

## Hen Harrier

### Description

The males and females are very different in appearance, but both sexes have the long wings and tail which characterise harriers. The larger female is brown above and streaked below with a distinctive white rump and black bands on its tail. The male is blue-grey above, with black tips to its wings. Its head and breast are grey, but its belly and rest of its underparts are whitish. Like the female it also has a white rump. Harriers have a distinctive low flight interspersed with frequent glides when they raise their wings into a V shape.



The hen harrier, recently named as the northern harrier, is most at home in open moorland, where it quarters low over the ground in search of small birds and mammals. Its spectacular sky dance display can be seen in upland areas in the spring; when the male and female chase and tumble high over the moors and forests in a frenetic 'sky-dance'. The uplands of Counties Antrim and Fermanagh support the majority of Northern Ireland's breeding pairs.

### Distribution

The Hen Harrier can be seen on the uplands of counties Antrim, Tyrone and Fermanagh. In 2004, only 50 to 60 pairs were recorded in Northern Ireland. The Antrim hills and the Fermanagh uplands would be the best place to see them.

### Action

Hen harriers are specially protected under the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985.

Development of procedures to prevent disturbance and destruction of nests in forests by The Forest Service, together with Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group and RSPB.

Proposed actions include:

1. Proposals to designate SPA sites for Hen Harriers in Northern Ireland.
2. Increase the population to 10 nesting females by 2020.
3. Increase the range of breeding birds to 30 10km<sup>2</sup> by 2020.

### Further Information

<http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority/species.asp?item=286>

### MLA Species Champion

