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**Name:**

**Barn owl**



## History

The barn owl's scientific name literally means "white owl" and comes from the Greek word "tyto" meaning "owl" and the Latin "alba" meaning "white".

As nocturnal birds, barn owls are difficult to study, but scientists think they declined in the 20th century because of changes to farming that destroyed their habitat and made it difficult for them to hunt. Many birds also died after eating rats and mice that had been poisoned – something that sadly still happens today.

Thanks to the efforts of many people, for example putting up nest boxes to replace nesting habitat that has been lost, barn owls have gradually recovered.

## What is special about this bird?

Barn owls have exceptionally good hearing and can find their prey by sound alone – even in complete darkness! Their specially shaped wing feathers are very soft, helping them to fly silently and catch their prey by surprise.

## General info

**Scientific name:** *Tyto alba*

**Size:** Up to 35cm long with a wingspan of 85–93cm (the average armspan of a 9-year-old child is 1.3m).

**Weight:** 280–420g.

**Where they live:** Barn owls live in most areas of the UK, but there are fewer in Northern Ireland because they prefer a drier climate. Look for them in open countryside, along field edges, riverbanks and roadside verges.

**How long they live:** Barn owls usually live four years – but the oldest wild barn owl ever recorded lived to 15.

**What they eat:** Barn owls mostly eat small mammals, including voles (which make up 45% of their diet), shrews and mice. They eat their prey whole, but can't digest fur and bone, so they cough this up in the form of a pellet. Barn owls usually hunt at night, but in winter, when food is hard to find, you might see them out in daylight.

**Conservation status:** Because barn owls have recovered from historic declines and seem to be doing well, they are on the Green List of birds we are least concerned about.

## Fascinating fact

Barn owls live on every continent except Antarctica, which makes them one of the most widely distributed land birds in the world.



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**Name:**

**Buzzard**



## History

Buzzard numbers in the UK have varied. During the 19th century many were killed until they were only found in the west of England, Wales and Scotland. Fewer were killed during the two World Wars and killing them was banned in 1954.

However, just as buzzard numbers were beginning to recover, most of their food disappeared in the 1950s when the myxomatosis disease killed many of the UK's rabbits.

More recently buzzards are faring much better. Between 1970 and 2015, buzzard numbers increased by 465%.

## General info

**Scientific name:** *Buteo buteo*

**Size:** An average of 54cm long with a wingspan of 120cm (the average armspan of a 9-year-old child is 1.3m).

**Weight:** Up to 1.2kg - females weigh more than males.

**Where they live:** Since 2000, they have nested in every UK county, on farmland, hills and moorland.

**How long they live:** Buzzards usually live about 12 years. The oldest recorded wild bird lived for 30 years, five months and 21 days.

**What they eat:** Mainly small mammals, but also birds, reptiles, amphibians, larger insects and even earthworms! In winter they will eat carrion (dead creatures).

**Conservation+ status:** The buzzard is the UK's most common bird of prey. It is on our Green List, which means that we have no concerns about it.

## What is special about this bird?

Buzzards are sometimes called "telegraph pole eagles" because of their large size and habit of hunting from perches. Individual buzzards can vary a lot in colour, from very pale to dark brown, making them tricky to identify.

## Fascinating fact

A buzzard's call sounds like a mewling cat. Starlings and jays often impersonate it.



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**Name:**

**Golden eagle**



## History

Golden eagles used to be seen all over the UK and Europe, but in the 18th century, they were killed by farmers who mistakenly thought the birds were attacking their sheep.

Sadly, this persecution continued in the 19th century when some gamekeepers illegally killed the birds because they eat grouse, which people like to shoot for sport. This is why there are almost no golden eagles in England or Wales.

## General info

**Scientific name:** *Aquila chrysaetos*

**Size:** Length up to 82cm; wingspan up to 2.1m – wider than the armspan of an adult human!

**Weight:** Males weigh an average of 3.7kg; females weigh an average of 5.3kg.

**Where they live:** Golden eagles live around mountains, moors and forests. In the UK, you can only see them in Scotland.

**How long they live:** Up to 23 years.

**What they eat:** Golden eagles will eat animals, such as deer and sheep, that have died of natural causes. They will also catch mammals and birds, including rabbits, grouse and wading birds. Despite what some people believe, golden eagles can't kill and carry off healthy lambs – hares are the biggest prey they can tackle.

**Conservation status:** The golden eagle is on the Green List, as it has recovered from previous declines.

## What is special about this bird?

Golden eagles are very big and powerful, but also very graceful and have spectacular display flights. They soar up high and dive down at amazing speeds – it's an unforgettable sight.

## Fascinating fact

Golden eagles are very popular across the world. They appear on more than 10 different countries' coats of arms, including Egypt, Ghana and Mexico.



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**Name:**

**Hen harrier**

## History

Hen harriers used to live all over the UK but people killed them and so by 1900, the only ones left were on islands off the coast of Scotland.

A new law in 1954 made killing hen harriers illegal, but sadly people still break the law. This includes some gamekeepers who kill hen harriers to stop them eating red grouse, which some people like to shoot for sport. As a result, hen harriers are much rarer than they should be – especially in England.

## General info

**Scientific name:** *Circus cyaneus*

**Size:** Around 48cm long, with a wingspan up to 1.1m (the average armspan of a 9-year-old child is 1.3m).

**Weight:** On average, males weigh 350g and females weigh 500g.

**Where they live:** Hen harriers live in open areas with low plants, such as heather. Most live on moorland in Scotland, but some are also found in northern England, Wales and Ireland.

**How long they live:** On average they live for seven years. The oldest recorded wild bird lived for 15 years, nine months and two days.

**What they eat:** Mostly small birds, mice and voles and, when smaller mammals are not available, young rabbits and hares.

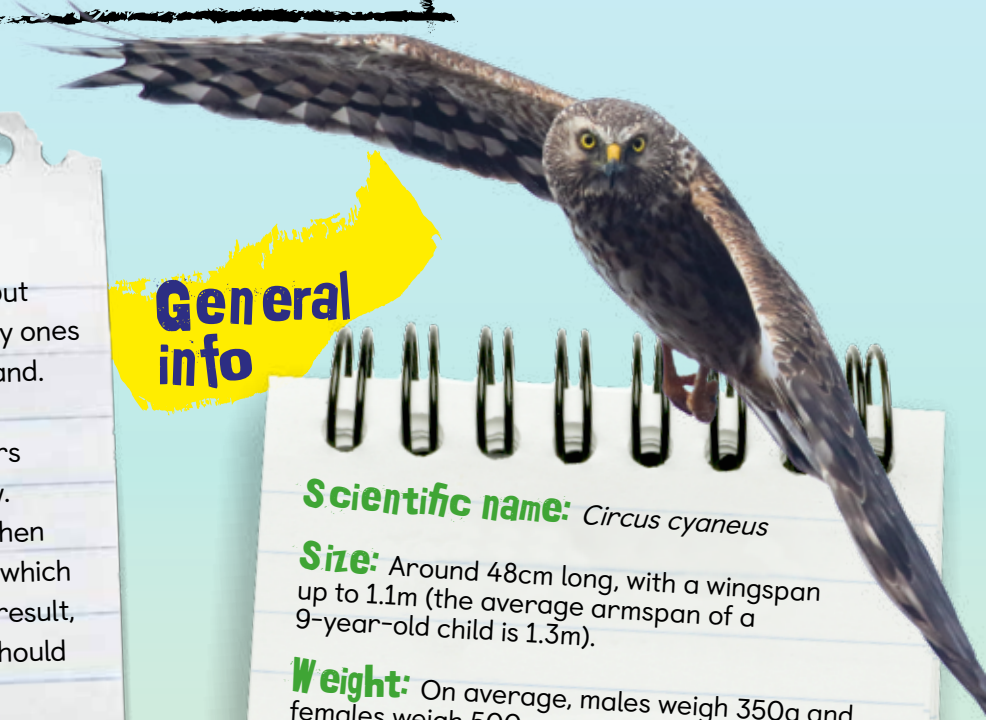
**Conservation status:** Hen harriers are the UK's most threatened birds of prey because they are illegally killed over much of their potential breeding range in the uplands. There are less than 600 pairs in the UK, but there is enough habitat for many more than this. Therefore, hen harriers are on our Red List, as we are very concerned about them.

## What is special about this bird?

Male and female hen harriers look very different. The female hen harrier is brown, which gives her camouflage when she is nesting. The grey male is much brighter and some people used to think the male and female were two different species.

## Fascinating fact

In spring, male and female hen harriers exchange food in mid-air, as part of a spectacular display known as "sky-dancing".





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**Name:**

**Kestrel**



## History

Falconry was very popular in England following the Norman conquest of 1066, and kestrels were kept and trained to hunt.

However, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, kestrel numbers declined. Pesticides used in farming caused a particular problem, especially in eastern England. When kestrels ate prey that had been poisoned by pesticides, it caused them to lay eggs that had thin and fragile shells. These would break too early, before the chick inside was old enough to survive.

When these pesticides were banned, kestrel numbers increased until the 1980s. Since then, the way that land is used has limited the places where kestrels can live and find food. Between 1970 and 2015, kestrels declined by 50% in the UK.

## What is special about this bird?

Kestrels are able to hover above the ground when searching for prey. Look for them doing this over roadside verges or out in the countryside.

## General info

**Scientific name:** *Falco tinnunculus*

**Size:** Around 34cm long, with a wingspan of 76cm (the average armspan of a 9-year-old child is 1.3m).

**Weight:** Males up to 190g; females up to 220g.

**Where they live:** Throughout the UK in open country, towns and cities, on rough grassland and roadside verges.

**How long they live:** Typically, kestrels live up to four years. However, the oldest bird recorded lived for 15 years and 11 months and one day.

**What they eat:** Voles are the most important food for kestrels, except in Northern Ireland where there aren't any voles. Kestrels also eat other small mammals such as wood mice and shrews, as well as small birds, insects, earthworms, and even small lizards in warmer areas.

**Conservation status:** The kestrel is on the Amber List, because it is declining.

## Fascinating fact

Voles – the kestrel's favourite prey – mark their runs with wee, which shows up in ultraviolet light. Unfortunately for them, kestrels can see ultraviolet and so these wee trails lead them straight to their prey.



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**Name:**

**Osprey**

## History

Shooting, habitat loss and people collecting their eggs, caused ospreys to become extinct in the UK. By the middle of the 19th century, they had disappeared from England, and in 1916 the last nest was recorded in Scotland. They did not return until Scandinavian birds bred in Scotland in the 1950s, by which time killing ospreys had been made illegal.

Since then, the RSPB and other groups have been protecting ospreys and they have returned to areas of England, Scotland and Wales to breed (the ones in Rutland were reintroduced by people). Around 240 pairs now breed in the UK. Vandals and egg thieves continue to be a threat to these birds in some areas.

## What is special about this bird?

Ospreys have spiny feet and long, arched, needle-sharp claws to help them grab slippery fish from rivers and lakes.

## General info

**Scientific name:** *Pandion haliaetus*

**Size:** An average of 56cm long with a wingspan of 158cm (the average armspan of a 9-year-old child is 1.3m).

**Weight:** Average weight is 1.5kg.

**Where they live:** Ospreys are found all over the world, near fresh and salt water. They migrate to the UK from Africa in late March and April, and leave again in August and September. One of the most famous osprey nest sites is at RSPB Loch Garten in Scotland. You can also see them in Cumbria and Rutland in England, and Porthmadog in Wales. They sometimes stop in Northern Ireland, so people have put up nesting platforms in trees to encourage them to stay.

**How long they live:** Typically, they live up to nine years. The oldest recorded bird lived for 20 years and 11 months.

**What they eat:** Mostly fish – sometimes very big ones, up to two metres long, which they catch and carry away!

**Conservation status:** The osprey is on our Amber List, which means that we have some concerns about it.

## Fascinating fact

Ospreys can close their nostrils when they dive, reaching a depth of up to one metre.





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**Name:**

**Peregrine**



## History

The relationship between peregrines and humans goes back thousands of years. Because of their speed and the fact they are easy to tame, people used them for falconry to catch food.

Despite this, they also killed wild peregrines and by the 1930s, there were only about 700 pairs left in the UK. More were killed during World War II, to stop them hunting the homing pigeons that carried important messages.

The number of peregrines hit an all-time low of only 360 pairs in the 1960s because of pesticides used in farming, which got into their bodies when they ate poisoned prey. This caused peregrines to lay eggs with very thin and fragile shells that broke far too early. Once these chemicals were banned and better laws were brought in to protect peregrines from illegal capture and egg collecting their numbers began to increase.

## General info

**Scientific name:** *Falco peregrinus*

**Size:** An average of 42cm in length, with a wingspan of 1m (the average armspan of a 9-year-old child is 1.3m).

**Weight:** Females weigh up to 1.1kg; but males only weigh about 670g.

**Where they live:** Most peregrines used to live on the rocky western coasts and in northern areas of the UK, but they now also nest on tall buildings in many UK cities and in other man-made sites, like quarries.

**How long they live:** Typically, peregrines live up to six years. The oldest recorded bird was still going strong at the age of 21 years and 10 months.

**What they eat:** A variety of birds – mostly feral pigeons, starlings and ducks.

**Conservation status:** The number of peregrines is increasing, so they are on our Green List.

## What is special about this bird?

Peregrines are the fastest birds on the planet and can dive (stoop) at speeds of over 100mph. The fastest stoop ever recorded (a captive bird) was 240mph.

## Fascinating fact

Peregrines don't build nests. They usually find a shallow dip in rocks or scrape out a little dip in soil on a ledge of a cliff. Sometimes they nest on the ledges of buildings.



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**Name:**

**Red kite**



## History

People valued kites in the Middle Ages because their scavenging kept the streets clean, but in the 16th century new laws branded them "vermin" and encouraged people to kill them. By the time birds of prey were given legal protection in 1954, only a few kites remained, in a small area of Wales.

In 1989, kites were reintroduced from Spain and Sweden to the Chilterns and the Black Isle in Easter Ross. As numbers increased, birds were carefully collected from the Chilterns and released into Yorkshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Northamptonshire and the Derwent Valley near Gateshead. Since then, kites have been reintroduced to Northern Ireland and East Scotland. These reintroductions were so successful that red kites are no longer of conservation concern.

## What is special about this bird?

Red kites have long, forked tails that they use like a rudder to steer effortlessly through the air.

## General info

**Scientific name:** *Milvus milvus*

**Size:** Up to 66cm long, with a wingspan of up to 1.95m (the average armspan of a 9-year-old child is 1.3m).

**Weight:** Males weigh an average of 1kg, while females are larger at about 1.2kg.

**Where they live:** Mainly Wales, southern England, East Midlands, Yorkshire, Gateshead area, Northern Ireland, northern and central Scotland, and Dumfries and Galloway. Young birds roam all over the UK for their first two years.

**How long they live:** On average they live for four years but the oldest recorded wild bird lived 25 years, eight months and 28 days.

**What they eat:** Mainly carrion (dead creatures) and sometimes earthworms. Occasionally, they catch birds as big as gulls or crows.

**Conservation status:** Reintroduction schemes and the ongoing protection of red kites against illegal killing has allowed their numbers to rise rapidly. They are now on our Green List, which means we have no concerns about them.

## Fascinating fact

Red kites collect shiny, bright and eye-catching objects to line their nests. Flags, socks and even a pair of frilly knickers have been found in nests!





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**Name:**

**Short-eared owl**

## History

Some people used to kill short-eared owls, but even though this became illegal in 1954, numbers of these birds have still fallen. This is because many of the marshes and moorlands where they live have disappeared.

Their population also varies according to the amount of prey that is available, especially voles. In bad vole years, the short-eared owl is the least common of all the owl species breeding in the UK.

## General info

**Scientific name:** *Asio flammeus*

**Size:** Up to 38cm in length with a wingspan of 1m (the average armspan of a 9-year-old child is 1.3m).

**Weight:** Up to 330g.

**Where they live:** Most short-eared owls breed in northern England and Scotland, with a few in Northern Ireland. They are easier to see in winter, when they spread more widely and are sometimes joined by birds from Scandinavia.

**How long they live:** The oldest known wild bird lived to the age of about six and a half years.

**What they eat:** Small mammals, especially voles.

**Conservation status:** The short-eared owl is on the Amber List because we have some concerns about this bird.

## What is special about this bird?

Short-eared owls use their excellent hearing and flying skills to hunt voles. Although they look like ears, the tufts on top of their head are actually just feathers – their ears are hidden at the sides of their head.

## Fascinating fact

Most owls are active only at night (they are nocturnal), but short-eared owls are seen during the day.





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**Name:**

**Sparrowhawk**



## History

In the past, sparrowhawk numbers suffered because their woodland homes were cut down and some people killed them.

Pesticides, which were used in farming, also entered the sparrowhawk's food chain through the prey they caught, causing their eggs to have very thin and fragile shells that broke far too early. Fortunately, these chemicals were eventually banned and sparrowhawks are now protected, so their population has recovered.

## General info

**Scientific name:** *Accipiter nisus*

**Size:** Up to 33cm long with a wingspan of up to 62cm (the average armspan of a 9-year-old child is 1.3 m).

**Weight:** Males can weigh up to 180g; females are much heavier at up to 345g.

**Where they live:** The whole of the UK apart from the most northerly Scottish Highlands and islands. If you watch carefully, you might see sparrowhawks in your garden or school grounds.

**How long they live:** The average lifespan for a sparrowhawk is four years, but the oldest known wild sparrowhawk lived for 17 years.

**What they eat:** Mainly small birds and pigeons. Sparrowhawks ambush their prey from hiding and have learned that gardens are great places to find lunch.

**Conservation status:** Because there are currently no concerns about sparrowhawks, they are on our Green List.

## What is special about this bird?

Sparrowhawks are one of the most nimble birds of prey and can twist and turn to dodge trees as they chase their prey through woodland, reaching speeds of up to 50km per hour.

## Fascinating fact

Female sparrowhawks are up to 25% bigger than males, which means they can tackle larger prey, while males are more agile and better at hunting smaller birds. This means that males and females don't compete for food.



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## Name:

**White-tailed eagle**



## History

In the 1700s, white-tailed eagles lived in parts of England, Ireland and Scotland. Some people killed them, and in 1918 the last UK white-tailed eagle was shot on Shetland in Scotland.

It took until 1975 to successfully reintroduce them on islands in Scotland. In 1985 the first white-tailed eagle chick fledged on the Isle of Mull. Further successful reintroduction schemes have followed in Scotland, and the Isle of Wight in 2019, but the population remains very small.

## General info

**Scientific name:** *Haliaeetus albicilla*

**Size:** Massive! Around 80cm long with a wingspan of around 2.2m – wider than the armspan of an adult human!

**Weight:** Males are an average of 4.3kg, while females weigh around 5.5kg.

**Where they live:** Mainly Skye, Mull and the Western Isles in Scotland. In 2007, they were reintroduced to Fife in Scotland and Kerry in Ireland. In winter, birds from Scandinavia occasionally visit eastern England. In 2019, they were reintroduced to the Isle of Wight off the south coast of England.

**How long they live:** Between 20 and 25 years.

**What they eat:** White-tailed eagles will eat almost anything, including seabirds, ducks, geese and mammals. They can even grab fish that are swimming close to the surface. In winter, they also feed on carrion (dead creatures).

**Conservation status:** White-tailed eagles are on our Red List as we are very concerned about them.

## What is special about this bird?

The white-tailed eagle is the largest bird of prey that lives in the UK.

## Fascinating fact

In Iceland, generations of white-tailed eagles have used the same nest for 150 years.