

Marsh Harrier Nest Illegally Targeted

When a Marsh Harrier nest was found on Denton Moor in May it was initially a cause for celebration. The Marsh Harrier is not a species that is normally associated with upland breeding, being more confined to lowland areas near to water courses. This was the first ever breeding attempt in the BOG recording area.

The plight of the Hen Harrier and its conflict with the managers of grouse moors is well documented. The RSPB has reported that during this year there were just three successful nests from seven breeding pairs of Hen Harriers in England, despite huge areas of suitable habitat. There were no successful nests on grouse moors.

Denton Moor, situated to the north of Ilkley, is at the southern end of the Nidderdale area which has long running troubles with raptor persecution. The RSPB has reported that within five miles of the Marsh Harrier nesting attempt, in the last ten years, at least nine Red Kites have been illegally poisoned and a further three shot

Under the authority of a Schedule 1 licence, RSPB staff visited the site in May 2017. Once the female had left the nest, it was checked and confirmed to contain five eggs. A monitoring camera was installed but when they returned on the 19 May, the nest was empty with all the eggs gone.

On 17 May the female Marsh Harrier is seen leaving the nest, immediately followed by a volley of gunshots. It is believed this was a failed attempt to shoot the bird. A couple of minutes later, two men carrying firearms walked into the nest site. One of them is seen bending down and, as they leave, a white object – thought to be at least one Marsh Harrier egg – can be seen in his hand.

On 18 May 2017, the camera recorded another visit by an armed individual to the nest site and, again, it is believed at least one Marsh Harrier egg was removed. The RSPB has no doubt from the nature of the incidents that the individuals are not egg collectors and these were deliberate acts carried out to stop the birds from breeding.

On the 19 May, the RSPB returned to the nest to find all the eggs had gone, though a pair of Marsh Harriers was still in the general area. A review of the video footage showed a disturbing series of events, with regular human activity at the site.



[Two armed men near the Marsh Harrier nest site. click for video.](#)

RSPB Investigations Officer Howard Jones said: "North Yorkshire is consistently the worst county in England for the illegal killing of birds of prey, with recent confirmed reports of a poisoned Red Kite and Buzzard, as well as a shot Tawny Owl and a Kestrel. It's therefore not surprising that this rare breeding attempt of a Marsh Harrier has also succumbed to human persecution."

North Yorkshire Wildlife Crime Officer Bill Hickson, with the support from the Rural Taskforce are investigating this and other incidents concerning the continuing problem of raptor persecution. It is now obvious that the status quo cannot continue. Grouse moor estates have to be brought more closely within the law, there has to be more accountability with penalties that include loss of subsidies and imprisonment in the worst cases.

Judge Christopher Hodson quoted Lord Justice Sedley when sentencing a man to 30 months imprisonment for taking the eggs of Peregrine falcons, a protected species, from the wild and attempting to smuggle them out of the country. "Environmental crime, if established, strikes not only at a locality and its population but in some measure to the planet and its future. Nobody should be allowed to doubt it's seriousness."

Denton Moor and Denton Hall are owned by N. G. Bailey UK who promote shooting activities in the area. The MP for Skipton & Ripon is Julian Smith (julian.smith.mp@parliament.uk).