

Common buzzard

The common buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) is widespread and prominent, soaring in the air



The buzzard is now probably the most common bird of prey in the UK.

It is easily recognised soaring over woodland with its broad rounded wings and short tail and neck or perched on a telegraph pole by the road.

Different colour phases occur and it is possible to see birds with very dark brown bodies and under wings, as well as ones where these are almost white. Females are slightly larger and a fifth heavier than the males.

Length: 51-57cm; wingspan: 113-128cm

Status in UK

40,000+ pairs, increasing; GREEN listed; resident

Population trends

Although widespread throughout the UK 200 years ago, by the early 1900s persecution had eliminated the buzzard from all of lowland England, except the New Forest, and much of Wales.

Its recovery during and after the Second World War was slowed, first by myxomatosis hitting its favoured rabbit prey in the 1950s, and then by the effects of persistent pesticides. However with reduced persecution the buzzard's resilience and adaptability have seen it spread south and east from its heartlands in the north and west, so that now the species is found in all counties. Its population now probably exceeds that of the sparrowhawk and the kestrel, despite still being persecuted by deliberate poisoning and shooting.

Habitat and distribution

The buzzard is found on upland moorland and in wooded farmland in the lowlands throughout the UK. Populations in the east of England are still sparse; absent from the northern Scottish islands.

Breeding

Large stick nest is built into the crown of a tree or even large hedgerow shrub. Buzzards will also use cliff ledges.

Feeding

Mammals up to the size of rabbits are taken, as are small birds, mainly from the nest or as fledglings. Earthworms can be an important food, especially from recently ploughed fields where buzzards can be seen competing with rooks and gulls. Carrion also plays a significant part in the diet.