

British Birds of Prey

HARRIERS

#12

Harriers are a group of diurnal hawks (active during the day), characterised by their low and slow flight. They have long wings and a long narrow tail, and typically feed on small mammals, small birds or reptiles. There are three harrier species you may find in the UK.

Montagu's harriers are extremely rare in the UK, with less than five breeding pairs estimated across the country. Migrating to Britain in the summer, they breed in areas of East Anglia, and Dorset through to Hampshire.

Hen harriers are most common harrier in the UK, with over 600 breeding pairs recorded in 2010. Those in Scotland and parts of Ireland stay year-round, whilst European birds migrate to the coastal areas of southern and eastern England during the summer.

The marsh harrier is the largest of all the harriers, with a wingspan of up to 130cm. There are about 400 breeding pairs in the UK, with most found on the marshlands of south-east England.



▲ Montagu's harrier, male



▲ Hen harrier, female



▲ Marsh harrier, male

Huxley's Birds of Prey Centre, Horsham

Montagu's Harrier - Page 2

Apart from the UK, Montagu's harriers are found in Europe, and into Asia and Africa. Males are grey, whilst females are dark brown.

They are a very vulnerable species, as about 70% nest in farmlands, where they are at danger from agricultural activities such as spraying. Their survival is very dependant on nest protection, with many of these nests safeguarded or relocated.

In the UK, the locations of the five nests are kept secret to prevent the birds being poached or having their eggs stolen. At least four British Montagu's harriers have successfully been tagged (named Beatrice, Mark, Roger and Sally!) with conservationists able to track their location as they migrate.

D	K	D	K	E	R	A	M	L	D	E	A	S	E	S
V	S	W	R	M	Y	P	U	S	R	N	M	U	N	H
N	F	Y	A	O	A	P	R	I	R	W	S	D	R	Y
R	H	L	X	H	Y	T	E	E	U	H	I	R	A	L
E	S	S	D	P	A	H	I	R	D	O	S	E	I	R
R	O	V	B	K	S	R	O	M	R	A	K	N	X	D
I	M	E	S	U	R	T	N	S	R	O	T	R	M	T
O	A	T	I	A	T	A	X	Y	E	H	R	O	A	H
S	H	R	H	U	A	E	H	E	I	R	E	T	R	O
A	N	R	X	E	O	H	N	L	M	A	S	A	S	K
R	E	U	H	T	D	W	A	X	O	H	R	O	H	L
O	R	M	O	N	T	A	G	U	S	R	C	Q	T	C
D	I	L	S	K	W	A	F	H	P	Y	S	E	K	H
J	U	M	A	C	N	S	R	R	E	A	T	U	E	L
H	L	A	N	R	U	I	D	O	H	V	D	N	Y	K

Word Search

HARRIER

MONTAGU'S

HEN

MARSH

HAWK

DIURNAL

PREDATOR

HUXLEY'S

Fill in the Blanks

Use the words below to complete the facts about hen harriers and the harrier family! Each word is used only once.

HUNTED ROOST COMMUNALLY GROUND RAPTORS
MATE MAMMALS HABITAT LOSS NESTS DIET

Harriers are one of the few polygynous _____: this means one male will _____ with several females over a breeding season.

Their _____ are built on the _____, on dirt or vegetation mounds. They are made of sticks and lined with grass and leaves.

Outside of the breeding season, hen harriers may _____ with other species, including marsh harriers and merlins.

Hen harriers were named because they used to hunt fowl and grouse birds. However, today about 95% of their _____ consists of small _____.

The number of hen harriers is decreasing in the UK, due to _____ and being illegally _____ on grouse hunting grounds.

Match the Facts

Numbers of the western, or Eurasian, marsh harrier in the UK are slowly on the rise. Females are darker in colour than males, with a cream coloured head.

Can you match the adaptation of harriers with its benefit?



Adaptation

Harriers have a slight facial disk, much like owls

Strong, hooked beak

They have amazing head stabilisation: they can keep their heads fixed in place whilst the body moves

The crop, located in the throat area, is used to store food and digest it later

Benefit

Can keep focus on prey

They can eat a large amount of prey at once without getting filled up

Easier to tear tough skin and flesh

Channels sound waves into the ears (under the feathers behind the eyes) for clearer hearing