

## **Hobby *falco subbuteo***

*Uncommon but regular summer visitor/passage migrant.*



Hobby photo: Sean Gray

**1988** – There was an immature bird at Otley Gravel Pits in August on 15th, 16th, 28th and 29th.

**1989** – Just one record, a first-summer bird flew south-east at Otley Gravel Pits on 17th May.

**1990** – An adult was seen briefly at Hoodstorth Allotment, near Thruscross Reservoir, on the typical date of 20th June. The next was a bird at Otley Gravel Pits, undoubtedly attracted by the colony of Sand Martins, and reported on the following dates: 8th July, 29th July when it was seen chasing Swifts, 30th July and 5th August. The final record of the year was a bird found on 24th August, at the barren and treeless upland site of Fly Flatts Reservoir.

**1991** – This was the best year yet, with five records. An adult was reported from Thornton Moor Reservoir on 7th July and a first-summer bird frequented Bingley Moor from the same date until 23rd July, although it was often elusive. The next report related to a bird near a small Sand Martin colony on the River Wharfe on 15th July while another or just possibly the same bird was seen flying west at Hey Slack Allotment, near Thruscross, on 24th of that month. Finally, one flew up the Washburn Valley at Lindley Wood Reservoir on 14th August. Clearly July is the best month for this mercurial little falcon.

**1992** – A typical year with a handful of records. The first, an adult, at Sawood Moss on 7th June was followed by a single on Bingley Moor on 14th July. The next was a first-summer bird at Thornton Moor on 1st August. The final record was a single over Oakworth on 6th August.

**1993** – A typical year with just five sightings. The first on Bingley Moor on 28th June was followed on 11th July by one chasing Swallows, Swifts and Starlings at Thruscross. A first-summer bird was at Otley Gravel Pits on 12th July and an adult was seen at Paul Clough on 26th September. The final record involved a bird on 3rd October at Oakenshaw, painfully close to the boundary of the observer's local patch!

**1994** – There were six records for this annual and exciting species. The first, an adult which flew over Beaver Dyke Reservoir on 7th May, was followed by one at Menston on the same day and another at Otley Gravel Pits on 4th June. A single was observed chasing a Skylark at Thornton Moor Reservoir on 6th July and what was possibly the same bird was seen hunting at nearby Leeshaw two days later. The final record was of a bird flying south, again at Beaver Dyke Reservoir, on 14th July.

**1995** – An excellent year with breeding almost certainly having taken place. Between 18th July and 26th August three birds, involving at least one juvenile, were observed at a site where frequent hunting, often in pairs, was targeting the hirundine flocks. On 13th an immature was seen to attack a Heron and chase four Mallards. Elsewhere, records relate to single adults, with the first at Otley Gravel Pits on 29th and 30th April. Three May birds: at Skipton Moor on 4th, north-west at Thornton Moor Reservoir on 12th and at Norwood on 14th. The final record came from Beamsley Moor where one passed east on 29th September.

**1996** – Since this species was first recorded in 1988, the number of recorded sightings has gradually increased year by year, although the number of individual birds involved is probably relatively low.

The first record for 1996 was of a single bird on Aslwith Moor on 5th June. This was followed by an adult bird at the unlikely location of Wyke Banks on 6th July. The next day, one bird was seen at Denton – possibly two, and a bird was at Burley Moor on 24th July. On the evening of 15th August, a first-summer bird flew north-west, low across Thornton Moor Reservoir. At an undisclosed site,

birds including juveniles were regularly observed in typical breeding habitat between 25th July and 15th September; finally an adult was seen there on 2nd October.

**1997** – A little disappointing after the last few years but still five records in all were submitted, involving five or six birds.

The first sighting was of two birds together in courtship flight at Todley Hall Road (Newsholme Dean) on 14th May, whether courting or not, they had departed by the next day. The next sighting were of single birds on 3rd June, and 16th June in the Washburn and Wharfedale areas respectively, these records could well relate to just one bird. On 5th July, a bird flew north-west over an observer's garden at Gilstead. Finally, a bird was seen flying south-west at Thornton Moor Reservoir on 24th August.

There was nothing this year to hint at breeding by this enigmatic species, although the two June records offered brief hope, the nest-sites are notoriously difficult to find however.

**1998** – 1998 was a bit below average for this species compared with recent years, but there were still five records, all of single birds. For once, the north of the Group's recording area did not fare so well, with only one record; the remaining four records all came from locations to the south-west. The first of the year's records was a bird at Ogden Reservoir on 7th June; this was followed by another at Marley Sewage Works on 21st June, then another was seen from Barden Scale on 7th July. There was then a gap until the autumn, when juvenile birds were seen chasing Barn Swallows at Elland Gravel Pits at dusk on 10th September and at Fly Flatts Reservoir during the mid-afternoon on 14th September.

**1999** – There was a total of nine records, all of single birds. All three spring records came from the Barden Scale watchpoint, with the first being of a bird circling over the valley beneath a 'dread' of hirundines and Common Swifts on 8th May. Presumably it was the same bird that was watched there the following day for more than ten minutes, stooping at a Buzzard at one stage. The watchpoint's last record of the year was on 31st May, when a bird was seen dive-bombing a Sparrowhawk.

A cluster of records then came from Ben Rhydding Gravel Pits, where the Sand Martin colony on the river-bank once again proved to be a magnet, with a bird seen in June on 21st and on 1st July. A bird reported chasing Swifts over Black Hills at Cottingley on 11th July was the only record away from Wharfedale. Finally, a bird was seen flying west at Otley Gravel Pits on 30th August.

**2000** – Recorded sightings of this species remain stable, although the much-anticipated breeding record again failed to materialise, and there were no records this year from Ben Rhydding Gravel Pits, where birds have been observed taking Sand Martins in recent years. The first record of the year was of a bird seen at close range on Ilkley Moor on 6th May, followed by one at Barden Scale on 20th June. Autumn passage records consisted of single birds at Burley on 15th August, Timble Ings on 12th September, Kex Gill Quarry on 2nd October, and Thornton Moor Reservoir on 4th October.

The above details probably don't reflect the species's true status in the area, as a further five records were, unfortunately, not supported by descriptions.

**2001** – This year's records tend to suggest that the species is well-established as one which summers in the area, but, tantalisingly, there is still no record of confirmed breeding. The pattern of sightings indicates that at least 14 individuals were involved.

Spring passage was sparse, with the only birds being individuals in the Barden area on 4th and 8th June and at Esholt Sewage Works on 26th. There then followed many records at Barden throughout July, with up to two birds being seen on eight dates, July also had records of singles at Knotford Nook, Cragg Vale and Fly Flatts Reservoir, and three different birds were seen towards the month end at Otley Gravel Pits.

The remaining records were all in August: at Cold Edge Dams on 2nd, and at Barden on 13th and 21st, when two birds were present.

**2002** – A disappointing year, given the species' northward range expansion, with only four records received, somewhat less than in most recent years.

The first bird was at Barden on 4th June, followed by another there on 15th and with further sightings of what may have been the same birds into July. Away from this area, a bird was seen at Haworth on 8th July, and the final record was one at Menston on 3rd August.

**2003** - A reasonable year owing to a good run of records from the Barden watchpoint. A first-year bird was noted on the 31st May with up to four birds noted at this site throughout June and early July with the last there, a single on 9th September (AGG et al). Elsewhere singles were noted at Sword Point Plantation on 11th June (Pri), Hoodstorth on 15th June (TK), Haworth Moor on 22nd June and Otley Gravel Pits on 6th August.

**2004** - The first was the earliest ever recorded in the area, a single at Otley Wetland on 9th April, and another bird was seen here on 19th July.

Elsewhere in Wharfedale, individuals were recorded on seven dates between 17th May and 28th June, and in this general area, a bird was seen to successfully rob a Sparrowhawk of a small prey item, which it ate on the wing.

**2005** - The trend of recent years continues, with many records of birds in the summer months at a location in Wharfedale. Birds were seen on twelve dates between 21st June and 9th August, and often involved two birds (AGG et al). Whilst distances made the perception of individual features difficult, it is likely there was a turnover of different birds throughout this period.

Other records all involved singles. These came from Leeshaw Reservoir on 25th June (MD, SJ), Rombald's Moor on 25th July (SJG) and Thruscross Reservoir on 1st August (JLT). Thornton Moor Reservoir had a bird on 4th September (MD, DCB), and 7th and 8th one was seen on nearby Ovenden Moor, chasing Meadow Pipits and Swallows.

**2006** - Even if all four records submitted had been supported by the necessary descriptions, 2006 would have been a poor year. As it was, only two of them were so validated, making it particularly disappointing.

Only one record came from a recently reliable part of Wharfedale, a bird seen on 5th August, and aged as a 1st-summer individual (AGG). The other was one chasing hirundines near Leeshaw Reservoir on 21st September (BV).

It is only a few years ago that the numbers of birds seen in the area prompted thoughts of local breeding, so it is hoped the current downturn is only temporary.

**2007** - There was a welcome upturn in the number of records in comparison with 2006, although all ten of them came from Barden, and were over a three months period. The descriptions provided and the spread of sightings suggests different individuals could have been involved on each occasion.

In June, birds were seen on the 1st, 3rd and 10th, and after a gap of some three weeks, another was located on 2nd July, with a further sighting a week later, and another report on the 27th. Shortly afterwards, a bird was present on 1st August (all AGG et al), presumably a different one on the 5th (AGG, BV), and the final reports were in the last few days of the month: on the 20th (JLT), and 25th.

**2008** - The 11 records of single birds were spread across the area. In some cases, the dates and locations suggest that the same individuals might have been involved. Sightings came from Barden Scale on 6th, 17th and 28th June, and 13th and 29th July (AGG, MD et al), and in the same period a bird was noted at Blubberhouses on 9th July (DO). Nearby Thruscross produced a bird on 20th May (JLT). The remaining records came from the south of the area, and were all in autumn: at Soil Hill on 23rd September (CJK) and 5th October (KM), and at Thornton Moor Reservoir on 4th and 7th October.

**2009** - A reasonable year for an uncommon, but now expected species. Following a well-watched bird at Barden Bridge on 12th May, individuals were seen from the Barden Scale watchpoint on 11 occasions between 24th May and 20th August, and two were observed on 25th July. Whilst many of these sightings were over a three week period in July, it is unlikely the same birds were involved throughout. Elsewhere there were June records on the 3rd at Stainburn Moor Plantation and 11th at Whetstone Gate, in July on Bingley Moor on the 1st, and at Leeshaw on the 20th, and a bird was at Timble Ings on 5th August.

**2010** - This year's 14 records (all of single birds), are much in line with 2009, and the dates indicate many of them were on passage. At Barden, birds were seen over the fell on five days between 11th June and 3rd July, and possibly the same individual was near Barden Tower on 9th and 12th September. Other than a report of one on Lindley Moor on 22nd August, all the other sightings were in the south of the area. Thornton Moor Reservoir had observations on 3rd May and 22nd September, there were records from Leeshaw Reservoir on 13th July and 3rd August, and birds overflowed Soil Hill on 27th June and 30th August. Although one of the records was a juvenile, there is no evidence of local breeding.

**2011** - There were 18 reports, much in line with the last two years, and indicating an upturn, following a drop from 2006. There was a good spread of locations, but Barden again had the most sightings: on 9th May and 2nd July, and in August on the 15th, 17th, and 24th. Other Wharfedale records came from Askwith Moor on 24th June, and at Burley and Rombald's Moor on 3rd September. Five of the remaining records also came from north of the River Aire, with birds seen at Graincliffe Reservoir on 27th July, at Timble Ings on 1st and 29th September, at Stainburn Forest on 14th September (SR), and over Baildon twelve days later. Records from the south of the area are by no means as frequent, but there were welcome sightings from Bradshaw on 19th July, Warley Moor on 8th June and 6th July, and Oxenhope watchpoint on 23rd September. Other than two birds at Barden in August, the others were singles, and most, if not all, were on passage.

**2012** - The 25 records received were nearly 50% up on 2011, and this, and the probable number of birds recorded, arguably makes this one of the best years on record. As with most raptors, Barden Scale led the way, with singles on 24th June, 12th, 19th and 21st July, and on six days between 3rd and 15th August, during which two birds were noted on the 5th, and later on the 28th. The final records here were on 31st August and 17th September, with another bird seen on Barden Fell on the 8th. The numbers of fairly adjacent records makes assessment of numbers difficult, but 10 different birds may have been involved.

Other Wharfedale records were from Otley Wetland on 16th May and 17th July, and Knotford on 14th July and 4th August, whilst nearby, one was seen several times in summer over Sandwith Moor. As last year, there were four reports from the south of the area: two birds in Oxenhope on 13th July, singles in Harden on the 15th and at Warley Moor Reservoir 10 days later, and past Oxenhope watchpoint on 5th August. Tantalisingly, a pair was thought to have bred just outside the Group's area.

**2013** This was another strong year for this small raptor with 27 records, two more than in 2012 which was one of the best on record. Once more, as with most raptors, Barden Scale led the way with a single bird on 2nd May. However, on the next day and again on the 6th, two birds were seen together hawking insects over Barden Fell. Single birds were seen on the 19th, 25th May, 1st June and on the 4th June, two birds were once more together, this time sparring with each other. Throughout July there were many sightings, until the 15th, which was a busy day when there were at least three different individuals on the Fell (AGG, BV et al).

On the 14th August, at Barden, what was believed to be a juvenile Hobby, behaving unusually, convinced the observer that this newly fledged bird was an indication that breeding had taken place nearby. On the 22nd August, two more birds were seen in this area, but if more proof of local breeding was needed, there were several sightings of up to three birds together on the 29th August, all adjudged to be juveniles. A single was seen sparring with a Sparrowhawk over Lower Fell Plantation and later in this protracted scenario, a couple of the birds were engaged with a male Peregrine (AGG).

On the 25th August, and away from the excitements at Barden, a bird with narrow-pointed, swift-like wings was seen flying quickly and directly east over the Whetstone Allotment (TK). The following day another Hobby was watched as it chased Swallows at Leeshaw Reservoir (BS). Other records were from Knotford in late July (via AJ) and a single bird was recorded on two occasions at Swinsty Reservoir on 10th September. A late bird on the 15th October was thought to be a juvenile (WNS).

**2014** A bird on the 5th April over Hazlewood Moor, was the earliest ever date for this species (TK). It was followed nine days later by another bird on the same moor which was seen spiralling up and gradually moving eastwards (KM).

There were many fewer records, just 15 compared with the strong showing in 2013 when there were 27. However, this small raptor did grab the attention of observers throughout the entire length of the area. On 17th April a bird flew in from the east at Stockbridge Reserve (SR) and in the middle of May there were two sightings, of possibly the same bird, at Barden Scale (AGG).

On 8th June a bird was watched at Warley Moor Reservoir as it flew towards Thornton Moor (BS) and on the 26th of that month there was another sighting at Barden Scale (BV). During July there were six records, one near Ogden Reservoir (BS), three on Haworth Moor where a bird was seen jousting with two Kestrels (KM,BV), another at Barden (AGG), and the last one was over Hollins Hall Golf Course where it was seen chasing Swifts in advance of a cloud front (RW). Finally, there was a second sighting at Warley Moor Reservoir on 16th August (BS) and on 16th September, at Glovershaw, a bird swept in from the west in pursuit of hirundines (PCK).

**2015** With just 13 records, this was an average year though for reasons mentioned in the Editorial, there may well have been more. Upper Wharfedale has long been an area much favoured by this superb raptor. There was strong evidence of breeding there in 2013, and activity noted this year was again suggestive of this. Two birds were often seen on these fells in June and July, with prey being carried by one of the pair (BV, KM, MD, PD&JBP). A similar situation occurred in the south of the area, where several sightings of adults were followed in July with views of juveniles (IH). An individual moved south at Bramley Head in late August (KM), and in September singles were in Upper Wharfedale (BV) and over Oxenhope Watchpoint (DB, HC).

**2016** With only six records, this was a well below average year, and, surprisingly, there were no reports from Upper Wharfedale. Spring sightings were of single birds near Yeadon Tarn on 1st June (MB), and the Lower Washburn Valley on the 10th (AJ) and 16th (PRo). Six weeks later on individual was noted at Slippery Ford, on 27th July (IH), and the remaining reports were of birds in August, at Timble Ings on the 5th (WNS), Keighley Moor Reservoir on the 18th (IH), and at Otley Wetland on the 29th, where a bird pursued Swallows round a mist-net (WNS).

**2017** Eighteen records, fairly well-distributed, is a reasonable return. Barden Scale produced singles on six days between 13th May and 19th August (BV), and elsewhere in Wharfedale individuals were at Otley Wetland on three days in July and August (AJ). Elsewhere, there were singles on Keighley Moor in June (IH), at Esholt in July (AJ), Leeshaw and Menston in August (BV, WNS), and two sub-adults on Sandwith Moor on the late date of 11th October (AJ). Other late sightings were passage birds at Oxenhope Watchpoint on four dates between 20th September and 8th October (DCB, HC).

**2018** A total of eight birds is down on recent years. Most of the reports were from north of the Aire and in June, when birds were seen at Barden on 4th and 13th (HC, BV), Timble on 6th (AJ), and near Hawksworth on 17th (RW). Birds were noted over Pool on 19th July and 3rd August, and on the 1st a bird picked up at Arthington was released at Otley Wetland (AJ). Also in August, there was a further Barden record on the 21st (BV). The sole Airedale record came from Slippery Ford on 13th June (IH).