

# #theBOUblog template

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Short, snappy title (max. 10 words)

The sell – a snappy highlight or question to use to promote the blog (max. 20 words)

Name

Institute (with link to website)

Main article text (500 – 1000 words)

- use short paragraphs
- embed links (as per example below)

References and/or further reading

- include links to online items
- add additional items such as blogs etc. not referred to but providing further reading
- see example below for format

Author biography (max. 100 words).

- inc. link to your online profile
- inc. a head and shoulders photo of yourself
  - o max 250 x 250 px wide to be reproduced at 120x120px

Images

- inc. one opening image
  - o also used as thumbnail on BOU homepage
  - o needs to reproduce well as a square
  - o a good photo of a bird or other striking image is preferred
  - o no graphs, etc!
  - o size max 500 x 500 px wide
- inc. 1 – 3 photos and/or figures to include within the blog
  - o size at 1000 px wide

See example below and recent blogs at <http://www.bou.org.uk/blog/>

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EXAMPLE

View online at <http://www.bou.org.uk/hen-harriers-going-going/>

### **Hen Harriers: going, going . . .**

Does science support claims of persecution? And what of a species recovery in an anti-raptor climate on grouse moors?

#### **Arjun Amar**

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The UK Hen Harrier population is in terminal decline and action is urgently needed to stop the species being driven to extinction in the UK. But what does the science say to support the claims of persecution and for the species recovery in an anti-raptor climate on grouse moors?

In a paper published in 2010, ecologists (including myself) from various organisations such as the [RSPB](#), [Scottish Natural Heritage](#) (SNH) and the [Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust](#) (GWCT) found that there were only five pairs of successful Hen Harriers on driven grouse moors in the UK, whereas our data estimated that in the absence of illegal persecution these areas should have supported 500 successful pairs ([Redpath et al. 2010](#)). Since then the situation for this species has worsened still, and in 2013, for the first time in over 60 years, there were no successful breeding Hen Harriers in England. Like most ornithologists, and I suspect most people, I find the near annihilation of the Hen Harrier in England and on grouse moors elsewhere in the UK deeply depressing.

I have been lucky enough to have spent several years studying a non-persecuted population of this species on the Orkney Islands ([Amar & Redpath 2005](#), [Amar et al. 2008](#), [Amar et al. 2012](#)), and I really feel for the birders, ramblers, climbers, [artists](#), [children](#), teachers and others who have never had the opportunity to experience the joys that come from having these magnificent creatures in their local upland areas.

Hen Harriers are not the only raptor species that suffer on grouse moors – my own research on Peregrine Falcon breeding success in the uplands of England showed that because of persecution Peregrine Falcon pairs nesting on grouse moors fledge only half the number of chicks of those which nest away from this kind of habitat ([Amar et al. 2012](#)). This work suggests that persecution was widespread on grouse moors in almost all areas of England, findings that run counter to the claim that raptor persecution is only occurring on few 'rogue' estates. Other research has highlighted similar problems for Golden Eagles on the grouse moors of Scotland ([Whitfield et al. 2004](#)).

So, why are birds of prey persecuted on grouse moors, despite the fact that they are legally protected? The simple reason is because they eat Red Grouse and much of our upland moorland is managed for the recreational shooting of Red Grouse.

[CAPTION] Moorland managed for grouse showing patches (pale areas) where heather has been burnt and the patches are in early stages of regeneration © Ailith Stewart

There are two forms of grouse shooting practised in the UK:

- 1) Walked-up grouse shooting in which people shoot grouse that are flushed up by dogs. This form requires lower densities of grouse and raptors tend to fare much better.
- 2) Driven grouse shooting, involving people flushing grouse over a line of static shooters. This form requires higher densities of grouse (c. >200 per km<sup>2</sup>) and is associated with heavy raptor persecution.

Many are now questioning the legitimacy of an industry that relies so heavily on illegal activities.

Research has now shown that the concern expressed by grouse moor managers and gamekeepers was not without basis as in certain circumstances Hen Harriers can make driven grouse shooting economically unviable ([Thirgood et al. 2000](#); [Park et al. 2008](#)). These circumstances relate to when you have high density of harriers that settle on a moor, which is influenced by the number of Meadow Pipits ([Redpath & Thirgood 1999](#)) and the number of voles ([Redpath et al. 2002](#)); and also on the state of the grouse cycle, with low to medium densities particularly vulnerable, due to variation in predation rates by Hen Harriers on grouse chicks ([Redpath & Thirgood 1999](#)).

Landowners and grouse moor managers argue that Hen Harriers cannot be allowed to reach high densities otherwise their grouse shoots will become economically unviable ([Potts 1998](#)). They will then have to make their gamekeepers redundant and as a result the benefits to some other (non-predatory) biodiversity that accrues from grouse moor predator control will be lost ([Baines et al. 2008](#)). Furthermore, the argument is made that if management of Red Grouse ends, these heather moorlands will become degraded, lost to forestry or intensive sheep grazing and therefore their overall conservation value will be reduced.

Within the framework of human-wildlife conflicts, one could argue that we are currently in a lose-lose situation ([Redpath et al. 2013](#)). Conservationists are the biggest losers; because there are currently almost no Hen Harriers in England and very few elsewhere in areas managed for driven Red Grouse. Conservationists are also wasting a huge amount of valuable conservation resources on trying to protect the few pairs that do settle, or on satellite tracking the few juveniles that fledge, only for these to mysteriously disappear over winter in the English uplands ([Natural England 2008](#)).

Many would argue that landowners and grouse moor managers, whilst not winning completely are losing less. However, they are still facing some costs. For example, grouse moor managers currently have bad publicity for their sport, with the threat that public opinion could turn against them and ultimately their sport could be more regulated or even banned completely. Furthermore, estates are apparently reluctant to let any harriers settle, because they have no safety net that will enable them to legally manage harriers so that they do not reach levels that would threaten their ability to have driven grouse shooting ([Potts 1998](#)). Thus, with the current status quo, they are being forced to break the law to maintain their interests.

So, despite the fact that we know more about the biology and ecology of this species than almost any other bird of prey in the UK, and despite the fact that scientists, conservators, government representatives and grouse moor managers have spent decades trying to find a workable solution ([Redpath et al. 2004](#), [Thirgood & Redpath 2008](#), [Thompson et al. 2009](#), [Sotherton et al. 2009](#)), we currently have fewer Hen Harriers on driven grouse moors than at any point in my lifetime. Redpath et al. ([2013](#)) recognised that ecological science can only take you so far in human-wildlife conflicts and within this conflict we have perhaps devoted too much time and

resources to understanding the birds rather than addressing the underlying conflict between those defending raptor conservation objectives and grouse moor managers.

However, for the first time I now sense that there is something of a sea change in the arena of this human-wildlife conflict. I always hoped for change in momentum and now it really seems to be happening. I have been involved in trying to find a resolution to this conflict for the last 15 years – working for organisations on both sides of the conflict (GWCT and RSPB), and I can honestly say I have never seen so much activity and impetus to resolve this issue, one way or another, as there has been in recent months. These include:

- 1) Over 10,000 people signed a petition that called on the government to consider licensing driven grouse moors. This activated a response from government. However, many people were upset by what they viewed as wholly inadequate, shallow and dismissive response from the UK government. [View](#)
- 2) Mark Avery (former RSPB Conservation Director) launched a new petition calling on a total ban on driven grouse shooting which has currently garnered over 9,000 signatures in 9 weeks. [View](#)
- 3) A new organisation – Birders Against Wildlife Crime – launched with plans to hold a National Hen Harrier Day on the 10 August (the Sunday before the glorious/inglorious 12th, the start of the grouse shooting season), to draw attention to the on-going persecution of this species on English grouse moors. [View](#)
- 4) The *Ethical Consumer* magazine launched a campaign encouraging consumers to boycott companies associated with driven grouse shooting, until persecution of birds of prey on grouse moors ends. [View](#)

Linked to this and other campaigning in the UK, retailer Marks & Spencer abandoned plans to stock Red Grouse as they were unable to secure enough "responsibly sourced" birds. [View](#)

- 5) The RSPB released a statement arguing that the time has come for driven grouse moors to be licensed to protect British birds of prey. [View](#)
- 6) Defra's Hen Harrier recovery programme was outlined by GWCT (whom also launched a petition to government to have the programme released), this wide ranging scheme would include a brood management scheme, which would involve actively moving harrier nestlings away from grouse moors once they attained densities at which they could threaten driven grouse shooting (see [Amar et al. 2000](#) for details of a similar scheme used in France on Montagu's Harriers), alongside other measures designed to improve the conservation of harriers and minimise the impact on grouse shooting, such as diversionary feeding ([Redpath et al. 2003](#), [Amar et al. 2004](#)). However, as yet this scheme is still to be ratified by all consenting parties and is yet to be released by government – despite some pressure. [View GWCT petition](#)

These approaches therefore span the full spectrum of solutions from 1) an outright ban of driven grouse shooting to 2) a licensing scheme with conditions in place that allow for the sporting rights to be removed where illegal persecution continues, to 3) a brood management scheme. Personally, I think any one of these three approaches could well work to provide a conservation success (i.e. more harriers) at least in the short term. However, the implications for land management from these different options are less clear, and will be the focus of much

intense debate going forward. Either way, hopefully over the next few years at least, one or even a couple of these proposals will be implemented. Something has to change and I sense, finally, that something is about to....

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### **About the author**

Arjun Amar's PhD focussed on the cause of the Hen Harrier decline on Orkney. Following this he undertook a post-doc with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust working on research aimed at helping to resolve the Hen Harrier – Red Grouse conflict and on understanding habitat use by the species on Scottish Special Protection Areas. Arjun worked for the RSPB between 2005-2011 as a Senior Conservation Scientist where his research included exploring the impact of grouse moor management on raptors and wader populations. Since 2011 he has been a Senior Lecturer at the Percy FitzPatrick institute at the University of Cape Town, where he continues research on raptor conservation. [View full profile](#)