

Satellite tagging of young kestrels

Satellite tagging of six young kestrels

Progress Report*****

21 March 2017

A signal has been received from Peake. It is not very strong but the temperature indicates that the bird is alive near Colmonell in South Ayrshire. This is encouraging and hopefully more data will be forthcoming.

6 March 2017

Unfortunately no more data from the kestrels for some weeks now. **Jenni** and **Peake** were last heard from at the end of December, **Gibb** and **Glen** at the beginning of January and **Emma** at the end of January. Hopefully one or more will come on line with spring sunshine.

With the 2017 season fast approaching the priority is getting funding to pay for a third year of tagging and order the tags. An uphill battle as usual!

20 January 2017

Glenn still seems to be with us but nothing from **Jenni**, **Emma** or **Peake**. All the tags are recording low voltage and the small surface area of the solar panel (the size of my thumb nail) means that they will struggle with the short day light hours at this time of year and in poor weather conditions. This is happening to the current hen harrier tags being monitored by the RSPB.

Still, it is not unusual for tags to come back on line when conditions improve so all is not lost yet, though there has been no relevant data from **Emma** and **Gibb** for some time which does not bode well.

3 January 2017

It is very encouraging that there is still evidence that some of the 2016 satellite tagged kestrels are still active. Notwithstanding that voltage is very poor at this time of year, particularly in the small kestrel sized tags, the picture is much more encouraging compared to the 2015 results. **Peake**, **Glenn** and **Gibb** are all still within 10 kilometres of their natal sites, the last signal being on 29 December, 2 January and 3 January respectively but all three have very low voltages. **Jenni's** last date was 27 December and **Emma** on 2 December, the latter giving most cause for concern.

19 December 2016

Still potentially five with us but most have low voltage, par for the course at this time of year. No good data from **Emma** since 2 December, **Jenni**, **Gibb** and **Peake** still in the same areas on the 18th, 12th and 18th respectively. Encouragingly **Glenn** could possibly be back on line but there were no definite location dots. A good spell of sunshine would be most welcome.

6 December 2016

News of the four 2016 cohort that are left after a gap when Jenni, my contact at the RSPB who supplies the downloads, took a break to get married! We wish them well.

Gibb is 3 kilometres inland from the natal coastal site but the voltage and data are dropping. **Jenni** is still in the same area as last reported while **Peake** has moved 10 kilometres south east of the edge of the Galloway Forest. **Emma** has not been transmitting since 2 December and the voltage is poor on the satellite tag. Recent lack of sunshine cannot be helping.

18 October 2016

Peake and **Gibb** have shown no inclination to leave the general area of the natal territory. **Emma** is still north west of Dalmellington where she has been for some time. The mover is **Jenni** who had travelled from the coast to an area south of Dalmellington and has now moved south west and returned to the coastline west of Stranraer.

22 September 2016

Data from 11-20 September indicates mostly local movement from four of the birds. There has been no signal from **Glenn** since 7 September and unfortunately it seems not to have survived. The last known position was 2 ½ kilometers south of the natal site. **Peake** has been active in an area covering 5 kilometers inland and 17 kilometers south of the site but it is still very much coastal orientated. **Jenni** was in roughly the same area as **Peake** till she moved inland to the Dalmellington/Carsphairn area. **Gibb** has a cluster of locations inland 3 kilometers from the natal site while **Emma** is still in the same area west of Dalmellington, a distance of 27 kilometers from the coast.

12 September 2016

All five birds are ok and although none have moved a great distance they are staying around in the same areas they were recorded in last week. Of great interest is the news that **Rosie's** tag from last season's cohort is still transmitting and there may be a chance of recovering it. There is no expectation that the bird is still alive.

9 September 2016

The five remaining young birds are still active but unlike **Kate** which made a move only to disappear on a driven grouse moor, they seem in no great hurry to move any significant distance. There is a cluster of data for **Jenni** near Carsphairn, still in my main study area, **Peake** has moved off the coast and is a few kilometers inland, **Gibb** is south of Pinwherry/Colmonell and **Glenn** is within a few kilometers of its natal site. **Emma** is giving some cause for concern as there has been no decent dots since 31 August. We think that the bird is ok as the rest of the data from the satellite downloads is positive. It could be that the tag is not getting as good a charge as the others.

29 August

Sadly, despite the tag having been working perfectly with good voltage, the sudden lack of transmission from **Kate** and subsequent unsuccessful ground search, we have to assume that the bird is dead. The other five are still transmitting but are showing little sign of movement from the 23rd. **Jenni** is near Penpont at the Shinnel Water (always a good kestrel area) having travelled 56km directly east from the natal site. **Glenn** is established in the Galloway Forest Park north of Glentrool, a 33km movement south east. **Emma** is 25km north east of her natal site while **Gibb** has moved 7km east. **Peake** is still within a few kilometers of the home territory.

23 August

Sadly there has been no data from **Kate** since her last position on 12 August when there was a sudden failure in transmission. Two of the birds, **Gibb** and **Peake**, are showing little inclination to move from the general natal areas south of Girvan. **Gibb** is currently located 5Km SE of the town and **Peake** is just south of Lendalfoot near the coast. **Jenni** is still well inland at Kendoon Loch near my main study area. **Emma** is roughly in the same area as in the last check, near the village of Patna. **Glenn** also is quite close to his last known position and is near South Balloch.

15 August

All six birds accounted for. **Peake** and **Gibb** are still home birds, not having moved far from their natal sites. **Kate** continues to be the prime mover leaving the Gifford area in East Lothian and is currently just north east of Lauder. **Glenn** has moved inland having made a trip to Ailsa Craig and back and is in the Glentrool area. **Emma** has not gone far, a short trip north to Hollybush, east of Ayr. **Jenni** is also inland at Carsphairn south of Dalmellington (into my main study area!)

8 August

All the tags are transmitting and all young birds except one are still quite close to their nesting territories. **Kate** has made the first move, crossing the country coast to coast and is currently near Gifford in East Lothian.



29 July 2016

All six tags are operational and there has been some small movement of birds from the natal areas. This year's cohort of young kestrels are **Peake** and **Jenni** from a small coastal quarry. **Kate**, **Emma**, **Gibb** and **Glenn** fledged from an adjacent territory, the nest site being a ledge on a cliff site just back from but within sight of the sea. The two birds showing the local movement are **Gibb** and **Peake**, the latter the most interesting as it has so far survived the possible negative response from the peregrine pair which nested in the same quarry only 60 metres away.

15 July 2016 Last week four young kestrels from a coastal site were satellite tagged completing this season's target of six. The tagging was carried out by Dave Anderson assisted by Gibby McWhirter, who monitors this territory for me, and Charlie Park. I was unable to take part due to a family holiday commitment!! The four kestrels, two males and two females, were one of the few broods available this season. Only 13 young were ringed in the study areas compared to the 60-80 annual totals in the 1980s and 90s. This is indicative of the decline of this species as the level of monitoring effort has not changed. Today all six tags were transmitting and the birds will be monitored visually in the nesting territories till they disperse.

28 June 2016 The build up to this year's satellite tagging has been less than straight forward. The number of possible broods is sadly extremely limited as the downward trend continues. To compound matters a peregrine pair had moved into the quarry presumably after a failed breeding attempt at their nearby territory. They had a newly hatched chick on the opposite side to the kestrels which was one of the few possible kestrel broods available.

Still the team set out, Dave and Graeme Anderson, Gibby McWhirter (ladders man) and myself. Incredibly the peregrine female settled down quickly and watched the whole proceedings from a perch. I suppose she'd never seen sat tagging done before! Typical for this season the number of kestrel nestlings had been reduced from five to two which were duly ringed and tagged (drawing some blood from a couple of the team!). Timing is now critical and hopefully in over a week's time we can get enough birds to use the four remaining tags at two later broods.





22 April 2016

Everything has gone quiet in the field with the 4 tags still unaccounted for not transmitting. One lives in hope but It was hoped to retrieve **Rosie's** tag but the transmissions have stopped. Although the general area is known it would be like the proverbial needle in a haystack situation. The good news is that the 2 tags which were retrieved are fully charged and ready to go and 4 new tags are on order from America (nearly all the cost covered by sponsors!). The problem may well be finding kestrels to tag as to date nineteen territories checked and only 4 pairs in residence. Almost a kestrel silent spring so far.

9 February 2016

Received a call from Dr Matt Stevens from the Hawk Conservancy Trust reporting that **Rabbie** had been found freshly dead at Worton in Wiltshire having collided with a window on a farm. This male had provided the best data for his movements with the Solway coast, Kilmarnock, New Cumnock, mid Wales twice and Plymouth all visited on his journey. The tag has been recovered and hopefully can be reused in 2016.

On the same day Jennie Birrell reported that **Rosie's** tag had started to transmit again in Dumfries & Galloway. Unfortunately it was from the same area as previous transmissions so has probably come to an untimely end. It is hoped to receive the tag.

The hunt is now on to secure funding for four new tags to take the project into a second year.

January 13th 2016

Still no responses from any of the 5 tagged birds left which could still be out there. Weather has not been helpful so hopefully, if a dry sunny spell ever appears, some data will be forthcoming as the batteries charge up.

30 November 2015

As the signal from George had been transmitting regularly but from a static location a team from the RSPB Scotland and myself attempted to locate the bird / or its remains and hopefully retrieve the tag. The tag was transmitting when we arrived, a real bonus, and the locus pinned down to an area of felled conifer belt. Despite the extremely difficult terrain the red color ring was eventually spotted next to a stump. All that remained of the bird was the two legs. The tag was found wedged on the other side of the stump, the solar panel thankfully facing upwards, hence the result. Bit of a mystery as to what had happened as there was not a trace of feathers in the vicinity so it had either died or been killed somewhere else, plucked, and then carried to the spot.

No further data from any of the remaining birds but the monitoring will continue.



16 November 2015

Sadly there is no good news regarding **Rabbie** and **Maddie** as there has been no response from either of the two survivors. The solar panel batteries may have been drained due to the poor weather of late so I fear the worst. However you never know as **Maddie** was out of touch for a few weeks before transmitting again. **George** is still transmitting but has not moved for some considerable time so presumably he has not made it. The Species Protection team at RSPB Scotland are hoping to mount a training exercise to see if we can locate the bird and retrieve the tag using a new piece of equipment. Will keep you posted on that.

16 October 2015

Jennie Birrell at RSPB Scotland checked the data today but there were no updates as it looked like the batteries on both **Rabbie** and **Maddie** are running low. The tags are therefore struggling to send out info. Hopefully this is only due to a lack of sunshine and not something more serious.

12 October 2015

Not much movement from the two birds. **Rabbie** is near Trowbridge north of Weymouth within striking distance of the coast in an area of mixed farmland. **Maddie** is literally hundreds of meters from the Channel, just west of Dover in coastal grassland and scrub. Maybe the ferry timetables are not suiting them!

25 September 2015

Maddie is still roughly in the same area very close to the Channel. **Rabbie** has moved south again and is just north of the Isle of Wight near Andover on the fringe of an afforested area. None of the other four are showing positive transmissions.

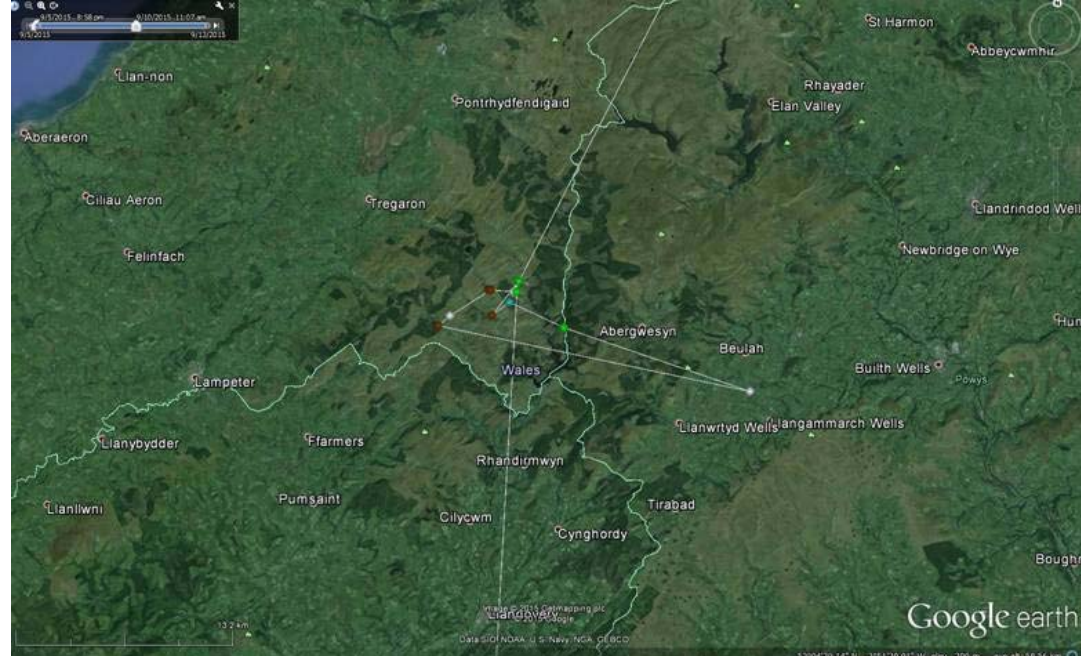
18 September 2015

Exciting news that **Maddie** so long off the radar is back on line and is west of Dover hopefully getting ready to cross the Channel. She's located in a lowland habitat mix, deciduous woodland fringe and open rough grassland. **Rabbie** is still in Mid Wales having gone to Plymouth and baulked at the sea crossing!!

14 September 2015

The data is not encouraging. On the one hand **Rabbie** has flown to the south coast of England, east of Plymouth, then moved due north to mid Wales - see maps. **George's** data shows he has not moved, his temperature reading is low but the tag is still transmitting. **Rosie** is similar, very low temperature reading - 2-5° which is not hopeful. No further data on **Alice** and **Kirky** has still not transmitted. Still unsure about **Maddie** as there is data but not good enough to verify her exact location.





8 September 2015

There has been a lack of significant movement from **George** between 30 August and 6 September which is slightly concerning. Still very much within the forest edge near the natal site. **Rosie** is a definite cause for concern as there is only one good fix from 6 September and her data is showing a low temperature and not much activity. **Rabbie** the rover went East to West between 26 August and 2 September and then back again. The last fix puts him south of Loch Braden. There is nothing from **Alice** or **Maddie** except a tantalising low resolution dot from the Kent coast from **Maddie** but better data is needed if this movement is to be confirmed.

25 August 2015

George has re-surfaced and sent some data which shows he has not moved far and is still within 5 km of the natal site. **Rabbie** the wanderer is now in the New Cumnock area as his adventures continue. Nothing new from **Maddie** and **Rosie**.

21 August 2015

Still no new data from **George** since the last update, **Rosie** has sent out some data but not good quality. **Alice** has headed off to Gretna and **Rabbie** is 3 km south east of Kilmarnock, quite the rover. **Maddie** has provided some data but again not good enough quality to pinpoint where she is.

17 August 2015

No data from **George** since 11 August and no data from **Rosie** since the 10th which is a concern as both their batteries have a good charge. **Alice** and **Rabbie** have both been giving out decent data. **Rabbie** has headed south from the Loch Braden area almost to the Solway Firth and then decided to head back north again! **Alice** is still a relatively home bird. **Maddie** hasn't given much data but the battery voltage is much lower than the others so this may improve.

13 August 2015

There is a general lack of good data coming through with poor quality argos dots. **George** has not moved far, no signal at all from **Kirky** so either a malfunction of the equipment or mortality. **Rosie** is still in the area near Loch Urr and Dunscore, north west of Dumfries and **Alice** has made little movement so far. **Rabbie** is still relatively static and there is no further data from **Maddie** after the move east.

7 August 2015

Still only five birds showing. **Maddie** has been able to send one argos point, a green dot so fairly accurate, which puts her between Stanhope and Tweedmuir, south of Broughton and Biggar on the west side of the Borders, a considerable journey west of approximately 70 kms. No good data from **Rosie** since 29 July and argos data from **Alice** is very poor. No change in status for the others.

3 August 2015

All but one of the six kestrels have appeared on the download. **Kirky** is yet to send any data and **Maddie**'s battery is very low so no relevant information is forthcoming. Sunlight has been at a premium this last week

with a lot of rain in the study area. Hopefully the weather will improve and the battery will get a good charge.

George and **Alice** are roughly in their respective natal areas still. **Rabbie** has moved approximately 7.5 km east and is just north of Loch Riecawr.

Rosie has only one record of note and that puts her within a 1.5 m radius of Craigenputtock, near the village of Dunscore north of Dumfries. The first real movement from the natal area, 30 kilometers south east.

26 July 2015 2015

Data from five of the six young kestrels has been downloaded. Sadly **Maddie** does not seem to be transmitting.

George is still within 2km of nest site (10 data points)

Alice has travelled 3km from its nest in a westerly direction (4 data points)

Kirky moved 20km west (8 data points)

Rabbie one movement 1.5km north east (2 data points)

Rosie one movement 16km west of natal site (4 data points)

7/8 July 2015

All three broods checked, all the young had fledged and were flying around the natal sites.

First data in Birds still not made any major moves.

George - 15 July travelled short distance from the nest site

Rosie - 14 July still near nest site

Alice - 10 July & 15 July has made one short movement one kilometre west of nest site then back

Kirky – 10 July moved short distance west of nest site

No data yet on **Maddie** and **Rabbie**
