

MARSHHARRIER

circusaeruginosus

In addition to the twin hazards of persecution and toxic chemical attack endured by our other raptors, the Marsh Harrier has been particularly affected by habitat loss due mainly to land drainage and it became effectively extinct in Britain by 1917.

During the following few years there were occasional attempts by immigrants from Holland to breed in the East Anglian reed-beds but it was not until 1927 when Lord Desborough and later the Norfolk Naturalists' trust gave them protection that the population began its slow recovery.

As its name suggests, it is a wetland bird, nesting in dense reed-beds or other thick vegetation in shallow water. It feeds mainly on marsh birds including duck and waders but will also take small mammals. Prey is usually caught by surprise as the Harrier quarters the ground using all available cover.



Marsh harrier,
Back from the brink.

FactFile

Length: 48cm – 56cm

Wingspan: 115cm – 130cm

Weight: 0.40kg – 0.80kg

Habitat: Wetlands where disturbance is minimal. Large dense reed-beds are essential for breeding. The female builds the nest and the male builds platforms for feeding & resting. Between 3 and 6 eggs are laid, usually in late May, and these are incubated for as long as 38 days. If food is scarce, the older chicks may kill and eat their younger siblings. Fledging occurs after 40 days at which point the male leaves. The young leave when they are about 2 months old. Breeding success is generally low with up to 34% of clutches being lost.