

Autumn Ring-tailed Harriers in Kent

When I had my first Montagu's Harrier record for Reculver published in the 1971 KBR I had to write a full description of it to satisfy the KOS Rarities Panel. Montagu's Harrier remained a "description species" in Kent for another twenty years until 1993. With the removal of this species from the list all records of ring-tailed Hen and Montagu's Harriers were accepted at face value and that situation has remained until now, 2015.

In the early days sightings were not complicated by thoughts of Pallid Harriers which were extremely rare in the UK and had never been seen and accepted in Kent. Things changed in 2002 when a second summer male Pallid Harrier was seen at Elmley from 3rd-20th August and 2011 when a juvenile was identified at Cliffe Pools RSPB between 24th and 27th September. Have ring-tailed Pallid Harriers been missed in the past?

At the last Editorial and Records Sub-Committee meeting we discussed whether in the likelihood that some records of Montagu's and Hen Harriers may be confused whether the Rarities panel should reconsider adding autumn records of ring-tailed Montagu's Harriers to the description list. Bearing in mind any Pallid Harrier would have to be described to the satisfaction of BBRC.

After discussion it was decided that this would probably be counter productive and that we would lose valid Montagu's Harrier records in the process as a proportion of observers would not bother to send in descriptions. We therefore decided to keep the status quo. It was decided, however, that I should write a short paper highlighting this issue and asking observers to make sure that they are really certain of their identification when submitting reports or ringtails. *Just because a ringtail is seen in August does not mean it is a Montagu's and just because it's recorded in September it is not necessarily a Hen.*



Hen Harriers
by
John Whitting





Montagu's Harriers (Upper) by Malcolm Freeman (Lower) by Gavin Coultrip

Modern identification guides give all the detail needed to solve this knotty problem but don't forget that what you see maybe Pallid or even Northern Harriers, but that's another story!

Ring-tailed Harrier Records in Kent over the last five years - 2009 to 2013

| | Montagu's Harrier | | | | Pallid Harrier | | | | Hen Harrier | | | |
|--------------|-------------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------|----------|-----------|-------------------|
| | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct |
| 2009 | - | 5 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 3 | widespread |
| 2010 | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | widespread |
| 2011 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | - | 2 | 6 | widespread |
| 2012 | - | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 2 | - | widespread |
| 2013 | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 4 | widespread |
| Total | 1 | 11 | 4 | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | 5 | 16 | widespread |

- there have been about 40 records in five years averaging eight records per year. This excludes October records of Hen Harriers when this species is usually reported to be widespread.
- there have been two reports in July, 16 in August, 21 in September (including one Pallid) and one in October which excludes Hen Harriers.

Suggested reference

***The Raptors of Europe and the Middle East* by Dick Forsman**

***Collins Bird Guide* by Lars Svensson, Killian Mullarney and Dan Zetterstrom**

***Field Identification of female and juvenile Montagu's and Pallid Harriers* by Dick Forsman www.dickforsman.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/cirmac-pyg-ringtails1995dbvol17-p41-54.pdf**

Chris Hindle (for the Editorial & Records Committee)