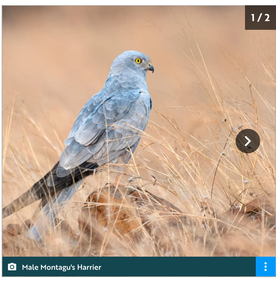
Birds and wildlife

Montagu's Harrier

Circus pygargus

Group: Kites, hawks and eagles
UK Conservation status: Red



Male Montagu's Harrier

How to identify

The Montagu's Harrier is a slim, medium-sized, long-winged bird of prey. It has a long tail, is smaller than a Buzzard, and has more pointed wings than the similar Hen Harrier. The male is grey on top. In flight, it shows black wingtips and a black stripe across the inner wing. The female is dark brown. It is an extremely rare breeding bird in the UK, and its status is precarious. Each pair needs special protection. It seems increasingly to be nesting on arable farmland rather than on marshes. It is a summer visitor, and migrates to Africa to spend the winter. Montagu's Harrier are a Schedule 1 listed species on The Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Key features to look out for

- Medium size (Common Gull sized)
- Male is pale grey above with extensive black wing tips, black stripe along wing and a white rump, pale below with blue grey head.
- Female heavily barred brown above with white rump, underparts paler and barred / streaked.
- Delicate, tern-like buoyant flight.

Where and when to see them

Migration

Sadly, this attractive raptor is having a very hard time clinging on in modern Britain. A rather delicate harrier, these birds travel to Europe from Africa to nest on farmland, plains and bogs. Although never a particularly common bird here, Montagu's Harriers are today extremely rare nesters, mainly in southern and eastern England.

Key

Resident | Passage

Summer | Winter

* This map is intended as a guide. It shows general distribution rather than detailed, localised populations.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗

Key facts

General | Male | Female

Beak	Yellow, Black
Conservation status	Red
Diet	Small birds, voles, shrews, rabbits, lizards and insects.
Leg	Yellow
Length	43-47cm
Habitats	Farmland, Wetland, Grassland
UK breeding birds	Less than 5 pairs
Weight	225-450g
Wingspan	100-120cm

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