

Birds of prey are also called *raptors*. They usually hunt and catch live animals. Some also *scavenge* on dead animals known as *carrion*.

Birds of prey are at the top of the food chain, so what happens to them tells us about the state of the *environment*. If they are doing well, it means there is plenty of food available and a healthy *environment*.

Some birds of prey, like red kites, are thriving now, but others aren't doing so well. Red kites are threatened by changes in the places they live, by chemicals used to control insect pests on farmland, and poisons used to control rats. They are sometimes *persecuted* or deliberately killed.

It is becoming easier to see red kites in Rockingham Forest, but if you look a little bit harder, you may see other birds of prey as well. The following are birds of prey that hunt during the day (known as *diurnal*). Look out for them if you take a walk in the countryside.

### kestrel



- Length 33–36 cm, average *wingspan* 75 cm.
- Males have a blue/grey head and tail and a red/brown body, (females are brown all over). Both sexes have a long tail and long, pointed wings.
- Seen hovering with a fanned tail over roadside *verges*, also seen over farmland, in parks and in towns.
- Nests on ledges or in holes, often on buildings, or in old crows' nests.
- Feeds on small mammals, birds and insects.
- Still the most common bird of prey in Britain, but numbers have dropped recently because there is less food around.

### buzzard



- Length 51–56 cm, average *wingspan* 120 cm.
- Broad rounded wings, short neck and short, slightly rounded tail.
- Mainly brown in colour, lighter underneath.
- Often seen flying over open country, or in well-wooded areas. Will occasionally hover.
- Nests in trees.
- Feeds on rabbits, voles, young birds, frogs, worms and insects. Also *scavenges* for *carrion*.
- Buzzard numbers are recovering from declines caused by *persecution* and pesticides. They recently came back to breed in eastern and southern Britain.

### sparrowhawk



- Length 28–38 cm, average *wingspan* 70 cm.
- Long, square ended tail and short, blunt, broad wings.
- Males have a grey back (females brown) and both have black bands on their tails. Both sexes are whitish underneath, with bars of orange (males) and brown (females).

- Flies with a burst of rapid wingbeats followed by a short glide.
- Found in or near woods and over farmland – sometimes in urban gardens.
- Nests in trees.
- Feeds on small birds, which it chases along hedgerows and through woodland.
- Numbers dropped significantly during the early 1960s, due to use of organochlorine pesticides. By 1990, *sparrowhawk populations* had mostly recovered, but now numbers are falling again. Perhaps this is due to a lack of food – the numbers of some of the songbirds they eat have fallen.

### hobby



- Length 30–36 cm, average *wingspan* 74 cm.
- Short tail and long scythe-like wings. Looks like a large swift.
- Slate-grey back and white underneath with heavy black streaks. Reddish thighs.
- Comes to southern England in the summer to breed. (Spends the winter in Africa). Prefers *downland* and farmland with old hedgerow trees, and woodland edges.
- Nests in old crow nests.
- Feeds on large insects such as dragonflies, and small birds, particularly larks, martins and swifts.
- Hobby *populations* are rising steadily, possibly linked with the increase in numbers of their dragonfly prey.

### owls in the east midlands



You could see four species of owl in Rockingham Forest: the barn owl, tawny owl, little owl and long-eared owl. Owls are birds of prey: they kill their prey using their sharp talons, and then eat it whole. Unlike other birds of prey, most owls hunt mainly at night, although you may be lucky and see one in the early evening. Little owls are the exception – they can be seen hunting in the daytime.

### rook

- Purplish-black *plumage* with bare greyish skin at base of bill, flattened forehead. Feathers at top of its legs make it look as though it is wearing baggy trousers.
- Eats earthworms and grain, but also a variety of other food such as nuts, beetles and caterpillars.
- Among the most sociable birds with a strong sense of territory. Feathers on crown of head are raised when excited.



- Normally nests in colonies in the tops of tall trees. These colonies are known as 'rookeries'. It builds untidy nests of twigs lined with dry grass, roots and leaves.

### tawny owl

- Size of a woodpigeon. Mottled brown, a face lined with a ring of dark feathers and dark brown friendly eyes. Has a tubby body and rounded wings.
- Eats small mammals, especially mice, voles and shrews, as well as other birds, insects and *invertebrates*.
- It hunts by night and roosts by day. Can be seen in daylight perching in the open on a branch, telegraph pole or rock.
- Nest is usually in a tree hole about 3 metres off the ground, also in clefts in rock faces and holes in buildings.



### great spotted woodpecker

- Black and white bird that is dirty white underneath and has crimson feathers under a short tail. The male has a crimson patch on the back of its head.
- It has a bounding flight with wings folded against the body at the bottom of each bound. No song, but a drumming noise as it taps the tree trunk.
- Feeds mainly on insects in summer, and seeds and nuts in winter.
- Excavates a hole in a tree trunk, usually oak or birch, for its nest.



### nuthatch

- Plump bird that is blue-grey on top, and buff underneath with chestnut coloured flanks and a black eyestripe.
- Feeds mainly on insects such as small beetles and spiders in summer, and in winter it eats nuts and seeds.
- Wedges a nut or seed into a crack in the bark of a tree and hammers it open with its bill.
- The only British bird to go down a tree trunk headfirst.
- Nests in natural holes in trees, sometimes uses a hole in a wall or a nestbox.



### treecreeper

- Small bird with long down-curved bill. Its upper parts are mottled and barred brown with pale streaks.
- Feeds on insects such as stoneflies, crickets and earwigs.
- Always on the move – up the tree trunk probing the bark for insects. Once it has reached the top of a tree, it flies to a new tree to continue its search. Builds nest behind loose bark or ivy, or in a hole in a building.



### willow warbler



- The size of a blue tit. Slim, with greenish-brown upper parts and yellowish-white under parts. Very similar to the chiffchaff, but with a completely different song.
- Feeds mainly on insects such as flies, caterpillars, beetles and midges.
- Often sings from a prominent perch.
- Nests in young woods and plantations, usually on the ground in a well-hidden domed nest with an entrance at the side.

### robin



- Size of a house sparrow. It has an orange-red face, neck and breast, white belly, and brown upper parts.
- Eats *invertebrates* such as worms, spiders, and beetles. Also eats fruits and seeds in winter.
- You can often see it hopping along the ground. In Britain and Ireland it is quite tame.
- Nests are usually quite low down in a hollow in a bank, a tree stump or among tree roots.

### great tit

- Size of a house sparrow. Largest member of the tit family. Has a glossy black cap, collar and throat, and a black stripe down its yellow breast.
- Mainly eats insects, such as caterpillars and aphids. In winter, also eats fruits, seeds and nuts.
- Less social than other tits. Acrobatic and lively, making it amusing to watch. In gardens, it may become quite tame.
- Nests in a hole in a tree or building, and will use a nestbox. Nests are made of moss and lined with hair.



### jay

- This colourful bird is in fact a member of the crow family!
- Has brown-pink *plumage* and a bright blue patch and a white patch on each of its wings. It has black and white feathers on the top of its head.



- Feeds on acorns. Hides them first in the ground or in cracks in trees. It will then go back later to eat them.
- A secretive woodland bird, which is more likely to be heard than seen.
- Builds nests on a branch or in the fork of a tree.