

Raptor ecology on the islands of Colonsay and Oronsay

David Jardine (Argyll Raptor Study Group)

This long term study on these two small Argyllshire islands started in the 1980s. Initially established to explore the fortunes of the local population of buzzards, it has expanded to cover all six raptor species breeding on the islands along with raven and the small population of long-eared owls. While originally a ringing project, prey remains have also been regularly analysed. The early years of the study found that the main prey of the buzzards were rabbits, rats and small birds; this led to monitoring of the populations of the principal prey species.

Measurements of the buzzard chicks have allowed the timing of the breeding season through the project period to be tracked. Timing of breeding has changed significantly during the study and is related to spring weather and food supplies. Interestingly however, there is evidence that timing also changed when there were population changes in some of the other raptor populations, indicating an intra-guild effect. Rabbit populations have declined in recent years and the project is currently monitoring the gradual decline of the buzzard population and the changing fortunes of the other raptor species.



Caption for photo: Buzzard chicks with rat prey in the Colonsay study area. (Photo by David C Jardine)