

MONTAGU'S HARRIER

circus pygargus



Our rarest breeding raptor.

FactFile

Length: 43cm – 47cm

Wingspan: 105cm – 120cm

Weight: 0.23kg – 0.44kg

Habitat: Lowland regions – marshes, sand dunes, young forestry plantations and heaths. More recently, nesting in arable crops. Nests are always built on the ground, usually in tall vegetation including growing crops. A clutch of about 5 eggs is laid at up to 3 day intervals in a nest of 8 to 12 inch diameter. The egg hatches over a long period but, despite the size difference, the youngsters are not aggressive to each other. Fledging can take up to 42 days and independence a further 2 weeks.

Montagu's Harrier is our rarest breeding raptor. It narrowly missed total extinction early this century when the population was confined mainly to the Norfolk Broads. That it has survived at all is largely due to a shift from its normal habitat to the use of crop fields (mainly cereal) for nesting. Also, co-operation between farmers and conservationists has played a part. As a result, it has now established new territory in southwest Britain.

The Montagu's diet is extremely varied and includes small mammals, song birds, invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians and the chicks and eggs of ground-nesting birds. Normal hunting flight is a series of slow glides punctuated with strong, rapid wingbeats. This extremely buoyant bird is capable of rapid changes of direction and sudden stoops. Unlike other harriers, they can fly fast enough to chase fast moving ground prey and can even take small birds in flight.

