the following:

In the north of the area, National Trust and Severn-Trent Water Authority land in the Upper Derwent Valley. In the south the group covers all of the White Peak, including the Staffordshire Moors; in addition the group covers central Derbyshire as far as the Nottinghamshire border and South Derbyshire, mainly for Hobby.

Mick Taylor (SPRSG)

Steve Davies (PDRM)

On a personal note, this will be my last report as co-ordinator of SPRSG. Having done the job since the group's formation in 1998, I have decided to stand down and hand the reins to Trevor Grimshaw, who will continue to take the group forward in a positive manner and continue to work for raptors both locally and nationally. I have enjoyed my 13 years at the helm and would like to take this opportunity to heartily thank all the group members for their hard work and support over the years: without them, none of this would have been possible.

Mick Taylor (SPRSG)

We would thank the following organisations and individuals for allowing our members access to their land:

ARC Limited	Buxton Lime	Chatsworth Estates
Forest Enterprise	Lafarge Limited	RMC Limited
Severn Trent Water	Sheffield City Council	Tarmac Limited
National Trust	United Utilities	Yorkshire Water
Mr & Mrs J White	T Kirk Forestry	Barry Mosley
Derbyshire CC Ranger Service		Peak Park Joint Planning Board

and all the others who wish to remain anonymous, including some enlightened gamekeepers and shooting estates.

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Members of the groups in 2011

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John Atkin	
Roy Frost	Stephen Moores
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Mick Lacey	Ken Smith
Geoff Mawson	Jack Street
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Carl Ashford
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SPECIES' ACCOUNTS

RED KITE *Milvus milvus*

Sightings continue to increase throughout both study areas, mainly of single birds, but two were seen together in the Matlock / Rowsley area during early spring without any evidence of breeding, unfortunately. One bird seen on 3 April was wing-tagged and had been ringed as a nestling on 21 June 2010 in Northamptonshire, 116 km SE of where it was observed. It surely can only be a matter of time before this elegant raptor breeds in our area, which has plenty of suitable habitat.

MARSH HARRIER *Circus aeruginosus*

Spring and autumn passage were again noted from both study areas, mainly in April and May and from late July through to September. Although there is little likelihood of any breeding in our study areas, it is interesting that the upland areas are used on migration.

HEN HARRIER *Circus cyaneus*

A pair of Hen Harriers had been seen in the Buxton area in mid-April; these were later confirmed as a breeding pair when the birds were seen bringing in nest material, with copulation also being observed. A dawn to dusk watch was put into operation. On a number of occasions two female harriers were witnessed in the area. It later became apparent that the behaviour of the pair had changed and that this initial nesting attempt had not been a success, but there were reports that both a male and female Hen Harrier were still present in the area. A co-ordinated watch was arranged to discover where these two birds were and if indeed they were making a second attempt to breed. The pair was located in an adjacent clough, a few hundred metres from the original nesting attempt. Stephen Murphy of Natural England subsequently visited this second nest under licence and reported seven eggs. The dawn-to-dusk watches were continued on the new nest site. Everything seemed to be progressing well until the end of May, when the RSPB warden Jo Elliott reported not having seen the female all day, but that the weather was quite bad, so that was not to be unexpected. The following day Jo Elliott said that although the male was present, there had been no food pass or any of the other usual behaviour. A decision was made to visit the nest again under licence with Jo Elliott and Ed Lawrance (United Utilities). The nest was found to have failed: signs were that something had taken the female in the night, the feathers showed no signs of having been chewed and the nest eggs were smashed, appearing to show signs

that they had been compressed. Feathers were sent away for DNA analysis and, as no trace of dog or fox DNA was found, once again destruction by humans may well have been the cause of failure. An observation camera had been arranged for this nest, but unfortunately this incident happened before the camera was in place. Police enquiries also subsequently proved to be inconclusive. Several birds were noted on autumn passage, but no winter roosts built up.

GOSHAWK *Accipiter gentilis*

PDRM report that there were a number of sightings of Goshawk in their study area (including a pair displaying over suitable habitat early in the breeding season), but no confirmed breeding attempts.

SPRSG report that 2011 was a mixed year for this species. In the Upper Derwent Valley seven sites were checked and four territories were established in early March. Three nests were found and two females began incubation; the third pair vanished. Moulded feathers from the incubating females and buccal swabs from the young produced and ringed confirmed that the same adult Goshawks as in 2010 were breeding at the two traditional sites. Only one nest was successful fledging two chicks. DNA samples were taken should future identification be necessary.

Elsewhere in the SPRSG recording area, 17 sites were detected, 14 were occupied, and at least seven were successful, fledging a minimum of 16 young. At three of the failed sites, persecution was strongly suspected and at a fourth failed site it was thought that persecution was possible.

[Joint records from the two raptor groups are shown from 2011]

Goshawk	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Sites	12	13	17	15	16	18	23	24	13	21	24
Successful	10	10	10+	8+	11	12	14	11	7	12	8
No. Fledged	17	26	23+	16+	18+	25+	26+	27+	13+	25	18+

SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus*

This species is not studied in detail by SPRSG, but PDRM figures are impressive with 77 young fledged from 18 sites of which 71 were ringed. SPRSG ringed 11 birds, including three adults.

A site at Horbury appeared to have been interfered with; there were clear signs that the tree had recently been climbed and that there had been hatched young in the nest – this site has a history of human interference.

COMMON BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

PDRM report that Common Buzzards are continuing to expand into their study area, apart from the surprising lack of breeding birds in suitable habitat in areas adjacent to heather moorland (cf SPRSG records in the Upper Derwent Valley). Just three breeding attempts were recorded in these moorland fringe areas, two of which were successful. The other site failed due to disturbance (believed to be intentional: a bivouac was constructed under the nest and rubbish was left hanging from the tree). A further site failed due to disturbance (most likely unintentional) at an early stage. Two nests in the Buxton area were not followed up due to time constraints, so the

outcomes there were unknown. Overall, 38 young were ringed from 19 nests in this recording area.

As reported last year SPRSG no longer study this species in detail, as it is now so widespread. Continued lack of breeding success adjacent to the Upper Derwent Valley grouse moors mirrors the PDRM's findings and, as mentioned in previous years' reports, persecution would appear to be the obvious answer. Seven young were ringed from two nests in the study area, while two sites in the NE of the study area held three pairs in close proximity at each site.

KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

As in previous years no detailed study of Kestrels was undertaken by either group in 2011. A total of 22 sites were known to be successful in the overall area, fledging at least 79 young, of which 69 were ringed. A number of historic sites in the PDRM area were found to be unoccupied, so a more detailed study might be undertaken in 2012.

MERLIN *Falco columbarius*

The breeding pattern of Merlin in 2011 was distinctly strange. On the western slopes of the Pennines, breeding success was about average, with eight confirmed breeding attempts, seven successful, the other lost to predation. 25 young were ringed from a confirmed 22 (probable 27) fledged (the last nest was not confirmed as fledged, although there was a ringing recovery from the brood). The average of 3.85 per successful nest is believed to show a slight decrease in productivity.

On the eastern side, nine territories were located, but only two successful nesting attempts ensued, fledging two young at each site. Pairs were in occupation early in the season and copulation was seen at most sites. Inexplicably all but two of the females departed the area in early May, leaving males in occupation for a few more weeks until they too left the area. Apparently a similar situation was noticed in other areas on the eastern side of the country from the Pennines in the South to Deeside in the North. The only factor linking these areas we know of was the exceptionally dry Spring on the eastern side of the country and this may have had an effect on the breeding condition of the females, possibly due to lack of prey species.

[Joint records from the two raptor groups are shown from 2011]

Merlin	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Sites	10	9	6	11	9	9	7	9	9	9	17
Successful	7	6	4	5	5	4	3	7+	6	5	9
No. fledged	24	24	17	17	21	13	8	24+	24	21	31

HOBBY *Falco subbuteo*

This agile but secretive little falcon continues to gain ground in both our study areas. PDRM reported 10 young ringed from four nests with a further four successful nests just outside their study area, fledging at least seven young.

The majority of Hobbies recorded were from the SPRSG's long term study area, where 51 sites were checked, at least 41 of which were occupied (including four by single birds). At least 33 were successful, fledging a minimum of 70 young, of which 18 were colour-ringed. Overall the occupancy was high, but productivity slightly

lower than usual (2.125 young per successful nest, compared with 2.4 per successful nest average over 20 years).

[Records from South Derbyshire are included from 2004 and joint records from both raptor groups are shown from 2011]

Hobby	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Sites	2	4	6	23	35	40	44	35	34	41	59
Successful	2	4	4	17	31	32+	28	25	28	28	41
No. fledged	5	8	11	41+	72	73+	55	61	64	64	87+

PEREGRINE *Falco peregrinus*

In the PDRM study area there were two breeding attempts in 2011 and 7 young were ringed and fledged from the two sites. At a third site, on an RSPB reserve, which had been successful for a number of years, the pair failed to breed; the male was thought to be a first year bird

In the SPRSG area the species continued to enjoy good breeding success in 2011 away from moorland areas, with the situation in the Upper Derwent Valley continuing to give major concern: of five sites monitored, none were successful and no breeding attempts were made. At the traditional Alport Castles site, bird sightings were few; at a second, previously successful site, an occasional bird was seen, and at the three remaining sites, where birds had been successful at times in previous years, immature birds only were seen at one site. The group monitored a total of 32 sites in 2011. Breeding attempts were made at 27 of these sites (i.e. at all except those in the Upper Derwent Valley); these included the pair which bred successfully again on the Roaches in Staffordshire, fledging four young, the pair on Derby Cathedral, which raised four young, and two pairs in lowland North Derbyshire, which raised a total of five young.. A pair was found at a new site in the Buxton area of the White Peak, and was successful in fledging four young. Human persecution was suspected to be the cause of failure at a site in mid-Derbyshire, where birds had been successful for the previous three years: despite close incubation by the birds throughout April, the nest site was deserted, presumed robbed, at the beginning of May. At a further site in the Buxton area, where persecution has been rife in past years, the pair failed again in early May. However, a total of at least 55 young fledged from 20 nests, known to be successful. Results from five previously successful nests were unavailable due to time constraints, although all sites had breeding pairs early in the season.

[Joint records from the two raptor groups are shown from 2011]

Peregrine	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Sites	16	16	16	18	17	23	28	32	29	32	34
Successful	6	10	12	10	11	14	11+	19+	17+	18	21+
No. Fledged	11	18	25	26	30	32	23+	41+	35+	40+	61+

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

In the PDRM area no Barn Owls are believed to have bred in 2011. Single birds were seen around the New Mills area early in the year.

SPRSG reported lower numbers, no doubt due to the severe winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11. In the Chatsworth area, three pairs were successful, fledging six young. Three other nests in the Bakewell / Hassop area fledged a total of ten young, and a pair fledged four young near Taddington. One other active nest near Parsley Hay was found, but the outcome was unknown. In the south of the area a pair fledged three young from a nest in a natural tree hole and a further five fledged at another site. In total 23 young and three adults were ringed.

LITTLE OWL *Athene noctua*

No specific study of this species was undertaken by either group in 2011, but numbers appear down overall.

Six young were ringed from two nests.

TAWNY OWL *Strix aluco*

This was as usual the most noticeable owl (both heard and seen) recorded by both groups. Overall 17 pairs were located, 15 successful, fledging 33 young, most of which were ringed.

In the PDRM area, only seven pairs bred from a total of 25 sites visited. The low occupancy rate is thought to be due to the recent hard winters and the species may be worthy of a more in-depth study in 2012.

LONG-EARED OWL *Asio otus*

In the PDRM study area, despite visits to many traditional sites, little success was achieved locating active nests. At one site, three adult birds were present, but no active nest was found, although an empty nest found later in the season showed signs that young had fledged. A nest near Winscar failed due to tree felling in that area adjacent to the roost.

SPRSG fared a little better with two successful nests, c700m apart, fledging three and at least one chick respectively; at least two juveniles fledged at another site and an adult was alarm calling in June at a fourth site. At one further traditional site, a pair bred and reached the young stage, when unfortunately the male disappeared and the nest failed. At another well-used traditional site, no birds were present.

SHORT-EARED OWL *Asio flammeus*

PDRM report that in their area good numbers of Short-eared Owls displayed in the Longdendale Valley, but all activity suddenly ended and it was not until much later in the season that any known breeding attempts were encountered, a very unusual occurrence to say the least. Two sites were located later in the season, but only one site was successful, fledging at least four young from eight hatched. The second nest failed due to the apparent loss of one or both of the adults, because unlike normal chick starvation where the larger young cannibalise the younger birds, all the young birds of varying ages were dead in and around the nest. Persecution seems to be the most probable cause of failure.

SPRSG located five pairs, but unfortunately, due to time constraints, the outcome at these sites could not be followed up.

There was an influx of continental birds throughout eastern England in autumn, and up to six birds were seen during autumn and winter months, notably on the Eastern Moors Estate in north Derbyshire.

RAVEN *Corvus corax*

PDRM report 13 young ringed from three successful nesting attempts, including a brood of six in the Longdendale Valley. Two nests were on natural rock faces and one in a tree. From the 13 young ringed, at least six definitely fledged. A further pair nested on a pylon and had a brood of two, one of which fell to its death and the other fledged successfully.

In the SPRSG's study area at least 37 sites were occupied, although the total population may be nearer 60 pairs. At least 11 pairs successfully fledged at least 41 young. 19 pairs were in quarries, six were on natural rock faces, 11 in conifers, mainly Scots Pine and Larch with one in Yew, and a twelfth tree breeding pair nested in an Ash

[Joint records from the two raptor groups are shown from 2011]

Raven	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Sites	16	14	24+	27	31+	31+	33	42+	37+	49	41+
Successful	12	11	22	19	15+	19+	20	15+	12	11	15+
No. fledged	38	35	51+	40+	47+	46+	64+	48+	44+	47	48+