



Marsh harrier mother stars again on camera

Female raises brood of five at Sculthorpe Moor

A female marsh harrier and her chicks are starring on camera at Sculthorpe Moor Community Nature Reserve captivating visitors to this Hawk and Owl Trust wildlife haven near Fakenham, Norfolk.

Last year the same hard-working mother successfully raised three marsh harrier chicks in front of a fascinated audience who were able to watch the nest via a sophisticated CCTV system, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the European Union, using a miniature camera hidden in a log.

This year the tricky operation of getting the disguised camera situated next to the nest was again conducted by wildlife cameraman Martin Hayward Smith who holds the necessary licence to visit the nest. This year he used reeds to hide the device. Then there was a nervous wait to see if the mother bird would accept the change, until she settled down and began brooding the chicks.

This is only the second time that a marsh harrier has been filmed at the nest in this way - last year's nestcam at Sculthorpe Moor was the first. Footage recorded last year is being analysed by students from Leicester University to provide valuable research data on the ecology of marsh harriers.

In addition to live video footage from the nest visitors to the reserve this year can also hear live audio thanks to a microphone, funded by local business - Wildsounds, hidden with the camera.

Reserve Warden Nigel Middleton, Conservation Officer for the Hawk and Owl Trust, was delighted to see that this year there are five chicks although, like last time, one of them is very small. The female also has a new partner and this male harrier is much more involved than last year's, helping her to bring food in for the hungry family.

Leanne Thomas, Education Manager at Sculthorpe Moor, said 'We hope that many people will visit the reserve over the next few weeks to take up the unique opportunity to view this still-rare bird so intimately. People who live too far away to visit the reserve itself don't have to miss out as they can see the action on the nest via the webcam on the Trust's website (www.hawkandowl.org)'.

The harrier family can be seen on the big screen in the visitor centre and on a smaller screen in the Whitley Hide on the reserve. Visitors in the Whitley Hide also get panoramic views across the restored reed bed and fen over which the adult harriers can be seen soaring.

Sculthorpe Moor Community Nature Reserve is just outside the market town of Fakenham on the A148 King's Lynn Road. The reserve is open from 8am every day (except Monday) until 6pm on Tuesday and Wednesday and until dusk on Thursday to Sunday. The visitor centre where the marsh harriers can be viewed on the big screen is open 10am to 4pm daily (except Monday).

-ENDS-

Press enquiries to: Leanne Thomas 01328 856788

Notes to editors:

1. Hawk and Owl Trust

Founded in 1969 to help save the peregrine, the Hawk and Owl Trust is a national charity, now celebrating its 40th anniversary, which works for the conservation and appreciation of all wild birds of prey and their habitats both in its growing number of nature reserves and in partnership with others. Working with other organisations, farmers, foresters and landowners, the Trust researches, restores and manages nesting, roosting and feeding habitats and encourages greater understanding and appreciation of these very special birds. www.hawkandowl.org

2. Sculthorpe Moor Community Nature Reserve, near Fakenham, Norfolk.

The reserve is a rare remnant of old riverside fen in the Upper Wensum Valley, rescued by the Hawk and Owl Trust and the local community and officially opened by the Princess Royal in September 2003. The Trust leases the core area of the reserve from a parish charity, which holds the land in perpetuity. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) consisting of reed bed, valley fen, alder carr and woodland with a rich biodiversity of plants and animals. It is part of the River Wensum Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated because of its international ecological importance, and is the only place in the Wensum Valley where saw sedge occurs, now a priority habitat for conservation in Europe. www.sculthorpemoor.co.uk

3. The Heritage Lottery Fund

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 28,800 projects, allocating over £4.3 billion across the UK, including over £250 million in the East of England alone. www.hlf.org.uk

4. European Union Objective 2 Programme 2000-2006

This programme is designed to support economic regeneration activity in designated areas through funding from the European Structural Funds. For more information see the Government Office Website: www.goeast.gov.uk/