

Juvenile Honey Buzzard 21250

17 September 2002

The bird was migrating through the Perthshire Highlands and on to central Scotland between Glasgow and Edinburgh. It covered about 60 kilometres in 5 hours during the afternoon of 17th. At present, it is not taking the westerly route followed by the young birds last year.

19 September 2002

The youngster remained in same area of the Carron Valley Forest. It is presumably feeding in the Forestry Commission woodlands.

20 September 2002

By nightfall the young honey buzzard had moved 45 kilometres southwards to Broken Cross Muir, near Douglas Water.

22 September 2002

The evening transmission showed that the bird had been migrating strongly. It had travelled 480 kilometres due south in the two day interval and is now near Bridgend in South Wales. At this speed the bird could easily be in France when we receive the signals on the 24th September. The forecast is good for tomorrow with clear skies from Wales to France, but there will be fresh NE winds across the sea.

24 September 2002

The young honey buzzard was in trouble today and clearly illustrating the migration hazards that can befall long distance migratory raptors from Scotland. The morning signal at 1030 showed him to be over the open Atlantic Ocean south of Ireland and about 660 kilometres west of Land's End. Although the skies on 23rd were clear, the bird had veered westwards over the sea and with fresh to strong easterly winds had apparently not reached France or Cornwall. Signals

during the day showed that he was flying downwind across the Ocean and by 1620 was about 700 kilometres WSW of Cape Clear in south-west Ireland. It is difficult to predict whether the bird will redirect its migration, land on a boat or sadly be lost at sea. Hopefully, transmissions in two days will be favourable.

26 September 2002

Incredible!! The young honey buzzard is still flying and sadly he missed the outermost island of the Azores during the night. Today the first signal was at 0157am and a further 5 signals to 0846am showed that he was moving strongly to the south. He is now in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean well south of the Azores. Today's satellite photos show that a low pressure is over the Azores and he is travelling southwards in the strong northerly winds behind (west of) the low. There are belts of cloud and the wind is at least 40-60kms/hour; by this afternoon he should be picking up the strong west winds blowing towards the Canary Islands and Africa. Again we wonder if he has enough fat reserves to survive. The strong winds may assist him towards land or he might land on a boat, but the nearest land is a very long distance.

This bird's flight is already an incredible feat. It cannot land on water, so it has been flying continuously since the 23rd September without stopping and without feeding.

28 September 2002

Two signals were received overnight on 27th/28th September. The one very accurate signal gave a position approximately 280 kilometres to the NW of Madeira, north of the Canary Islands. This was 2240pm on 27th. It would be very encouraging to think that the bird then turned towards the island and the lack of later signals was due to it being in woodland or cliffs on Madeira. But we will need to wait another day for the next signals. By this time the honey buzzard had been in the air for over 100 hours and would undoubtedly be reaching its limits. It had travelled in strong westerly winds for nearly 1400 kilometres since the last signal on the 26th. Now we wait and hope.

30 September 2002

Last night, 29th September, two signals were received. But there were no further reports after 1727GMT. The position at this time was 27 kilometres to the south-west of that received at 2241GMT on 27th. The signals were both accurate to

within one kilometre, so it suggests that it is either on a fishing boat or on a floating object in the sea. The weather has been cloudy, with rain and thunder showers in that sea area and the wind is variable. Unfortunately, during the young honey buzzard's journey of nearly 5000 kilometre, much of it being swept along by strong winds, over the Atlantic Ocean he missed both the Azores and Madeira, by relatively small distances. The bird is in a remote area of sea being 300 kms from Madeira, about 600 kms from the Azores and about 1000 kms from both the southern tip of Portugal and the Moroccan coast. It is difficult to predict if we will get any more news.

This incredible journey has already revealed both the hazards of migrating from Scotland to Africa and also the stamina of a bird which a month ago had only just learnt to fly. For many people, this young honey buzzard is now a "well known" individual whose plight, as it has flown day and night over the wide Atlantic, has caused us to wonder and also to hope it has a safe landing. But how many other young honey buzzards and ospreys have perished unknown in the Ocean migrating to their wintering grounds in West Africa. There is no doubt that one of the messages to come out of this study is that the small number of honey buzzard nests in Scotland need special conservation to ensure that the maximum number of healthy young are reared so that at least some will successfully reach West Africa. Those that survive are likely to make certain in future years that they take the short sea crossing over the English channel like this year's male.

01 October 2002

The latest signals coming in this morning show that the bird is still moving slowly southwest. The position at 0510am was 55 kilometres SW of its position on 29th. By the time of the last signal at 0933 the bird had moved another 4.7 kilometres. It suggests that it is resting on something floating in the sea which is being carried SW by the sea currents and winds; it would be good to think it might be on a fishing boat. But we do not know.

03 October 2002

Transmissions received early this morning indicated that the young bird is still drifting in the open Atlantic Ocean, well over 300 kilometres from Madeira. He is clearly not on a fishing boat but is slowly drifting south-westwards at about 1km/hour in the sea currents. The bird's position had moved 35 kilometres since the 1st October and the last signal at 0453GMT this morning was at 34.779N and 19.975W. The clarity of the signals suggested the bird is on something floating in the sea rather than being in the water. It is not possible to say if it is dead or alive, but it is now a very long time since it left land on 23rd September and it is

not possible for it to feed while at sea. Birds of prey can last long periods without food but it would be incredible if this youngster was still alive after its massive flight. Sadly, on the very day that its father reached his wintering area in the tropical forests of Ghana, we have to conclude that this amazing young bird is probably dead.

05 October 2002

Last night, 4th October, seven signals were received between 1604pm and 2119pm, including two locations accurate to within 350 metres at 34.869N 20.303W. This position is 31 kilometres further west and is now 363 kilometres from Madeira. It is now only drifting at 140 metres per hour, presumably on calm seas and overcast skies. There has been considerable interest and concern from around the world for the lost young honey buzzard and we are grateful to the many people who emailed about its sad plight, with hopes that it might yet get to land. But it is now so long since the bird left land that we sadly have to conclude it has died. Some people emailed with news of honey buzzards and ospreys which they had seen from ships in the Bay of Biscay and which they thought at the time would have died at sea, now they know that some of these migratory raptors can safely make land after incredible over water migrations. But unfortunately, our bird was pushed far too far out to sea by the stormy weather but earlier in September, a young Scottish osprey we were tracking successfully returned to land after being blown out to sea. More signals were received from the same place on 6th October, it is now drifting slowly in the doldrums. With disappointment we conclude that the honey buzzard is dead but it's body is on a floating object on the sea and still transmitting. No signals were received on 8th October which confirms that the bird has died.

There has been great interest in the incredible exploits of this bird and the continuing migration of the male bird in Africa. Sincere thanks for all the interesting and encouraging emails which we have received, and for the very kind offers of support and donations for us to continue our conservation work.