



hen harrier © Andy Hay, rspb-images.com



merlin © Andy Hay, rspb-images.com



peregrine falcon © Chris Gomersall, rspb-images.com



curlew © Chris Gomersall, rspb-images.com



golden plover © Chris Gomersall, rspb-images.com



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The birds

Hen harrier

Probably the most important bird species to regularly breed in the Forest of Bowland, this bird of prey is most often seen flying slowly over the ground, as it hunts for small birds and mammals. Males are pale grey in colour with black wing tips, whilst the female is mainly brown with a distinctive white rump.

Merlin

Our smallest bird of prey, and not much bigger than a mistle thrush, the merlin is an open country specialist, where it hunts small birds in a fast, often twisting, flight. Males are a bluish colour above with a pale chest and belly, often tinged with pink, whilst the female is brown in colour.

Peregrine falcon

Our largest breeding falcon, and fastest bird, is most likely to be seen circling high above, as it watches for prey to appear. With pointed wing tips and short tail it creates a characteristic silhouette.

Curlew

With its namesake call and long curving beak, the curlew is one of the most familiar of our upland birds. From early April it can be found from the highest tops down to the valley bottoms.

Golden plover

In its spangled black and gold breeding plumage, this shy wading bird is more often heard than seen - a plaintive whistle often the only sign of its presence. A relatively rare bird in the Forest of Bowland, this moorland specialist is most common on the northern fells.

Red grouse

One of the few bird species to be found all year round on the fells, the red grouse is a popular game bird, with much of the moorland management targeted at benefiting this species. Most easily recognised by its "go back, go back" alarm call.

Short-eared owl

One of the few owl species that can be seen during daylight hours, the short-eared owl is a specialist hunter of voles, with numbers fluctuating dramatically from year to year in relation to vole numbers.

Oystercatcher

With its black and white plumage, orange beak and legs, and blood red eye, the oystercatcher makes a striking picture. Its favourite habitat is along gravelly streams, but it can also be found feeding in fields.

Snipe

A highly secretive bird, the snipe is most often seen when it is flushed from tall, wet vegetation, zig-zagging away into the distance. However, it can be seen and heard in the early morning as it displays over its territory, 'drumming' with its tail feathers and diving towards the ground.

Ring ouzel

Arriving from its wintering ground in north Africa in late March, the male ring ouzel perches on top of a tree or rock and gives his simple three whistle song. Another rare bird in the Forest of Bowland, it is most common around the southern fells.



red grouse © Chris Gomersall, rspb-images.com



short-eared owl © Chris Gomersall, rspb-images.com



snipe © Chris Gomersall, rspb-images.com



oystercatcher © Tom Marsh, rspb-images.com



ring ouzel © Mike Richards, rspb-images.com

How to recognise a distressed or disturbed bird

- They will make a loud repeated alarm call - they don't sound very happy and they're not.
- They will approach people much closer than would normally be the case - some birds may even dive bomb you. This is a clear message that the bird feels threatened by your presence and that you should retreat.
- They will feign injury in an attempt to distract you from the nest.
- Subtle behaviour such as circling high above.

What you can do to help

- Wherever possible stick to tracks or paths, particularly when going through dense heather.
- Keep dogs and birds apart. Birds see dogs as a threat.
- Give a wide berth to young birds and to adults that appear distressed. Move away quickly and quietly - this may mean going back the way you have come.
- Do not stop for prolonged periods away from paths. Move on if a bird shows signs of disturbance or distress.
- Avoid steep cloughs.
- As part of monitoring work by Natural England and the RSPB many hen harriers are tagged. You can help by reporting sightings and tag codes to RSPB Bowland Officer on 01200 446425 or Natural England on 07973 911594.
- Follow the Birdwatchers Code of Conduct - visit www.rspb.org.uk for further details.
- Follow any instructions or advice given by rangers or wardens.

The Forest of Bowland is important for ground-nesting birds.

The Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally protected landscape, and is internationally important for its heather moorland, blanket bog and rare birds.

The majority of Bowland's moors are within a Special Protection Area (SPA). This European designation recognises the importance of the area's upland heather moorland and blanket bog as habitat for upland birds, supporting many threatened species of ground-nesting birds.

The Forest of Bowland is also the only regular breeding place in England for the rare and enigmatic hen harrier, symbol of the AONB.

Disturbance is a major problem for ground-nesting birds

The breeding season, between 1st March and 31st July, is a particularly vulnerable time for ground nesting birds. Disturbed birds may be prevented from settling, or if already nesting they will fly away from their nests, neglecting their eggs or chicks. Disturbance may result in:

- birds failing to nest
- eggs failing to hatch
- chicks dying from cold or lack of food
- nests becoming vulnerable to predators

It is a criminal offence to disturb rare breeding birds, including hen harriers, peregrines and merlins, intentionally or not. Fines of up to £20,000 and imprisonment are possible.

Nesting areas are being monitored by Natural England, the RSPB and Lancashire Countryside Service.

Dogs on moorland

- Dogs are not permitted on many of the moors in Bowland. It is your responsibility to prepare before departure and to check signage at access points.
- In other areas, dogs should be kept on a short lead at all times.
- Information about these restrictions can be found on local signs or at www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk
- It is a criminal offence to disturb rare breeding birds, including hen harriers, peregrines and merlins, intentionally or not and this includes disturbance caused by your dog. Fines of up to £20,000 and imprisonment are possible.

You can find out more

Gamekeepers and landowners in Bowland are working with Natural England and the RSPB to help secure a better future for hen harriers. To find out more visit www.rspb.org.uk or www.naturalengland.org.uk

The Forest of Bowland AONB has a number of information leaflets including one about the area's Access Land.

Visit www.forestofbowland.com or call **01772 534709**

For the most up to date information on local restrictions visit www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk or call **0845 100 3298**.



Forest of Bowland AONB wishes to acknowledge the financial support of the above organisations.



TREADING CAREFULLY

helping ground-nesting birds



Hen harrier chick and eggs
© Peter Wilson, RSPB

