



Rough-legged buzzard

The rough-legged buzzard (*Buteo lagopus*) is an uncommon visitor to Britain which has never bred here

The rough-legged buzzard is difficult to distinguish from pale forms of the common buzzard, but the most distinctive features are the white tail with a well defined terminal bar, dark carpal patches and black patch on the belly.

In flight the wings and tail are longer than the resident species. It soars and glides with wings held higher, and often hovers.

The species gets its name from the feathering right down its legs, an adaptation to the cold climate in its Arctic breeding grounds.

Length: 50-60cm, wingspan: 120-150cm

Status in UK

Passage and winter visitor

Population trends

The first record of a rough-legged buzzard in Britain was in 1792, but it was no doubt often confused with pale forms of the common buzzard. There are usually some 70 records annually during passage, with about 20 reported each winter. Large numbers occasionally come to Britain after years when their small rodent prey is very abundant in the Scandinavian breeding grounds. The last of these was in 1974/75 when more than 250 birds were reported in autumn. About half over-wintered and two pairs remained into the breeding season. They were seen displaying but never bred.

Habitat and distribution

Rough-legged buzzards breed in tundra, high mountains and forest edge in the Arctic. Winter visitors to Britain are found in open country along the east coast, especially eastern Scotland, East Anglia and Kent. When there are larger numbers it spreads more widely.

Breeding

The birds visiting Britain breed in the north and west of Scandinavia. The nest, an untidy pile of twigs lined with finer material, is usually on a crag or low rock often overhung by scrub.

Feeding

In the breeding grounds rough-legged buzzards principally feed on voles and lemmings, but when in Britain rabbits are its favoured prey.

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