Misinformation tactics protect rare birds from problem predators

The following questions were asked during our live webinar with Grant Norbury but due to time restrictions, we were unable to answer these in the session.

How about fledging success? As the effect of odour winds down, chicks are fledging but are they just as likely to be predated on as usual?

I suspect so. Given that there were no differences in egg survival after 25-35 days, I would imagine that chicks would remain vulnerable - but it's an unknown.

Do you know if the manufactured scent changes the attraction or density of predators to the site? I am wondering if all those delicious smelling lures are drawing more predators to the sites (but that their predation rate is still counteracted by the lures masking the locations of the real bird nests).

We were worried about this, so we measured predator abundance on all sites using cameras and tracking tunnels and found no attraction effect of the odour.

You studied hatching success but did you follow any hatchlings through to fledging?

No, we didn't do that - it was too difficult and costly.

We see effectiveness declining over a season, but not critically. Any thoughts of how effective the method would remain with repeated application over multiple seasons?

Unknown but we would imagine predators would not hold that memory into the following season, especially as they will have encountered real prey in the meantime.

Do you think there might be long term learning of the misinformation by the predators and result in less predation without odour lures?

Unknown but we would imagine predators would not hold that memory into the following season, especially as they will have encountered real prey in the meantime.

Can I suggest you use lanolin or other 'greases' rather than a petrochemical?

Interesting thought - thank you. We have no idea about the efficacy of the holding matrix - it is an area we need to work on.

I might have just missed that, but did you use a control odour as well, e.g. treat the rocks/twigs with non smelly substances in "untreated sites", just to rule out the possibility that the effect was caused by increased human presence?

This is a very good point. We were very conscious of this effect so we attempted, where we could and when we had time, to smear plain Vaseline on rocks on the control sites as we walked around them checking cameras and tracking tunnels for measuring predator abundance. Ideally, we would have walked the control sites in exactly the same way we did on the treated sites, but we simply didn't have the time and resources. We made some effort, but it wasn't ideal. Nevertheless, I cannot imagine that the greater intensity of human walking on the treated sites would have accounted for the large increases in nest survival. Thanks for raising this.