

MERLIN *Falco columbarius*

Uncommon resident breeder and passage migrant.

2009 - Single birds were seen on moorland and adjacent areas in all but one month, and three pairs were known to have bred but there were no breeding reports from one formerly very productive area.

2010 - Of the relatively few records received, most clearly refer to relocating birds, and only a handful were from known potential moorland breeding areas. Successful breeding was established on three moorlands, where eight young were raised.

2011 - Whilst records were received from 12 different moorlands, some were adjacent, and only a few birds may have been involved. Only three other locations were mentioned, but one involved a bird perched on a suburban roof. Autumn migration watches logged 12 birds. Successful breeding was proved at two sites, with seven young, but others were almost certainly unrecorded.

2012 - There were records from 10 fairly widespread moorland areas during the breeding season, but only one nest was located, from which four young were ringed, though there were strong indications of breeding on another moor, and pairs were seen on two others. Most of the autumn reports came from Oxenhope watchpoint, where the seasonal total was 17, and singles were seen in Oxenhope village, and over the fields at Cullingworth.

2013 - There were records from five fairly widespread moorland areas during the breeding season, and there were two nests, one where three young were ringed and another where four were similarly treated. At another site, on the same moor, all four juveniles were predated by a fox. There was strong indication of breeding having taken place elsewhere, based on the behaviour of adults and young birds.

Most of the late summer and early autumn reports came, as in previous years, from the Oxenhope watchpoint and there were singles seen at Sandwith Moor, Glovershaw and Leeshaw.

2014 - This year there were no breeding records submitted but there were plenty of detailed reports that suggested that breeding was underway across our moorland. In Wharfedale a male bird was watched as it aggressively attacked Buzzards near what was certainly a nest site, and later in August, an adult and juvenile were seen here (AGG). During the breeding season birds were also recorded in the south of the area, and once more these involved birds chasing passerines and confronting other raptors. At one location, on two different occasions, a male bird was seen mobbing a family group of Kestrels and it was later seen to assault a Raven. Observations during the autumn migration accounted for 12 birds that passed within range of the Oxenhope watchpoint between 20th September and 29th October (DB, HC et al).

2015 - There were 33 reports from five main locations on the moorland fells. Although breeding was only confirmed at one nest, where five hatched eggs produced four young males and a female, there was plenty of evidence to suggest that there was more of this activity at other sites. Pairs were seen in spring defending their territory and chasing Meadow Pipits.

At one location symbiotic hunting involved a female bird trailing ten metres behind a Marsh Harrier and taking advantage of those passerines flushed by the bigger bird. Nearby there were persistent calls from a female or juveniles whenever the male was hunting (IH). In June and July an adult female was seen with a juvenile (PD&JBP) at one of the main sites. At another location adults and juveniles mobbed a Red Kite and others were keen to chase off a Hen Harrier. Reports also suggested that the mild conditions towards the end of the year had encouraged Meadow Pipits,

and subsequently Merlins, to remain on the moor. Records of these birds late in the year are unusual, but a female on 20th November and another watched at close range on 8th December are symptomatic of the changes affecting our climate.

A total of seven birds passed the watchpoint at Oxenhope during September and October.

2016 - For the first time in many years, not only were there no specific breeding reports, but there were only two records of display flight from different moorland areas, though a juvenile seen at one of them on 16th August was perhaps suggestive of local breeding. This particular bird seemed to be less savvy than the young Pied Wagtail it was chasing, which seemed to use the observers as protection, by diving into cover right next to them, causing the falcon to veer away.

Reports from three other moors were generally just of single adults, but an adult and possible juvenile were seen together on one occasion. A total of 10 birds passing Oxenhope Watchpoint between 28th August and 3rd November were clearly transient, and took advantage of the ready supply of passerines moving at the same time.

2017 - Apart from six birds on migration at Oxenhope, and a solitary moorland breeding record, all other sightings involved singles, mainly at moorland sites across the area.

2018 - A reasonable number of records came mainly from moorland sites, and the majority in the south. Though singles again predominated, two birds were seen on several occasions, at Hazlewood Moor and Ovenden Moor, and nine in total migrated past Oxenhope Watchpoint. The Ovenden birds may have been a breeding pair, and this certainly took place on Keighley Moor.