

Feature

Survey results “put keepers on the front foot”

A survey of gamekeeper members of the NGO and the Scottish Gamekeepers Association has revealed that keepers are the unsung heroes of nature conservation, explains Charles Nodder.

NEARLY 1,000 GAMEKEEPERS FROM ALL PARTS of England, Scotland and Wales took part in the survey earlier this year, making it the first national survey of its type. Between them, the respondents managed land totalling 1,337,454 hectares, an area five times that of all National Nature Reserves combined and 13 times that owned by the RSPB.

The results showed that farms and estates managed by gamekeepers are teeming with wildlife, including many rare and charismatic species. 84% have lapwings, 75% have skylarks and a staggering 54% now have ravens. Yellowhammers were reported by two

thirds of gamekeepers and a third had turtle doves. 15% reported the presence of the secretive nightjar, a species a keeper would know to be present, but a casual visitor would probably not see.

In addition, virtually all shooting estates reported having populations of at least three species of birds of prey, with three quarters having four or more raptor species present as well as many owls.

Commenting on this particular finding, NGO Chairman, Lindsay Waddell, said: “This survey proves that Victorian attitudes towards birds of prey belong to history and that nowadays gamekeepers host more birds of prey

than all the conservation bodies put together. The same could also be said of many other protected species.” Lindsay added: “The NGO invested in this survey to help put gamekeeping on the front foot and that is exactly what it has done.”

The survey results were launched on the NGO stand at the CLA Game Fair, where they were presented to the Secretary of State for Defra, Caroline Spelman, and to other Government ministers. Public and media interest was high, with particularly good coverage in the *Daily Telegraph*, which headlined its report: “Gamekeepers say they are ‘true protectors of the countryside’, not RSPB.”

Right: Nearly a thousand keepers responded to the survey from all parts of the British mainland. The 1,337,454 hectares they look after is five times the total area of National Nature Reserves and thirteen times the area covered by RSPB reserves.

Below: Yellowhammers were reported by two thirds of gamekeepers.



Alasdair Mitchell, who helped the NGO to promote the survey's findings said: "Much of the national coverage of shooting at the time of the CLA Game Fair seemed to relate to the NGO's survey. And as *KtB* goes to press, we are working on further TV programmes and magazine features."



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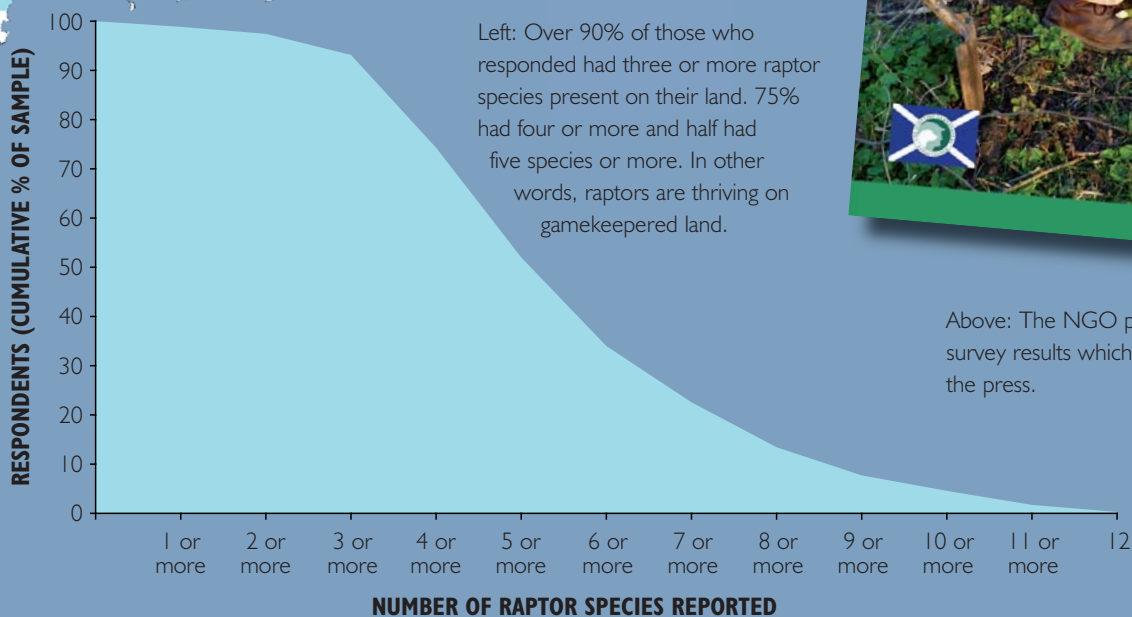
Above: A third of gamekeepers reported having turtle doves.

The NGO would like to thank all members who filled in a questionnaire when they were sent out back in February. Also, thanks to the SGA for circulating their members, and the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust for collating the full report.

A summary of findings is available on the NGO website.



Above: The NGO produced a booklet of the survey results which was sent to members of the press.



Left: Over 90% of those who responded had three or more raptor species present on their land. 75% had four or more and half had five species or more. In other words, raptors are thriving on gamekeepered land.