

Birds of Prey

Starter

- Look through the associated lesson slides that can be downloaded from the ONWP resources page.
- Work through the questions on the slides and the supporting information in the notes.
- Further information for your introduction to hen harriers can be found in the resources pages of this pack.

Activity

There are a variety of ways of carrying out the activity; here are a few suggestions. With some simple modifications, similar methods can be used with different age groups.

1. Build-a-bird-of-prey - small group work

- Select the species you are going to work with.
- If using four species, split the class into four groups. (If fewer species/children, divide accordingly.)
- Give each group a set of pieces of one of the birds.
- Ask each group to make their bird.
- They then need to discuss what is special about their bird. The questions below can be used to lead their discussion.
- Get each group to make brief notes about the characteristics of their bird.
- Each group then gives a presentation about their bird to the class.
- Then discuss the similarities and differences between each species.

Build a bird of prey kits

Questions to aid discussion

What is special about your bird? Look at:

Beak design – What is special about the design?

What types of food will it eat?

How does it feed?

Feet and legs – Are they designed for a specific purpose?

How would it use its feet? (For example, the kestrel has strong talons for catching its prey).

Where are they positioned on the body?

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Eyes – Forward looking or side on?

Why are they in that position? (Predators that catch fast moving prey, tend to need stereoscopic vision so that they can make a quick assessment of distance. They would need forward looking eyes to do this. Species that are preyed upon, tend to have eyes on the side of the head so that they can get almost 360 degree vision).

Colour of bird – Anything special about it?

Why is it that colour? To stand out or to blend in? Sometimes males want to stand out (to attract a mate), and females blend in more.

Tail - Anything special about it? (A longish tail can help a bird to balance and manoeuvre around trees; the kestrel can open and close and angle its tail really quickly to help it hover, swoop and manoeuvre in mid-air).

Is there anything else special about your bird?

Where do you think the bird may live (habitats)? What does it eat?

What conservation issues are linked to your bird?

2. Class discussion

The above can be done as a whole-class discussion if the children are very young or have insufficient knowledge to do the activity in groups.

3. Mixed birds – small group discussion

- Arrange the class in the number of groups equal to the number of birds you are using.
- Give each group one set of random pieces, ie. one beak, one leg, one body, etc.
- Each group then has to make a bird with the pieces they have.
- Each group answers the questions above for their imaginary bird.
- Each group feeds back to the wider group.

Plenary

- Recap the names of a few key species from photos on the board.
- Give the children a chance to tell their classmates what was said in their groups and have discussions around people's ideas and begin to get children to justify their decisions.

Extension idea

- Children can think of a name for their imaginary bird based on its characteristics eg 'long legged tit' or 'black stork'
- They can verbally describe or write down a 'day in the life' of their bird, explaining some of the advantages it would have in the habitat they choose for it to live in, and some of the problems it might encounter (is its beak too small for its legs (can't eat fish) or its eyes in the wrong place? How might it get over these problems? (Exercise to make children think about why and how adaptations happen).

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Hen Harrier Fact File

Breeding Season

Eggs laid on the ground from mid April to early June.

Call of the wild

When hen harriers call to each other, the noise they make is known as 'yikkering'.

Clutch

Average clutch size 4-6 eggs.

Colour

Adult female: Brown above, with white rump and banded tail. Adult male: grey head and breast, white underparts contrasting with block primary feathers and a dark band along the trailing edge of the underwing.

Conservation status

Hen harriers are on the red list which means that they're one of the species we're most concerned about.

Did you know?

Male and female hen harriers look so different, that for a long time they were thought to be two different species!

Diet

Mostly small birds and voles but sometimes larger prey, like young rabbits and red grouse.

Eggs

Rounded oval; chalky with coarse surface; bluish white or greenish; 46mm x 36mm. Incubation: around 30 days per egg. Eggs laid at 48 hour intervals

European visitors

Hen harriers can travel all over the country in winter and some birds have even been recorded travelling to France and Spain.

First known record

Hen harriers featured in the first ever book of British Birds, printed in 1544.

Fledging period

32 - 42 days

Habitat

Hen harriers nest in open areas with low plants like heather but can also be found on extensive farmland and young forest plantations.

History

- By the 19th century hen harrier were being persecuted by egg collectors and gamekeepers on grouse moorland.
- By the beginning of the 20th century, hen harriers were virtually confined to Orkney, the Outer Hebrides and Ireland.
- Between 1939 and 1945 there was decreased burning of moorland and persecution leading to post war colonisation by hen harriers.
- In 1939 hen harriers returned to breed on the Scottish mainland and were reasonably widespread in Scotland by the 1950's

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Hen Harrier Fact File

In other languages

In Welsh hen harriers are called Bot Tinwyn, which translates as “white-bottomed buzzard” a good way to remember the white patch just above their tail. In Scots Gaelic, they’re called Clamhan Luch, meaning “mouse hawk” because they like to eat voles and in Irish they’re called Cromán na gearc, meaning “hen hawk”.

Keeping warm in winter

In the winter, hen harriers leave their snowy hilltop homes and travel to lower, sheltered areas where it is easier to find food. At night they gather together in small groups of 2-10 birds at traditional sites called winter roosts. The largest ever recorded winter roost in Europe was on the Isle of Man and held over 80 hen harriers.

Lifespan

Up to 15 years, average seven years.

Nest

Nest in a shallow-cupped pile of vegetation, usually heather twigs. Other materials used can include straw, birch, larch, spruce, bracken. The nesting material is loosely woven and the nest is lined with grass.

Nicknames

Hen harriers have had lots of nicknames over the years, including ghostbird for their pale and ghostly shape drifting over the hills. Historical names include blue gled (Scotland); blue hawk (England) Flapper (Caithness) and katabella in Orkney.

Population

Hen harriers can travel widely during the winter and can cover very long distances in search of food and places to roost. Because they move around so much conservationists count how many nests have been in each area in the spring and record their population as number of breeding pairs. A UK survey carried out in 2010 recorded around 650 breeding pairs across the UK and Isle of Man.

Size

Female is 5-10% larger than the male.

Tail

17-19 cm.

Weight

Males weigh about 350g - slightly more than 2 apples. Females weigh about 500g - Roughly 3.5 apples.

Where found

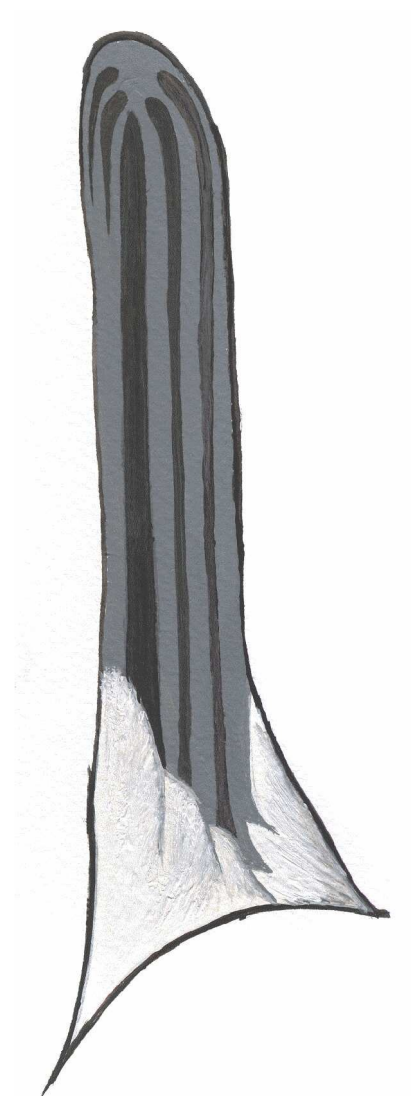
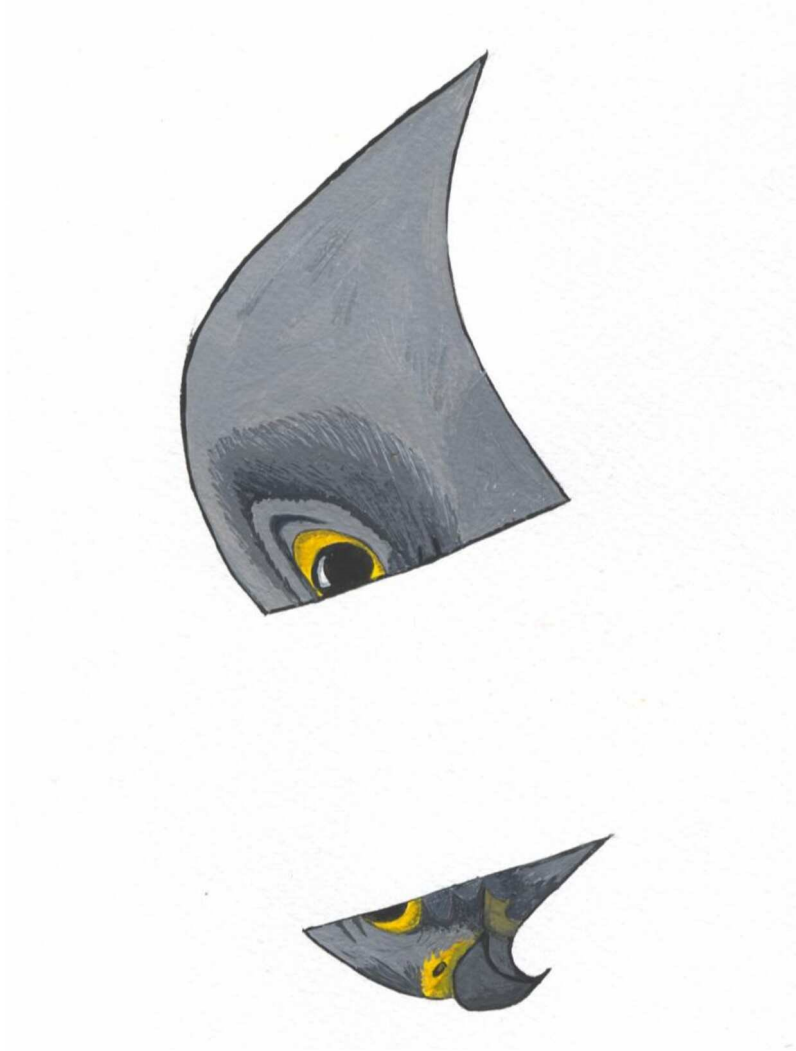
In Scotland: Orkney, the Uists and Inner Hebrides, parts of the Highlands and in the Southern Uplands. Smaller numbers in northern England, Wales and the Isles of Man.

Wingspan

Up to 1.2m - that’s the same as the average arm span of a seven year old child.

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Hen Harrier



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Birds of Prey

Golden Eagle



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Birds of Prey



Birds of Prey

Kestrel



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Birds of Prey

Osprey



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