

PE1500/B

Scottish Raptor Study Group Email of 23 February 2014

The Scottish Raptor Study Group (SRSG) is very pleased to have been invited to give its views on the above petition, to formally declare the Golden Eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos*, as the national bird of Scotland. SRSG feels that there are compelling arguments for granting this petition so as to designate the Golden Eagle as Scotland's national bird, for the reasons set out below.

Scotland's Golden Eagle population, comprising some 440 pairs which occupy their own exclusive individual nesting territories, is important in terms of numbers in an overall European context. These Scottish Golden Eagle pairs are to be found at present largely in the Highlands of Scotland, but with a small part of the population located in the uplands of southern Scotland.

SRSG soon after its inception singled out the Golden Eagle as the most fitting species for its logo which is based on artwork by the renowned wildlife artist Keith Brockie, a skilled Golden Eagle fieldworker in his own right. There has been and still is a world-wide focus on Scottish Golden Eagles through the writings of distinguished Scots such as Seton Gordon who was an inspiration to Golden Eagle enthusiasts throughout much of the 20th century, Adam Watson whose Golden Eagle study is the longest-running one anywhere on the planet and the late Jeff Watson, author of the definitive monograph on the species.

The Golden Eagle is uniquely fitted to be designated as Scotland's national bird through its perception in the minds of many as an iconic symbol of wildness, strength and survival. The perception as to survival is enhanced by the fact that the Golden Eagle managed to hold out in the Scottish Highlands when in the late 19th and early 20th centuries some other species were extirpated through man's agency. It is known that many visitors to Scotland want to see three animals, namely the Loch Ness Monster, the Red Deer and the Golden Eagle. That in itself should give the charismatic Golden Eagle, an example of rugged power in the acclaimed Scottish landscape, pride of place as Scotland's national bird.

SRSG feels that it is particularly appropriate, for the Scottish Parliament's consideration of the petition, that last month the Scots Pine was officially named as Scotland's national tree. The Golden Eagle and the Scots Pine can be said to complement each other through choice of the latter as the favourite nest tree of the Golden Eagle, to the extent that it is not a crag-nester. SRSG suggests that the argument for national status for the bird is boosted by what is now the national status of its host tree, the Scots Pine.

The Golden Eagle's link with the Scots Pine should become still more apparent if the bird expands its numbers and breeds, as it should, in lowland habitats. There is no ecological reason why Golden Eagles in Scotland should remain birds of the hill country only. A valid comparison is with Sweden, for example, where there is a productive tree-nesting Golden Eagle population on low-lying agricultural land. Thus in Scotland lowland Scots Pine forests could hold breeding Golden Eagles, banished at present to the hill country through past, and unfortunately in many places still continuing, criminal persecution.

SRSB contends that designation of the Golden Eagle as Scotland's national bird would help to reduce the impact of such persecution, through increased interest in conservation of the species and removal (or at least reduction) of the factors operating against it. It is clear that many more people, both residents in and visitors to Scotland, would like to be able to see Golden Eagles than are able to at present. Designation should help towards this end. The resulting increased interest in the Golden Eagle would be to the benefit of environmental education, wildlife tourism and thus local economies.

Patrick Stirling-Aird,
Secretary, Scottish Raptor Study Group