

# Understanding the seasonal movements and provenance of Short-eared Owls

## IMPORTANCE

Despite their place on Annex 1 of the EC Birds Directive, we know surprisingly little about Short-eared Owls in the UK, their population trends or movements. However, across its Holarctic range, there is evidence that the species is in difficulty. Work led by BTO Scotland has trialled a range of survey methods for studying Short-eared Owls<sup>1</sup>, radio-tracked a test sample of breeding birds<sup>2</sup> and investigated the movements of the species at the European scale<sup>3</sup>. This work underlines that a better understanding of the movements of individual owls breeding in the UK is critical for future conservation of the species.



## WHAT DO WE WANT TO DO?

- BTO Scotland plans to use satellite tags and geolocators to follow the movements and habitat requirements of individual owls breeding in Scotland throughout their annual cycle, using a pilot study to refine methods.
- We also plan to delineate populations through an investigation of genetic and isotopic markers.
- By using a series of different study areas (e.g. mainland versus island), we aim to tease out the influence of prey type/availability and predator type/abundance on breeding success and behaviour.

## BENEFITS

The proposed project will increase our understanding of the links between breeding and wintering areas and the degree of mixing between European populations. The work will increase our understanding of habitat requirements, supporting conservation planning. It will deliver the knowledge urgently required for putting in place appropriate monitoring methods to track population changes and the success of any future conservation initiatives.

## INDICATIVE FUNDING NEEDS

We are looking to fund a pilot project to test tracking methods (1 year; £45,000) and a full project, involving collaboration with European partners (2 years; £250,000), to deliver the information necessary to underpin much-needed conservation advice for this enigmatic owl.



## MORE INFORMATION

Please look at our website for more information on BTO research priorities in Scotland and projects for which we are seeking funding:

[www.bto.org/national-offices/scotland/research](http://www.bto.org/national-offices/scotland/research)



<sup>1</sup> In partnership with other partners to the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme and with funding from SNH.

<sup>2</sup> In partnership with Tay Ringing Group

<sup>3</sup> In partnership with EURING