

MERLIN

falco columbarius

The merlin is our smallest falcon.



Britain is host to a large proportion of the total European population - thanks largely to the management of the grouse moors - but its numbers continue to decline. The reasons are not entirely clear but some of the contributory factors include persecution by a minority of gamekeepers and collisions with overhead wires and other man-made objects (in one survey, a quarter of all ringing recoveries resulted from such accidents).

Males have blue-grey upper parts whilst females' are mainly brown. The under parts of both sexes are streaked.

These fast and agile hunters are our smallest falcons. Their rapid wingbeats enable them to chase down their prey, mainly small birds such as larks and meadow pipits, in level flight. Merlins are confined to Scotland, Wales, Northern England and the West Country.

FactFile

Length: 25cm – 30cm

Wingspan: 50cm – 62cm

Weight: 0.12kg – 0.30kg

Habitat: Open upland country. Hilly areas offer the best vantage points but some birds have taken to forest margins.

Merlins lay 3 – 5 eggs between mid May and early June. Incubation about 26 days but, because the eggs are laid at 2 day intervals, the young hatch at different times. The youngsters grow rapidly and are fully fledged in less than a month and are fully independent at two months.