



24 August 2023

## **BIRDS OF PREY BREEDING SUCCESS BRINGS BUMPER YEAR AT NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND'S MAR LODGE ESTATE**

- **A record number of breeding pairs of hen harriers recorded at Mar Lodge National Nature Reserve**
- **Eight pairs of hen harriers bred successfully producing a bumper number of 32 chicks – the estate's most productive year to date.**
- **White-tailed eagle Mar'verick's parents produced two chicks that have now fledged successfully.**

The team at Mar Lodge Estate is celebrating a successful breeding season this year with a record number of birds of prey chicks documented at the National Nature Reserve cared for by the National Trust for Scotland.

The conservation charity, which looks after and shares Mar Lodge to provide access to nature, beauty and heritage for everyone, recorded 32 hen harrier chicks this year, making it the site's most productive year to date after the species colonised the area in 2016. Since then, the number of breeding pairs has grown year on year reaching a high of 11 pairs in 2023, with eight of these breeding successfully to produce the bumper number of chicks.

In addition to the positive news of the hen harriers, it was also a fruitful second year for the pair of white-tailed eagles that set up home at Mar Lodge last year. After producing one chick, Mar-verick in 2022, this year they changed the location of their nesting site on the estate and produced two chicks that have now fledged successfully.

Shaila Rao, National Trust for Scotland's Conservation Manager at Mar Lodge Estate, said: "We're thrilled at the news that the birds of prey which choose to call Mar Lodge home have had such a great breeding year. This amazingly productive season is likely to be a result of a vole population peak that is providing an abundant food supply for hen harriers and other birds of prey which live on the estate.

"We have worked in partnership with the RSPB to satellite-tag four female chicks to allow us to learn more about hen harrier ecology and it will be great to see where these birds head off to once they have fledged. We were delighted to hear that two female harriers that were tagged on the estate last year as chicks, bred successfully for the first time elsewhere in Scotland.

“With the bountiful food supply on offer, it’s no coincidence that this year we had many more sightings than normal of the ethereal short-eared owl, and we were lucky enough to be able to confirm this breeding success after finding some short-eared owl chicks nestled in the heather.

“To top it all off, peregrine falcon, golden eagle, tawny owl, merlin along with buzzards have also fared well this year with successful breeding confirmed for all these species. Ospreys have not bred at Mar Lodge for some time, so we’re especially excited at the tantalising reports of numerous sightings of ospreys and we’re optimistic that this may be a precursor to a pair setting up home on the estate in future.

“It is fantastic to have this spectacular species as an addition to the variety of breeding birds of prey soaring the skies at Mar Lodge. It’s thanks to the amazing generosity of our members and supporters that we’re able to look after this special place, to preserve its important wildlife and nature for future generations to enjoy. This support allows our team to continue their vital work to monitor the different species on the estate, to understand more about them, and track potential threats to the bird populations from the climate crisis for example. It’s been a busy and exciting year for raptors at Mar Lodge and we look forward to what 2024 will bring.”

The work carried out at Mar Lodge Estate supports the National Trust for Scotland’s mission to provide access to nature, beauty and heritage for everyone, outlined in its 10-year strategy, launched in 2022. This work supports its conservation goals to enrich Scotland’s protected heritage and enable nature to flourish.

Further information about birds of prey and Mar Lodge Estate can be found on the National Trust for Scotland website, [here](#).

## **ENDS**

### **Editor’s notes:**

#### **About the National Trust for Scotland**

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland’s largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland’s magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022 the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland’s heritage which doesn’t have a voice, to

improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk).

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.