





# RAPTOR ID COURSE

A First Step into the Identification of UK Birds of Prey

Eagle Spotter Training







# The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project

*Reinforcing the isolated and vulnerable population of Golden Eagles in the South of Scotland*

**The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project** aims to reinforce the isolated and vulnerable population of Golden Eagles across the South of Scotland through a series of **five translocations over five years**.

Each year, up to **ten young Eaglets** from the North will be collected from nests of twins and brought down to boost numbers south of the Central Belt. Only one eaglet is taken from each nest, leaving one behind to be raised naturally.

The young Eagles spend a short time (approx. **6 weeks**) in custom-built aviaries at a confidential release site in the Moffat Hills. They are only handled twice (once at collection and once during the fitting of satellite tags) and are fed through sleeved hatches at the rear of the aviaries, ensuring they do not see humans during their brief stay in the aviary. This ensures that come release, the birds are as wild as the day they were collected.

Post-release, food is provided through the winter with all released birds being monitored very closely via satellite tags and on-the-ground observations. The Project Team maintain an open dialogue with landowners, stakeholders, people and communities who may be lucky enough to encounter an Eagle in their area to ensure that the young Eagles are safe and welcome wherever they roam.

At present, all three Eagles from our **first 2018 release (Edward, Emily and Beaky)** are all doing extremely well and have roamed from East to West across the South. They are finding their own food and have interacted with the small population of resident Eagles in the South, offering the beginning of a life-line to the struggling birds in the South.



# Basic Raptor Identification



Eagle



Buteo



Accipiter

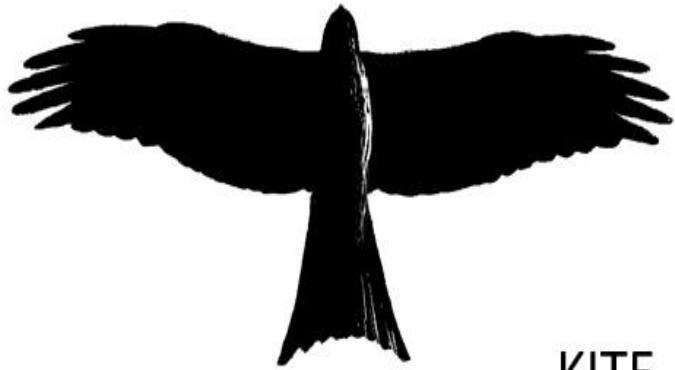


Falcon

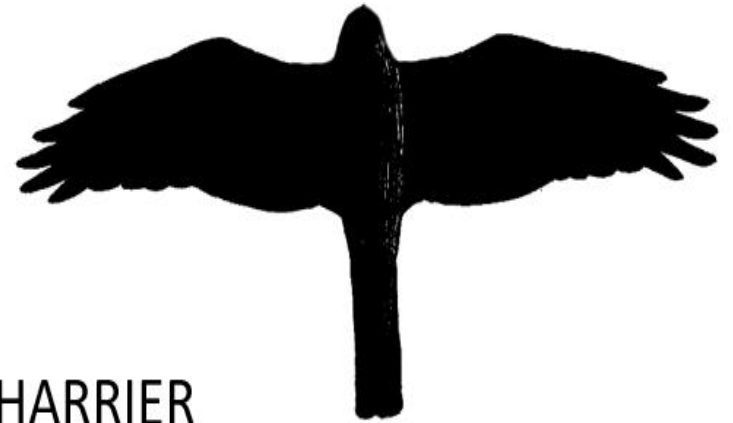




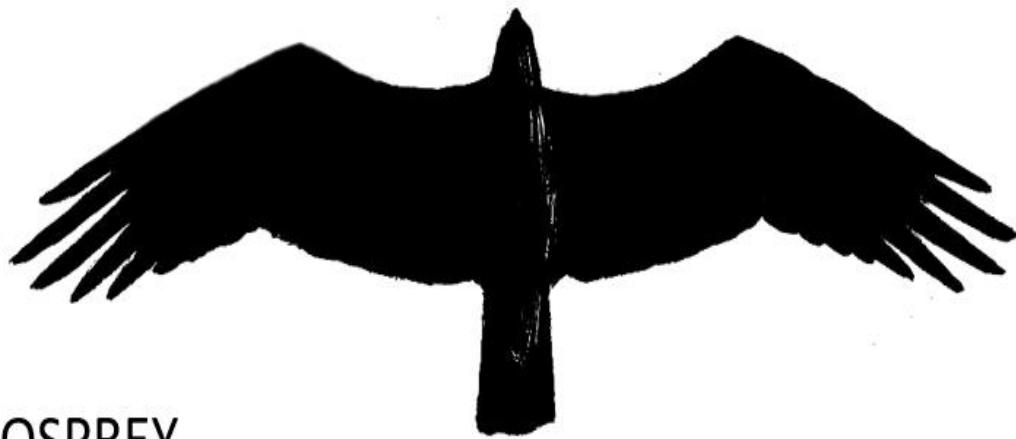
# Basic Raptor Identification



KITE



HARRIER



OSPREY





# **SPECIES ID PROFILES**



## Merlin

### Colour:

**Adult Male** – slate blue back, tail and wings, thick black band at end of tail, rusty orange breast and collar.

**Adult Female** – brown back and wings, tail has 5 strong bands, buff white breast with bold brown streaks.

**Size: SMALL - UK's Smallest Falcon** – **Length** – 26cm – 33cm. **Wingspan** – 55cm – 69cm

**Flight:** Very quick wingbeats, often low to the ground.

**FACT:** When hunting a Merlin will sometimes mimic the flight of a thrush to fool potential prey.

NOTES:





## Kestrel

### Colour:

**Adult Male** – rusty chestnut back and wings, tail grey ending with a thick black band, buff white, heavily spotted breast, grey head. **Adult Female** – brown back and wings, tail and with strong band, buff white breast with bold brown spots.

**Size:** *Length* – 31cm-37cm. *Wingspan* – 68cm – 78cm

**Flight:** Often seen hovering over rough ground or road edges – **Flight profile** – very long wings and tail.

**FACT:** Kestrels used to be the most frequently spotted Raptor in the UK (now it is the Common Buzzard). Kestrels have suffered a 65% decline in Scotland between 1995 and 2012.

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## **Peregrine**

### **Colour:**

Slate- grey upperparts, paler blue-grey at rump and tail. Underparts white and finely barred from lower chest to belly. Black hood and moustachial stripe. Sexes similar with female much larger.

**Size:** Length – 38-45cm (male), 46-51cm (female) Wingspan – 89-100cm (male), 104-113cm (female)

**Flight:** quick, rather shallow wingbeats - Flight profile – very long wings and tail, bulky body, chest heavy.

**FACT:** Peregrines, when 'stooping' are one of the world's fastest birds, reaching speeds of over 200mph. Peregrines suffered a massive decline in 1950's and 1960's due to biocides and persecution but are now recovering well. They are becoming a familiar sight in urban areas where they nest on tall buildings.

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## Sparrowhawk

### Colour:

**Male** – slate grey upperparts, often tinged with blue, barred chest and body, cheek and upper chest rufous, **Female** – slate grey upperparts with brown-grey barring below

**Size:** *Length – 29-34cm (male), 35-41cm (female), Wingspan 58-65cm (male), 67-80cm (female)*

**Flight:** Typically, a few quick wingbeats followed by a glide. **Flight Profile** – rather short, blunt-tipped wings and long tail

**FACT:** Sparrow hawks have been observed mimicking the flight of wood pigeons to get closer to their prey in open areas.

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## **Goshawk**

### **Colour:**

**Male** – bluish grey upperparts, white below with fine grey bars

**Female** – slate grey upperparts, as male below but overall much larger than male (male approx. size of Carrion Crow / Female as Buzzard)

**Size:** *Length – 49-56cm (male), 58-64cm (female), Wingspan 90-105cm (male), 108-120cm (female)*

**Flight:** Stronger, slower wingbeats than Sparrowhawk - **Flight Profile** – longer winged than Sparrowhawk, long tail broader at the base, head protrudes more than Sparrowhawk. Overall much more bulky than Sparrowhawk.

**FACT:** The current UK population of Goshawks is derived from escaped or released falconry birds.

NOTES:





## Common Buzzard

**Colour:** Sexes similar – typically brown upperparts with a pale band across chest, usually some light patterning on underside of wings. **HIGHLY VARIABLE!**

**Size:** *Length* – 48-56cm *Wingspan* 110-130cm

**Flight:** Often soars with tail fanned on level or slightly raised wings, sometimes hangs on the wind or hovers - ***Flight***

***Profile*** – broad wings, short tail in comparison to hawks, calls frequently

**FACT:** The Buzzard is now the most commonly seen bird of prey in Scotland and has massively expanded its range in the last 30 years.

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## **Red Kite**

**Colour:** Sexes similar – Tail rufous from above, pale below.

Large white patches towards end of wings typical. Light grey head with rufous body.

**Size:** *Length* – 61-72cm *Wingspan* 140-165cm

**Flight:** Buoyant and leisurely, constantly twists tail -

***Flight Profile*** – long wings, deeply forked tail, looks ‘stooped’ with tail and head hanging down.

**FACT:** Until recent years the Red Kite was restricted to Wales but, through a series of reintroductions in England and Scotland it is recovering well and spreading across the UK.





## Osprey

### Colour:

Sexes similar – upperparts grey-brown, underparts white with blackish marking on underwing - males typically appear 'cleaner' than females with less markings on head and chest.

**Size:** *Length* – 52-60cm *Wingspan* 152-167cm

**Flight:** Flight recalls a heron or large gull, buoyant on 'soft' wings, hovers over water when hunting - ***Flight Profile*** – long, narrow wings with long primaries, short, squared tail.

**FACT:** Ospreys were extinct in the UK until two Scandinavian birds naturally recolonised the nest site at Loch Garten in 1954. Subsequent reintroductions across the UK have aided a fantastic recovery with up to 250 pairs now breeding.

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## Hen Harrier

### Colour:

**Male** – striking black wing tips, underparts white with grey head and upper breast neatly divided. Upperparts blue/grey with white band above tail. **Female** – Upperparts brown with white band above tail, underparts streaky brown with defined barring on wing and tail.

**Size:** *Length* – 45-55cm *Wingspan* 97-118cm

**Flight:** typically, low with wings raised in shallow V, flight buoyant and ‘tern-like’ - **Flight Profile** – very long, narrow wings and long tail

**FACT:** Hen harriers had been persecuted to extinction as a breeding bird on mainland Britain by 1900, but managed to recover their population naturally. However, they remain one of the UK’s rarest birds.

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## Golden Eagle

### Colour:

**Adults** – typically dark brown with lighter

yellowish brown/ light rufous brown on upper wings. 'Golden' head and nape.

**Juveniles** – very dark brown with pure white patches on wings, white tail with black terminal band. 'Ginger'/ rich orange head and nape.

**Size:** *Length* – 80-93cm *Wingspan* 190-225cm

**Flight:** Powerful – 6-7 deep, slow wingbeats interspersed with short glides, soars for long periods without flapping - **Flight**

**Profile** – very large, long wings and long tail – notable 'bow' in wings between body and elbow.

**FACT:** The body of the oldest wild Golden Eagle in the world was recovered in 2018 at Inchnadamph, Sutherland in 2018. It was ringed as a chick in 1985 and was 33 years old.

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## White Tailed Eagle (Sea Eagle)

### Colour:

**Adults:** Overall dark with lighter head and white tail. **Juveniles:** Dark all over, lacking lighter head and white tail – streaked.

**Size:** **Length:** 100cm **Wingspan:** 250cm

**Flight:** Somewhat Heron-like, slow, heavy flaps interspersed with glides, regularly soars - **Flight Profile** – Massive! Huge, wide wings (this species is often described as a ‘flying barn door’). Somewhat vulture like.

**FACT:** In the UK White tailed Eagle were persecuted to extinction in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century but have returned through a series of reintroduction projects. There are now over 100 pairs breeding in Scotland.

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## **Other species commonly mistaken for Raptors**

## Corvids (Crows)

Crows (particularly in silhouette) can be misidentified as raptors as they commonly soar, are of similar size and have 'fingered' wings.

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### Raven

Ravens are approximately Buzzard sized and frequently soar.

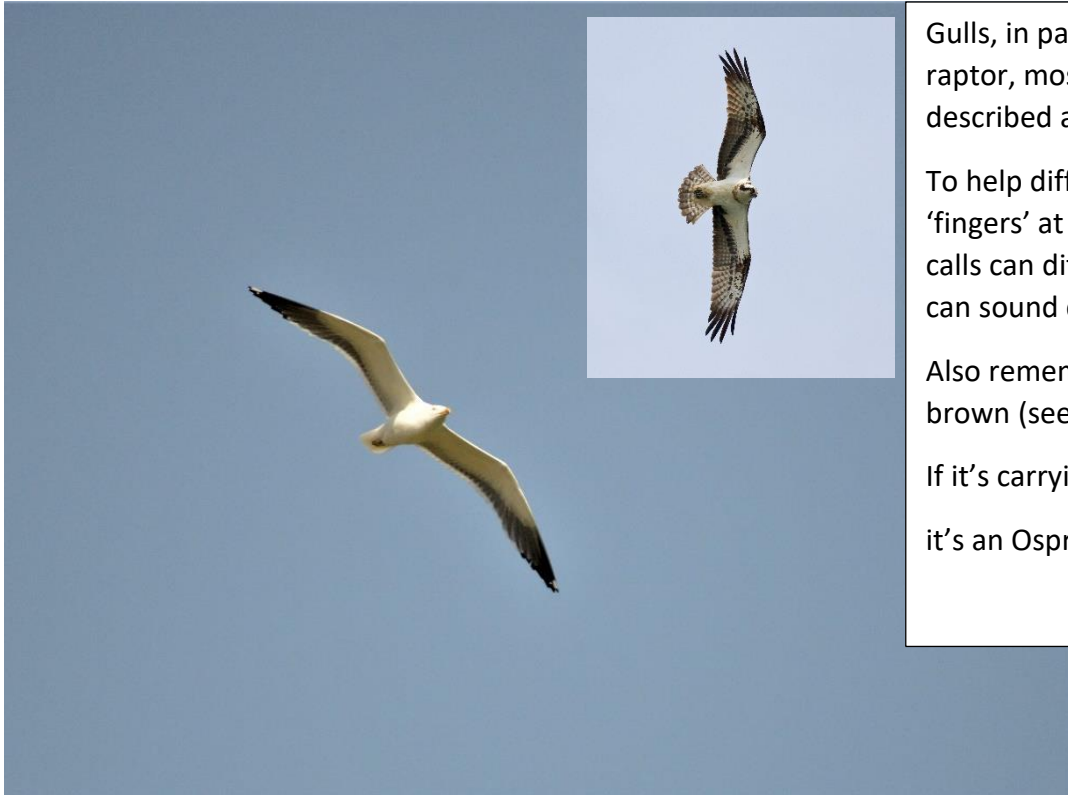
Look for diamond shaped tail, heavy beak and listen for '*croaky*' call.



Crows frequently 'mob' raptors and can be very helpful in locating birds of prey. (L-R: Buzzard & Carrion Crow; Kestrel & Rook; Sparrowhawk & Carrion Crow; Peregrine & Raven.



## GULLS



Gulls, in particular the larger species can sometimes be mistaken for a raptor, most commonly, the Osprey. An Osprey's flight pattern is often described a 'gull-like'.

To help differentiate, look for a more pronounced beak and lack of 'fingers' at wingtips in Gulls. Also listen as Gulls are very vocal and their calls can differentiate them from raptors (although some juvenile Gulls can sound quite 'raptor-like'!)

Also remember that in the larger species, juvenile gulls are typically brown (see right).

If it's carrying a fish in its feet, it's an Osprey!



NOTES: (Ospreys are summer visitors to the UK arriving mid-April and leaving late September)



## OTHER SPECIES

### GREY HERON (right)

On the ground no-one would mistake a Heron for a raptor! However, in flight at distance, the Heron can be confused with both **Osprey** and **White-tailed Eagle** due to its flight profile and pattern, particularly when flying directly towards or away from you.

Look out for trailing legs and bent neck (which is held in a 'S' shape in typical flight) and listen for the harsh '*crank*' call to aid identification.



### WADERS (Curlew left)

Like the Heron, Waders will only be confused with a raptor in flight. Despite their long bills, many waders share the same long, thin, pointed wings associated with Falcons.

In particular, the Curlew can be confused with a Peregrine Falcon when the long bill is not visible as, at times, its flight pattern is quite similar.

Again, your ears are your friends as the Curlew has a very recognisable call!

## Pigeons and Doves

Again, the confusion lies in flight with these species.

Wood Pigeons (right) can, at times, be mistaken for a Sparrowhawk, with their rapid wingbeats followed by a glide, wing shape, barred tail and often speedy flight. Look for white patches on wings and neck to confirm a Wood Pigeon.

In towns and villages, a glimpse of Collared Doves can sometime be reminiscent of a small hawk or falcon such as a Kestrel. Even when perched Collared Doves can sometimes look raptor-like. Look for their black 'collar' and listen for their familiar soft call.



### Cuckoo

As it dashes low over the heather on our moorlands, the Cuckoo can look incredibly 'Merlin-like'. With its wings sometimes looking long and sharp like a Falcon and at other times, rounded like a hawk, not to mention its barred underparts and long tail, Cuckoo's can pose a real challenge in discerning them from Raptors.

Luckily, they have a very distinctive call and you only have to worry about them for a few months in the Summer!

## **NOTES:**





Golden Eagle



Merlin



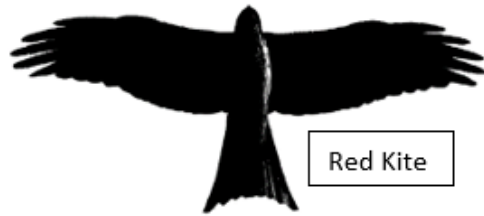
Kestrel



Peregrine



Buzzard



Red Kite



Goshawk



Sparrowhawk



Osprey



Hen Harrier

## RAPTOR FLIGHT SILHOUETTES

NOTES: