

Buzzard



Buzzard:

Buteo buteo

Distribution:

throughout Europe, except parts of eastern Britain, northern Scandinavia & Iceland.

Habitat:

open hilly & mountainous areas with copses & wooded valleys, secluded rocky coasts, sea cliffs, moorland, farmland and forests with large clearings.

Description:

broad, rounded wings, short neck & rounded tail barred brown & grey. Body plumage ranges from dark grey or brown to very pale grey - most are basically brown. Yellow, unfeathered legs & brownish hooked beak.

Size:

length:- 50-55cm. Wingspan:- up to 1.5m.

Food:

small mammals, especially rabbits, insects and carrion.

The buzzard is the most common of Britain's larger birds of prey. Its mewing 'kiew' is a familiar sound in hilly country in western or northern Britain, as it soars effortlessly, rising on a thermal of warm air.

Buzzard Habits**Daily Life**

.....buzzards hunt during the day and are usually seen on their own, or in pairs. A buzzard spends long periods soaring, holding its straight wings motionless, with the tips of the primary feathers curved upwards and the tail spread out.

The bird has very keen eyesight and as it soars, it scans the ground below for prey. Rabbits are its favourite prey and on spotting one of these, it swoops down quickly and accurately, grasping and killing the animal with its sharp, strong talons. It uses its hooked, pointed beak to rip the flesh from the body. The bird also frequently perches to watch out for prey, keeping an eye out from trees and fence posts.

Breeding

.....in the early parts of the breeding season, buzzards perform graceful aerobatics, soaring, tumbling and looping the loop, trying to attract a partner. A pair is often seen gliding in circles around each other; the male glides a little above the female and both face one another. This displays flight indicates that there is a nest nearby. Sometimes the display consists of a series of dives. The bird glides steeply down with half-closed wings and then soars up again, almost vertically, to repeat the glide.

The buzzards build a large, bulky nest in a tree or on a cliff ledge. When in a tree, sticks are used to make a flattish platform which is lined with finer twigs, bracken, heather, grass or moss. Fresh sprigs of foliage or ferns are used to 'decorate' the nest and are regularly replaced.

Normally 2 or 3 eggs are laid, but up to 6 have been recorded. They are white or bluish-white with blotches of red-brown and pale lilac. Incubation lasts for 33-35 days, beginning with the first egg, so the chicks hatch at

intervals. They are covered in greyish-white down.

The female guards the chicks to begin with, whilst the male brings food. He leaves the food at the edge of the nest, where it is picked up by the female and fed to the young. When the chicks are a week or so old, both parents continue feeding them while they learn to hunt for themselves.

If food is short then the younger, weaker chicks may die but in plentiful seasons, the whole brood will be reared.

Buzzards and Man

In the 19th century, buzzards were shot in large numbers by gamekeepers and by the early 1900s they had disappeared from many parts of Britain. However, during the First World War, gamekeepers enlisted to fight and many game estates were abandoned, allowing the buzzard numbers to recover. Since then there has been a more enlightened attitude towards birds of prey and the buzzard has spread back into many of its former haunts.

There was a set-back in 1954, with the introduction of myxomatosis which almost wiped out Britain's rabbit population. Since the rabbit is the buzzard's favourite food, many birds went hungry and the numbers began to decline yet again. Rabbits are common once more and, as a result, the buzzards are on the increase.

All content copyright of YPTE.

