



HEN HARRIER PROGRAMME



Hen Harrier Monitoring 2017

February 2018



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



'The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development: Europe
investing in rural areas'.



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SEEN A HEN HARRIER?

We would be very interested in any casual sightings of Hen Harrier in your area. You can let the Project know in confidence by either contacting your local Project Officer; by submitting a sighting via the Contacts Page on our website; by emailing the Project; or, by contacting the Hen Harrier Monitoring Project Manager Marc Ruddock on 087 357 8590.

Email: info@henharrierproject.ie
Online: www.henharrierproject.ie/contact.html

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The Hen Harrier Programme

HEN HARRIER MONITORING

The determination of eligibility for certain Payments in the Hen Harrier Programme is based on a robust annual Hen Harrier Monitoring campaign carried out by the Hen Harrier Project. In 2017, extensive monitoring of breeding Hen Harrier was carried out across all the SPAs in Ireland by experts from the Golden Eagle Trust Monitoring Team. Surveys for breeding Hen Harrier shall be undertaken between March and August each year of the Programme.

The objectives of the Hen Harrier Monitoring is to establish the occupancy of territorial breeding birds in each SPA and determine whether a breeding attempt was initiated (i.e. nesting) and to establish the breeding outcome (i.e. success or failure of a nest and if successful, establish the number of fledged young). Intrusive nest visits are not undertaken as part of the Monitoring.

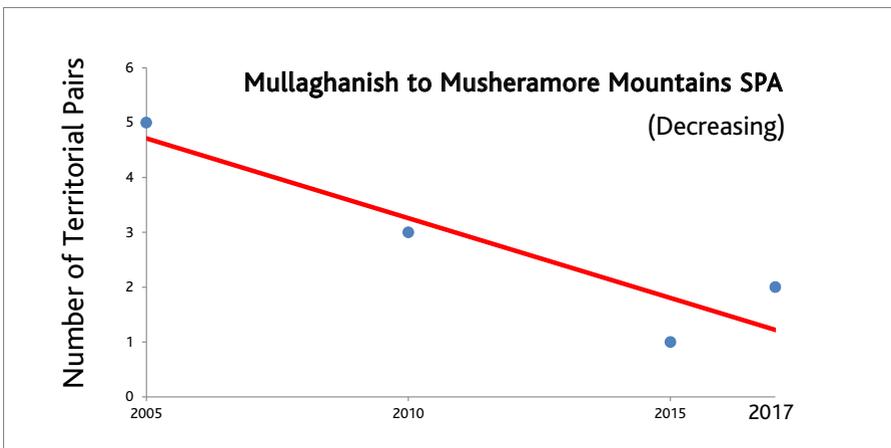
Suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the SPAs are surveyed from Vantage Points (VPs) that provide good views of the study area. More than 600 individual VP observations were undertaken across the SPA network in 2017, equivalent to over 1,100 hours of surveyor effort. All 55 10km squares which overlap SPAs were surveyed during 2017.

In 2017 there were a total of 58 confirmed territories and 12 possible breeding pairs of Hen Harrier within the SPAs (a population range of 58 – 70 pairs). A comparison of the estimated Hen Harrier numbers in 2005 shows that the total SPA population in 2017 is now 25.5% smaller than that recorded during designation.

Mullaghanish to Musheramore SPA



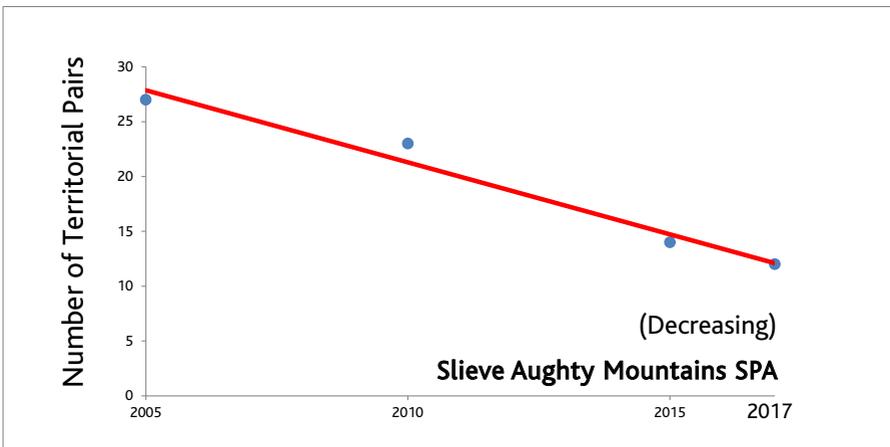
The Hen Harrier population in the Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains SPA at designation was five breeding pairs, however has undergone serious decline in the last 10 years. No pairs were recorded breeding in the SPA in 2014 and in recent years the population is between one and two pairs. Threats and pressures on the population include uncontrolled burning, forestry activities, wind farm development, and disturbance through peat extraction. Persecution may also be an issue. There were two confirmed pairs recorded during surveys in 2017. One other possible territory was detected beyond the SPA boundary. Only one of the two pairs nesting in the SPA were successful in fledging a total of two young.



Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA



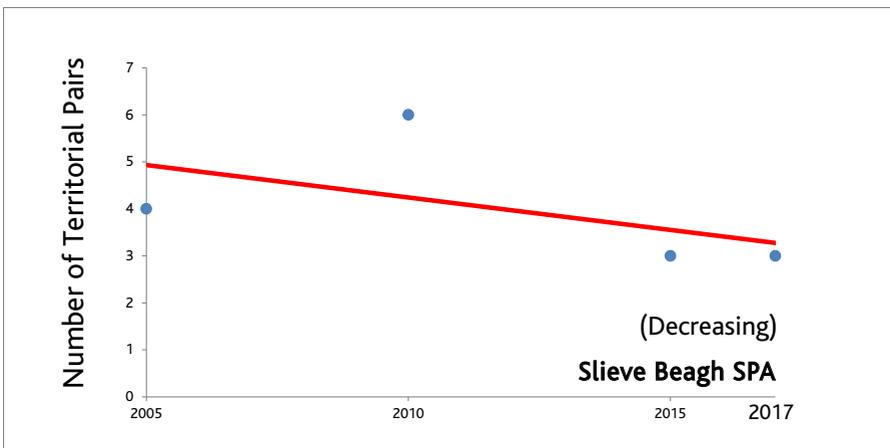
The breeding Hen Harrier population in the Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA has almost halved from twenty seven territorial pairs in the last 10 years. Confirmed breeding pairs in the SPA predominantly select 2nd rotation prethicket forest for nesting. Recent monitoring data show a subsequent high nest failure rate and very low numbers of fledged young per confirmed pair. Most frequently recorded pressures are habitat loss/disturbance from forest and plantation management activities, new tracks/paths and uncontrolled burning. There were nine confirmed territories and three possible territories recorded during surveys in 2017. Only two (22%) of the pairs nesting in this SPA were successful in fledging a total of four young.



Slieve Beagh SPA



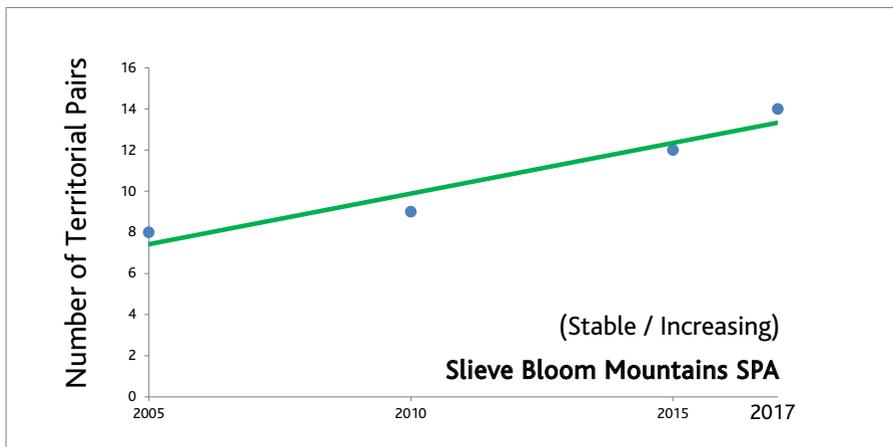
The small Hen Harrier population in Slieve Beagh SPA has undergone a slight decline in the last 10 years, however this is part of a larger cross-border population within the Slieve Beagh - Mullaghfad - Lisnaskea SPA designation in Northern Ireland and there has been some interchange of breeding pairs. Repression of breeding numbers and low productivity have been caused primarily by degradation of habitat through extensive, mechanised turf-extraction, uncontrolled illegal burning, and higher predation pressure from adjacent forested areas. There were three confirmed pairs recorded during surveys in 2017. Only one of the pairs within the SPA was successful in fledging two young. Both other nests were confirmed to hatch chicks but failed to fledge young. Both were recorded to have been predated.



Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA



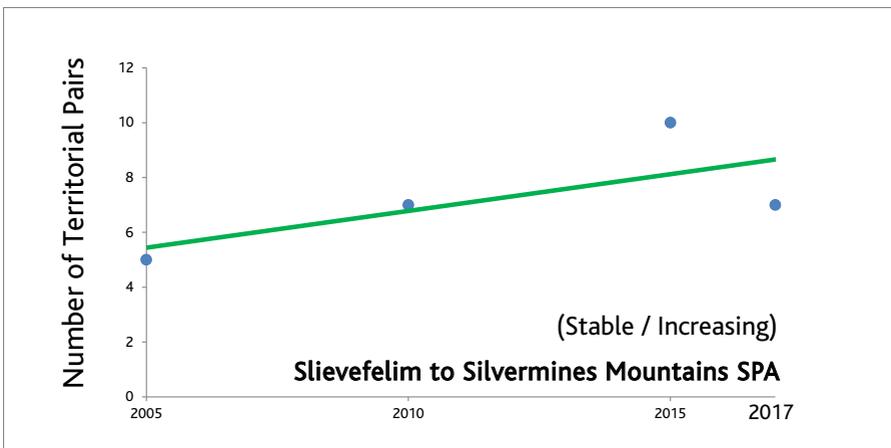
The large continuous open areas of heath/bog in Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA support a stable/slightly increasing population of breeding Hen Harrier. Most pairs in this region are recorded nesting in heather moorland. The Slieve Blooms has the highest fledging rate of all SPAs. Threats and pressures on this population are largely linked to forest and plantation management activities, habitat fragmentation and associated higher predation pressure. Forest plantation fringes the entire plateau and accounts for 61% of the land cover within the SPA. There were ten confirmed and four possible territories recorded during surveys in 2017. All of these pairs were located inside the SPA boundary. Six pairs were successful (60%) in fledging a total of sixteen young, the highest fledging rate of all the SPAs in 2017.



Slievefelim to Silvermines SPA



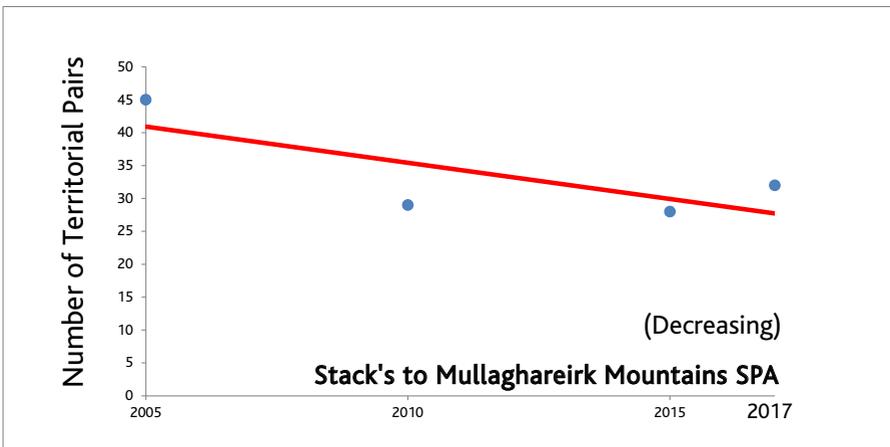
The breeding Hen Harrier population in the Slievefelim to Silvermines Mountains SPA is stable and increasing. Hen Harrier nest in a range of habitats (heath/scrub/pre-thicket forest) in the SPA, however most recent monitoring data shows the majority of pairs select heather for nesting. Threats and pressures in this SPA are similar to other areas, including forest and plantation management activities, habitat loss through changing land use, uncontrolled burning, disturbance etc. There were seven confirmed pairs recorded during surveys in 2017. Of the seven pairs, only three (42.9%) were successful in fledging a total of six young.



Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains SPA



The Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains SPA supports the highest proportion of breeding Hen Harrier within the SPA network. The population is decreasing, having declined by a third in the last ten years. This negative population trend is linked to decreasing habitat availability and suitability across the SPA, however where pairs are successful they tend to be productive. Main threats and pressures on the Hen Harrier population in this SPA are largely the extent of forest cover, plantation management activities and wind energy development. Persecution is also a concern. There were twenty seven confirmed and five possible territories recorded during surveys in 2017. All of these pairs were located inside the SPA boundary. Thirteen pairs within the SPA were successful (48%) in fledging a total of thirty two young, the second highest fledging rate of all SPAs.





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