

Scottish Borders goshawk study

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Goshawks were exterminated in the late 1880s and reintroduced into the Borders during the late 1960s to early 1970s, either by accidental escapes or deliberate release by falconers to create a 'wild' population. Historic records show that 549 birds were imported to the UK from Fennoscandia between 1970 -75 and from these birds 10 – 15 formed the initial population.

The first known breeding attempts in 1972 failed and it was not until 1977 when the first successful breeding was confirmed.

Forestry Commission staff monitored the nest sites and in 1988 the Border Goshawk Study Group (BGSG) was formed to monitor coverage of the birds in Northumberland, Durham, Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway regions on both Forestry Commission and private sector landholdings.



In 1988 only six known sites were located in the Scottish Borders with a slow increase to 10 pairs by 1994. In 2012, although 41 sites were occupied only 22 were successful, largely due to adverse weather conditions. A minimum 44 chicks fledged.

In 1996 blood sampling of juveniles was carried out by scientists at Nottingham University, which also coincided with the Forestry Commission Research Branch handing over the project to BGSG. Since 2005 we have been collaborating with Natural Research to conduct DNA sampling at approximately 80 sites. We use various sampling methods including mouth swabs, blood feathers and moulted feathers, to build up a DNA database that will allow us to examine breeder survival, recruitment and turnover.

Forestry Commission sites form the core stable population with sites on the private sector subject to persecution, as demonstrated by a high turnover of young birds occupying established territories. In 2012 we started to fit colour rings to juveniles, which will aid future individual identification and minimise disturbance by utilising camera traps and telescopes.

Goshawks should now be occupying large areas of the Scottish Borders but due to limited geographical coverage their range recovery is not clear. Similarly we cannot give an exact number of birds in the area, however a realistic figure would be 80+ pairs.