Honey Buzzard Review – Some Questions

The attached letter was sent to me as the result of the Honey Buzzard review carried out by the County Records Committee from October 2003 – March 2005. The paucity of detail has led me to ask the questions below. You will also note that one of the external experts (David Jardine) suggested that there was a need to review procedures following this case (point 13 below) so the matter is undoubtedly of interest to the Northumberland & Tyneside Bird Club Committee.

I would like this issue to be a substantive item at the next committee meeting of the Northumberland & Tyneside Bird Club.

1. What technical criteria were adopted for judging records?

2. What was the percentage acceptance of records previously a) accepted and b) rejected?

3. What pattern can be associated with these percentages?

4. Who were the four ex-CRC members involved in the review?

5. Did any members of CRC who might be said to have an interest in the outcome of the review have a voice in the review?

6. Was any attempt made to contact international experts (say Bijlsma, Forsman)?

7. What was the result of any such approaches?

8. Has my very detailed report on methods adopted in the Honey Buzzard survey and results for 2002 (sent you July 2003 at your request) been circulated to CRC members and Steve Roberts and David Jardine?

9. Was my response to Steve Roberts' comments circulated to the CRC? In particular were the CRC aware of the major inconsistencies between his talk at Penrith and the material in his letter?

10. Exactly what material was reviewed by Steve Roberts and David Jardine? Steve Roberts mentions an early version of my website, David Jardine mentions the textual descriptions.

11. The comments by David Jardine encouraged a positive way forward whereby the SW Raptor Group should be given time to find nests and other evidence for breeding through our disturbance permits, which were first granted last summer. Why has this approach not been followed?

12. David Jardine thought it likely that some of the descriptions of mine were valid. Why has this not been mentioned in the report of the review?

13. David Jardine also cast doubts on the methods adopted by the CRC: "The weaknesses of providing written descriptions and their review have been tested by this situation particularly where the review team (i.e. the N&TBC Records Committee) is perhaps less involved in raptors … than the observer. Therefore it will be right in due course to ask the N&TBC and the Records Committee to review what lessons can be learnt from the case". "I am happy for this email to be circulated to various parties and I hope that all find it a useful contribution to helping resolve this issue in a scientific manner. I have copied it direct to Nick for his information". Why has the CRC ignored this advice?

14. Is the CRC aware that another observer has independently been studying breeding Honey Buzzards in SW Northumberland under a disturbance permit? This person is a friend of Andrew Rowlands – hence Andrew's admission on Bird Forum recently that he knows Honey Buzzards are breeding in Northumberland from information on my web site and from other information.

15. What is the CRC reaction to the recent letter in British Birds by Rob Clements, quoting a significant Honey Buzzard population in Cumbria and the occurrence of many more pairs in northern and western Britain?

16. How many records of Honey Buzzard were received by the County Recorder last year and not passed on for publication in the bulletin, for whatever reason?

17. Did the County Recorder maintain strict confidentiality on the list of sites accompanying the report on methods (item 8)?

Nick Rossiter 16th April 2005