



HEN HARRIER PROGRAMME

Hen Harrier Monitoring 2018

January 2019



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



'The European Agricultural Fund
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AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION

Hen Harrier Project
Unit No. 2 Oran Point
Main St
Oranmore
Co. Galway
H91 R6XH

Phone: 091 792 865

Email:
info@henharrierproject.ie

Website:
www.henharrierproject.ie

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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 Monitoring Manager Marc Ruddock on 087 357 8590.

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

PROJECT OFFICERS

Dr. CAROLINE SULLIVAN:

Assistant Manager and Project Officer for Slieve Aughty Mountains.

Mobile: 087 649 9948
Email: caroline.sullivan@henharrierproject.ie

RYAN WILSON-PARR:

Project Officer for Slieve Beagh; Slieve Blooms; and, Slievefelim to Silvermines Mountains.

Mobile: 087 151 0849
Email: ryan.wilson-parr@henharrierproject.ie

EVELYN JOYCE:

Project Officer for Stacks to Mullaghareirk Mountains and, Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains.

Mobile: 087 362 3913
Email: evelyn.joyce@henharrierproject.ie

EOIN McCARTHY:

Project Officer for Stacks to Mullaghareirk Mountains and, Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains.

Mobile: 087 703 4348

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 2018, 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 are undertaken between March and August in each year of the Programme. The objectives of Hen Harrier Monitoring are 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). Nest visits are not undertaken as part of the monitoring.

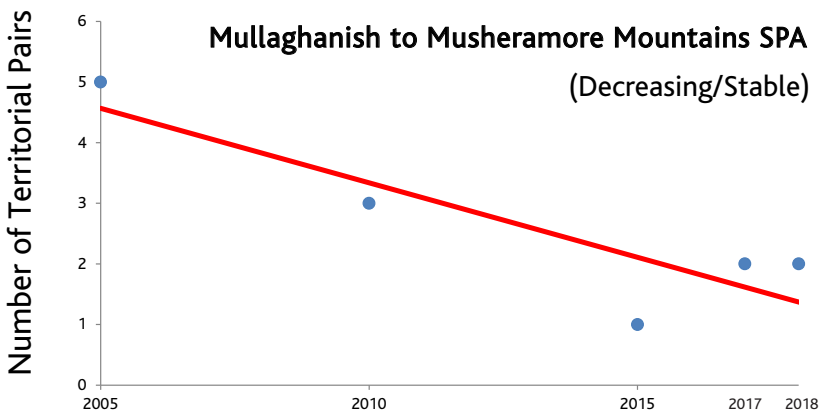
Suitable Hen Harrier habitat in the SPAs are surveyed from Vantage Points (VPs) that provide good views of the study area. More than 600 individual VP observations were undertaken across the SPA network in 2018, equivalent to over 1,100 hours of surveyor effort. All 55 10km squares which overlap SPAs were surveyed during 2018.

In 2018 there were a total of 53 confirmed territories and 15 possible breeding pairs of Hen Harrier within the SPAs (a population range of 53 – 68 pairs). This is slightly less than the number of breeding pairs recorded within the SPAs in 2017 (58 - 70 pairs). A comparison of the estimated Hen Harrier numbers in 2005 shows that the total SPA population in 2018 is now 27.6% smaller than that recorded during designation.

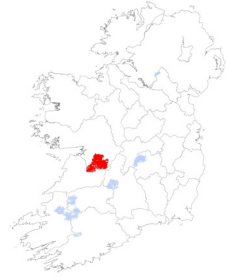
Mullaghanish to Musheramore SPA



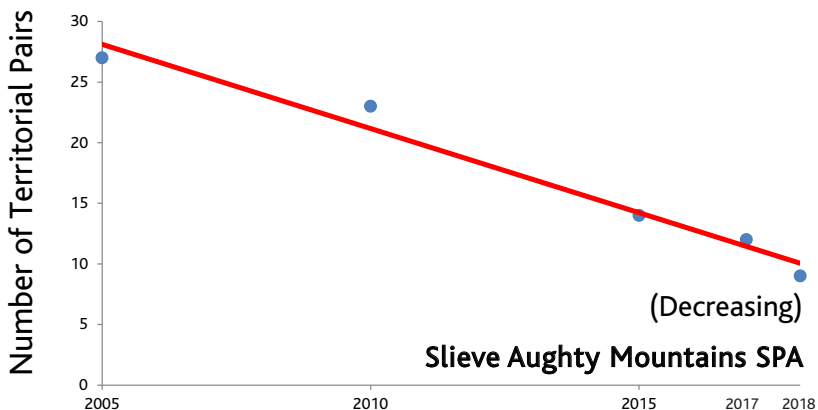
The Hen Harrier population in the Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains SPA at designation was five breeding pairs, however this population has undergone serious decline in the last 10 years. No pairs were recorded breeding in the SPA in 2014 and in recent years the population has been between one and two pairs. There were two confirmed pairs recorded during surveys in 2018, consistent with 2017 although one of these pairs was in a different location to 2017. Only one of the two pairs nesting in the SPA were successful in fledging a total of four young.



Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA



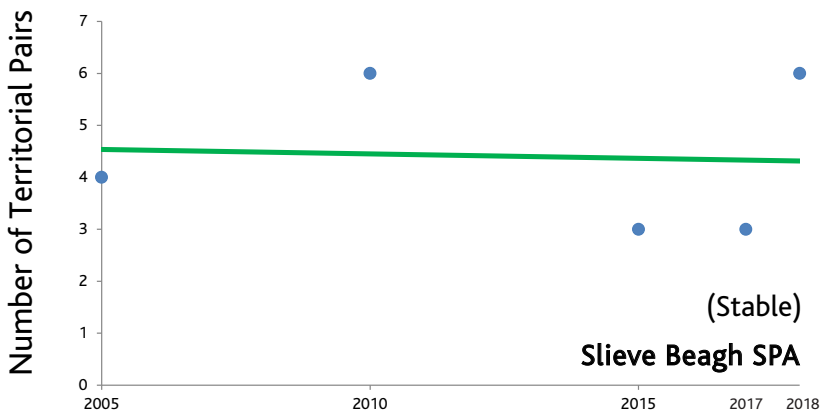
The breeding Hen Harrier population in the Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA has almost halved from twenty seven territorial pairs in the last 10 years. Confirmed breeding pairs in the SPA predominantly select 2nd rotation prethicket forest for nesting. Recent monitoring data show a subsequent high nest failure rate and very low numbers of fledged young per confirmed pair. There were six confirmed territories and four possible territories recorded during surveys in 2018. Only one pair in this SPA were successful in fledging a total of three young.



Slieve Beagh SPA



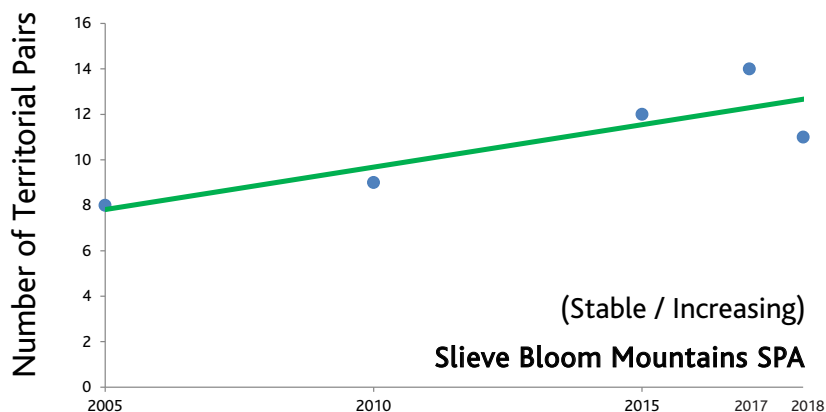
The small Hen Harrier population in Slieve Beagh SPA has undergone a slight decline in the last 10 years, however this is part of a larger cross-border population within the Slieve Beagh - Mullaghfad - Lisnaskea SPA designation in Northern Ireland and there has been some interchange of breeding pairs between years. Observational data during field surveys in 2018 noted extensive, mechanised turf-extraction and relatively high levels of human activity and uncontrolled dogs. In recent years fires have been a major issue for habitat loss on both sides of the border at Slieve Beagh. There were five confirmed pairs and one possible pair recorded during surveys in 2018. Four pairs within the SPA successfully fledging ten young which was relatively productive for Hen Harrier on Slieve Beagh.



Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA



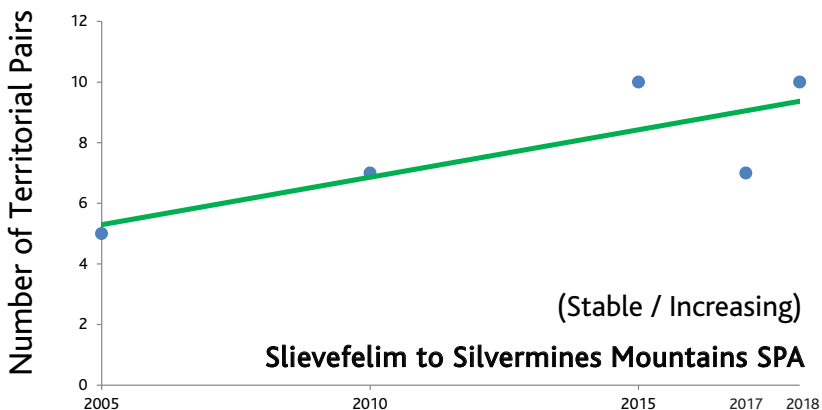
The large continuous open areas of heath/bog in Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA typically support a stable/slightly increasing population of breeding Hen Harrier. Most pairs in this region are recorded nesting in heather moorland. Forest plantation fringes the entire plateau and accounts for 61% of the land cover within the SPA. Numbers were slightly down from 2017 with ten confirmed pairs and one possible pair recorded during surveys in 2018. The Slieve Blooms typically has the highest fledging rate of all SPAs, however in 2018, only two pairs were successful in fledging a total of five young, compared with 16 fledged in 2017. A serious fire in the summer of 2018 may have contributed to the reduction in productivity.



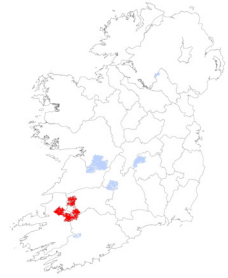
Slievefelim to Silvermines SPA



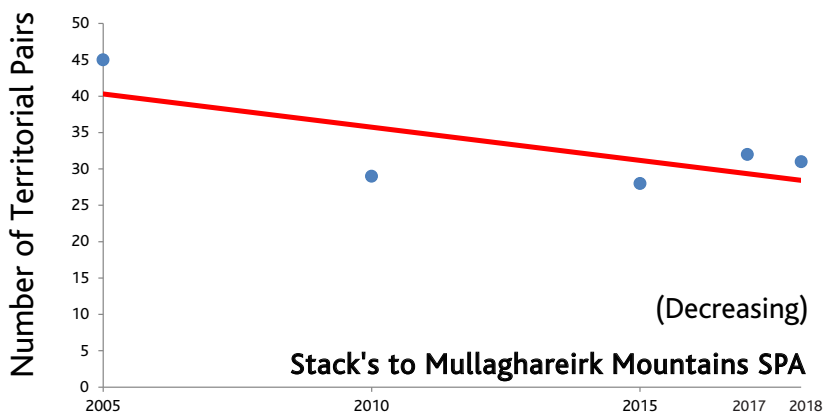
The breeding Hen Harrier population in the Slievefelim to Silvermines Mountains SPA is stable and increasing. Hen Harrier nest in a range of habitats (heath/scrub/pre-thicket forest) in the SPA, however recent monitoring data shows the majority of pairs select heather for nesting. During 2018 there were observations of disturbance which may have influenced Hen Harrier breeding success. There were eight confirmed pairs and one possible pair recorded during surveys in 2018 and an additional pair recorded outside the SPA boundary. Of the eight pairs, only two were successful in fledging a total of four young. A further confirmed pair were recorded outside the SPA and successfully fledged 3 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. Illegal persecution and human disturbance is a significant threat to Hen Harrier populations in parts of this SPA and is contributing to the population decline. Two separate suspected persecution incidents were detected by the Project in 2018. There were twenty two confirmed and eight possible territories recorded in the SPA during surveys in 2018. Only six pairs were successful in fledging a total of twelve young. Thirteen confirmed pairs were observed to fail at the chick stage.





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