

Hobby

Falco subbuteo



HOBBIES ARE summer visitors to Devon, usually arriving in late April/May and departing in September/October. These small falcons are masters of the air, capable of catching fast-moving dragonflies and hirundines, as well as an array of other flying invertebrates and small birds. For nesting they require the old nest of other birds (often Carrion Crow, Raven or Buzzard), usually in a stand of trees or plantation. Devon potentially holds much suitable habitat for this species, from rolling farmland interspersed with woodland to areas of heath with plantations in both upland and lowland areas.

The current Atlas surveys found Hobbies to be fairly widespread in Devon, present in 371 tetrads (20.0%) and more than 90% of 10-km squares. This is a difficult species for which to prove breeding, with confirmed records from only 17 tetrads and probable/possible registrations from a further 88 tetrads. The 'possible' category is greatly influenced by observers' interpretation of suitable habitat; in some tetrads Hobbies were recorded as present (when often in suitable habitat), while in contrast, others assigned as 'in suitable habitat' may well have been migrants.

No data were published in the *Devon Tetrad Atlas* 1977–85 and hence comparison is not possible, but the species has almost certainly increased in Devon, as it has nationally, with the British population now estimated at 2,800 pairs (Musgrove *et al.* 2013). In Devon the species was once thought to be strongly associated with heathland, but we now know that it is far more cosmopolitan in its habitat choice. One observation from the present Atlas is the apparent lack of confirmed breeding evidence from East Devon, often perceived as a Devon stronghold, perhaps further highlighting the difficulties in obtaining proof of breeding for this species.

While most Hobbies have left Devon by the end of September, late migrants were present in 23 tetrads in October, with very late single birds on Dartmoor and Lundy in early November.

Text: Mark Darlston / Photo: Paul Sterry/NPL

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Balmer *et al.* 2013: 320; Sitters 1988: 295; Tyler 2010: 216

Breeding distribution 2007-13

