

MONTAGU'S HARRIERS ON DEBSHAN RANCH

Seven separate sightings of male Montagu's Harriers Circus pygargus were made on Debshan Ranch (approx. 20°S, 29° 35'E) within the period 16 January to 17 February 1990. In addition Dave and Maggie Fredgold told us of two sightings they had made just before, and one just after, ours. In all instances the birds were identified by their typical harrier shape of long and narrow wings and long narrow tail, and their quartering low over the grassland. The males were predominantly grey above with a black line and paler below with longitudinal lines; and they had several black primaries in each wing. They were all sighted flying over grassland which had a few scattered trees and shrubs. In the same period, and area, four sightings of female or juvenile harriers (" ringtails ") were made, but specific identities (or ages) were not determined. No sighting was made of a Pallid Harrier C. macrourus; however we did see one male that could not be identified with certainty to either species, being too far away. All birds flew low except one male that soared after being disturbed from its perch low in a tree; this male soared in circles until at least 100 m high and in so doing attracted four vultures to soar also in its thermal.

The dates and approximate locstats were as follows—

Male Montagu's

17 January - QH 683.874; 22 January - QH 720.840
28 January - QH 712.843; 1 February - QH 712.837
1 February - QH 717.845; 11 February - QH 724.834
17 February - QH 724.848

Unidentified male

2 February - QH 735.827

" Ringtails "

16 January - QH 686.918; 22 January QH 720.840
5 February - QH 719.835; 17 February QH 733.832

It should be noted with the UTM grid system, that the difference in distance between 733 and 719, for example, is 1.4km. Thus in summary, we had 12 sightings in about 50 sq.km, over a period of 35 days.

We thank D.Fredgold for allowing us on the Ranch to study birds, and P.Mundy for help with this note.

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