



Media release
Immediate release

Pioneering project responds to disappearance of Merrick the golden eagle



Representatives for a groundbreaking conservation initiative, which attributes its success to overwhelming support from the public, raptor workers and land managers, have today expressed their shock, sadness and disappointment at the disappearance of Merrick, a female golden eagle translocated by the project in 2022. Police Scotland today confirmed they “believe the bird has come to harm and are treating its disappearance as suspicious.”

Responding to the news and backing calls for anyone with any information to report it to Police Scotland, Chair of the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project, Dumfriesshire farmer Michael Clarke said: “The disappearance of any golden eagle is extremely upsetting, but particularly when there is evidence to suggest that they have come to harm under suspicious circumstances. The project’s translocated eagles have captured the hearts and minds of many people, including children, who will all share in our utter shock, disappointment and sadness at the nature of Merrick’s disappearance.

“Indeed, the huge support our project has had for many years from tens of thousands of people in the community, raptor workers, conservation and the land management sectors, makes it all the more devastating to learn that she may have come to harm at the hands of someone who has disregarded the legal protection of the bird and the vital importance of a restored golden eagle population to protecting biodiversity and reversing nature’s decline.

“The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project’s success in quadrupling the local population is absolutely testament to the overwhelming community support, faith and trust that we have had in our work to date. For over six years our passionate and dedicated project team have worked painstakingly round the clock, in partnership with raptor workers, vets, estates, land managers, game keepers and the wider community, to ensure the health and safety of the birds we translocate. Continued support such as this is vital to saving Scotland’s nature for future generations.

“We are more resolved than ever to do our supporters justice and ensure the golden eagle population in the south of Scotland continues to thrive.

“We’re grateful to Police Scotland for their support and using all the resources at their disposal to establish the full circumstances. To ensure due process is followed, we cannot comment further at this stage. We will do so when Police Scotland shares more detail.

“We thank everyone for their support at this tough time and urge anyone with information to assist Police Scotland by contacting them on 101, quoting incident number 1193 of 18 October 2023.”

Merrick (F43), named after the highest peak in the Southern Uplands, originated from Rottal estate near Kirriemuir in the Angus Glens, a traditional sporting estate, which is accredited by Wildlife Estates Scotland (WES) for its commitment to protecting and restoring wildlife and biodiversity.

Merrick was the fifth eagle collected in the summer of 2022, the last to leave the aviaries, and the heaviest eagle translocated that summer at 5.2 kg. She was named by the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project’s host charity, the Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP).

Before her disappearance, the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project team’s round-the-clock surveillance of the golden eagles, showed that Merrick was thriving and exploring all over south of Scotland and Northern England in the south of Scotland. Merrick was photographed on her trip in Weardale and filmed in Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project partners the Southern Uplands Partnership, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, Scottish Forestry and NatureScot all share in the disappointment of today’s news. They worked on the project together for more than 11 years before releasing the first eagle chicks in 2018. Funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, project partners and the Scottish Government, the initiative is a key project under the Government’s ‘Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity’.

For more information or to donate to the charity initiative, visit:

www.goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk

Ends

