

Buzzard Cam Launched in Co. Down - interactive monitoring of buzzard nests by Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group at National Trust property Mount Stewart, on the Ards Peninsula.

6th June 2015

The Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG) in collaboration with the National Trust has this year embarked on an initiative to remotely monitor activity at buzzard nests and facilitate a unique raptor interactive experience with the wider public.

Teams of raptor study group volunteers have been closely monitoring all raptors across Northern Ireland but two special buzzard nests on Mount Stewart estate on the Ards peninsula have been getting close attention over recent weeks, one of which contained three eggs and the second contained an exceptional six eggs and one recently hatched chick, meaning that seven eggs were laid.

These two buzzard nests are currently being monitored for research purposes by remote cameras, under special licences and permits from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and Forest Service NI, at the stunning National Trust property at Mount Stewart, Co. Down.

Footage from one of these nests which had the three eggs is being streamed to the wider public via the NIRSG web-page (www.nirsg.com) and footage is also being relayed to TV screens at Mount Stewart where people can also watch the progress of the nest over the summer.

Dr Marc Ruddock, Project Manager for the NIRSG said; "We were hugely grateful to have received funding from the Challenge Fund in 2015 to visit schools across Northern Ireland and also to build this remote monitoring camera system. This system took many months to build and we now have a remotely powered camera recording high quality footage of the buzzard nests in Mount Stewart. Dr Ruddock continued "We would like to thank Andrew Murray and Stuart Ogg, the experts behind the construction of the system and also the National Trust for hosting the camera and our Raptor Officer for working to locate these nests. Dr Ruddock concluded this team project provides a fantastic blend of wildlife knowledge, raptor understanding, technology, field survey effort and with the essential support of land managers to provide a truly unique interactive experience for our raptor workers and also the public".

Mr Andrew Upton, Coast and Countryside Manager for National Trust for Strangford Lough & the Ards Peninsula said "We are delighted to have been able to host this type of project at one of our properties and we will have footage from the camera system relayed to screens at Mount Stewart to allow our visitors to see what happens first hand in the buzzard nest and we look forward to people coming to see this species on the estate in such a novel and interactive way whilst causing no disturbance to these special birds".

Dr Eimear Rooney, the NIRSG Raptor Officer, who completed her PhD on buzzards in Northern Ireland said "I am excited to be able to get a 24/7 insight into the life of a buzzard family. This is a species which is far too often killed illegally in Northern Ireland, particularly by poisoning, and this type of research and engagement with people is really important for us all to understand the value of raptors (birds of prey) and their behaviour and lifestyles within our eco-system". Dr Rooney continued "Our volunteers work tirelessly in monitoring many birds of prey across

Northern Ireland and we wouldn't find interesting nests such as this without the hard work of the volunteers. If anyone would like to help you can report your raptor sightings at the NIRSG webpage or why not follow us via Facebook to get updates about our work and in particular to receive updates of these nests".

Carol Forster from Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) which administered the Challenge Fund monies for the camera and education projects to the NIRSG said "It's really wonderful to see Challenge Fund money used for such a positive project delivering clear multiple benefits – benefits for wildlife, benefits for society in getting volunteers involved in nature, and benefits for government in terms of monitoring and data gathering".

Cathy Smyth ornithologist at Northern Ireland Environment Agency said "NIEA is delighted to work closely with the NIRSG and this interactive project, giving visitors a chance to get up close to a buzzard nest and affording them the opportunity to develop an interest in these fantastic birds".



Notes to Editors:

The Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG) was founded in the early 1990s and is a volunteer organisation that studies, researches and monitors birds of prey (raptors) across Northern Ireland. NIRSG encourage the conservation of raptors and provide information on breeding and wintering raptors to statutory agencies and non-government organisations to ensure effective and practical management and conservation. NIRSG raise awareness and the profile of all raptor species and inform and assist the police and wildlife agency regarding crimes and suspected crimes against raptors. More about our work and ethos can be found at www.nirsg.com. The work of the NIRSG and the Raptor Officer post is part-funded by the Natural Heritage Grants Programme (NHGP) from Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

Birds of prey and their nests are protected under law in Northern Ireland and so approaching a nest which is in use or being used may be against the law. Wildlife legislation, namely the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 as amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment (NI) Act 2011 protects birds of prey from disturbance and/or destruction by special penalties. Penalties can include a custodial sentence and/or up to a £5,000 fine per offence. A leaflet outlining the protocol for reporting raptor crimes was previously produced by the PAWNI Raptor Subgroup and is available for download at the following link: <http://www.nirsg.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/PAWNI-Raptor-Crime-Leaflet.pdf>

In 2014, with Challenge Fund support, the NIRSG Interactive Raptor Programme visited 12 schools across Northern Ireland engaging with nearly 2000 children and teachers. Due to the success of the initial project in 2014, the NIRSG received further funding to expand this worthwhile education work into 2015 from the Challenge Fund. The Raptor Education & Awareness Programme has completed school visits and a series of community events in March 2015 and reached more than 7000 people in every county in Northern Ireland along with project partners, the Golden Eagle Trust Ltd (www.goldeneagle.ie). This camera project is an interactive tool to continue this work in engaging with the wider public on Northern Ireland's special birds of prey heritage and biodiversity.

The **Challenge Fund** is co-ordinated by the **Northern Ireland Environment Link** (www.nienvironmentlink.org) and monies come from the plastic bag levy.

The National Trust is a UK conservation charity, protecting historic places and green spaces, and opening them up for ever, for everyone. The National trust was founded in 1895 with the aim of saving our nation's heritage and open spaces. 120 years later, the National Trust are still working hard to uphold these values. Mount Stewart is a neo-classical house and has one of the most inspiring and unusual gardens in the National Trust's ownership. For more information on Mount Stewart including opening times and directions for getting there these can be found at <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mount-stewart/>

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