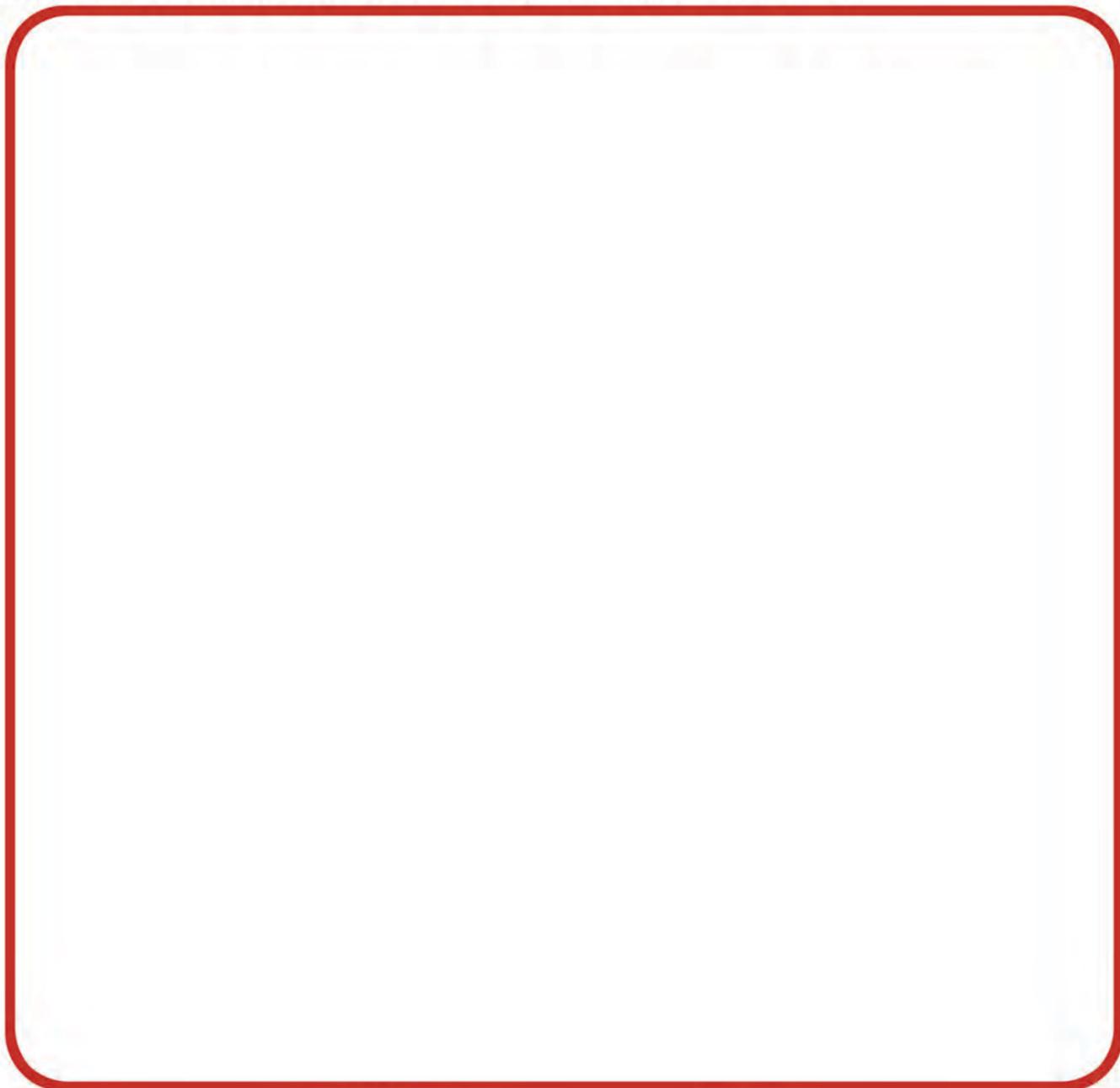


Draw your own bird of prey. Don't forget about all the features that make them different from other birds. Maybe you could even draw the habitat around them.



# Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group



## Key Stage 2 Information Booklet

Birds of prey

Birds of prey (raptors) are a group of birds that eat or prey upon other birds, animals, fish and even insects. Therefore birds of prey are carnivores (meat eaters). Some of them, like buzzards, also clean up our countryside and eat dead animals, these are called scavengers.

What makes them different to other birds?

All birds of prey have sharp talons and beaks for catching, killing and eating their prey.



**Talons** - raptors all have powerful feet with sharp claws, called talons, for catching their prey. Some of them can also use their feet and talons to carry sticks when they are making their nests.

**Hooked beak** - every bird of prey has a strong hooked beak to tear up its food.



**Eyesight** - most raptors have powerful eyesight for detecting their prey from far away when they are hunting.



Raptors mainly rely on their eyesight for hunting. Some species, like owls and harriers, also rely on hearing for hunting at night or to hear their prey in vegetation such as long grass or under leaves. Owls and harriers have a ring of stiff feathers on their faces called the facial disc. This funnels sound to their ears and allows them to detect their prey at night or in long grass when they can't see their prey.

Most birds of prey are active during the day, this is called diurnal. Some birds of prey, especially the owls are active at night, this is called nocturnal. Some species are most active at dawn and dusk and this is called crepuscular.

Wordsearch

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- barn owl
- buzzard
- falcon
- golden eagle
- goshawk
- hawk
- hen harrier
- hobby

- kestrel
- long eared owl
- merlin
- peregrine
- red kite
- short eared owl
- sparrowhawk
- talons

# Peregrine Falcon



## History

The relationship between peregrine falcons and people dates back thousands of years. Their speed and the fact they were easy to tame, meant that people throughout Europe, Asia and the Middle East used peregrines for falconry to catch food. Unfortunately people also used to kill wild peregrines and by the 1930s there were only about 700 pairs left in the UK. The number of peregrines in the UK hit an all-time low of only 360 pairs in the 1960s because of pesticides like DDT used in farming, which got into their bodies when they ate the poisoned prey. This caused peregrines to lay eggs with very thin and fragile shells that broke far too early and the young died in their eggs. These chemicals were eventually banned, and better laws against illegal capture, killing and egg collecting allowed peregrine numbers to increase. However, some people still break the law and kill peregrines and sadly each year some are shot or poisoned.

Visit [www.nirsg.com/kids](http://www.nirsg.com/kids) to find out more about birds of prey.

## FACTS

### Latin name

*Falco peregrinus*

### Size

Body 50 cm in length, wingspan up to 1.1 m (average armspan of a 9 year old child = 1.3 m).

### Weight

Females weigh up to 1.5 kg - about the same as 10 apples; but males are only 750g (about the weight of 5 apples).

### Where do they live?

Most live on high cliffs by the sea and all around our rocky coasts but also at inland cliffs, crags and mountains. They now also nest on some tall buildings in many cities and in other man made sites, like quarries.

### How long do they live?

Up to 15 years.

### What do they eat?

A variety of birds - mostly pigeons, starlings, crows and sometimes ducks. They need about 100 grams of food a day.

Birds of prey can be separated into different family groups.

**Falcons** - these are small to medium-sized birds of prey with tapered wings and tails. The best known is the peregrine falcon, one of the largest and most powerful falcons, while the merlin is our smallest bird of prey. Peregrines can reach flying speeds of over 200 miles per hour making it the fastest bird in the world.



Hobby



Kestrel



Merlin



Peregrine

**Hawks and eagles** - hawks have broad, rounded wings and long, slender tails. You might have seen a sparrowhawk hunting small birds in your garden, it is a very fast and agile flyer. Buzzards are larger and use their longer, broader wings for soaring high in the sky looking for prey. Eagles are much bigger with the white-tailed eagle being our biggest bird of prey, which is why it is also known as 'the flying barn door'. Before 2008 there were no red kites left in Northern Ireland but they have been successfully re-introduced using chicks from Wales which were released in County Down in 2008, 2009 and 2010.



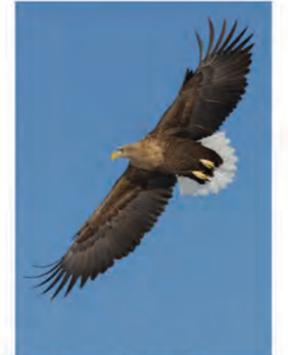
Buzzard



Hen harrier



Red kite



White-tailed eagle

**Owls** - birds with round heads and rather flat or dish-like faces, with forward-facing eyes and a short, hooked beak. Most owls are nocturnal, but some like the short-eared owl are often active during the day. The barn owl is nocturnal but is most active at dusk and dawn which is called crepuscular. The long-eared owl's ear tufts are feathers not their actual ears and they raise them when they are alarmed.



Barn owl



Long-eared owl



Short-eared owl

**Threats to Birds of Prey**

We love to see birds of prey in the wild and you can find them all over Northern Ireland. The bad news is that some birds of prey are declining.

Why? There are lots of different reasons why, and they are mostly caused by people!

**Habitat loss**

Habitat means where something lives. For example, hen harriers build their nests on the ground in heather in the uplands.

Over the years many of these areas of heather have been burnt or removed. This means there are fewer areas where hen harriers can nest. Deforestation or the cutting down of native trees and woodland means that tree nesting birds like buzzards, sparrowhawks and goshawks have fewer places to build their nests or roost at night.

No suitable habitat means no birds of prey!

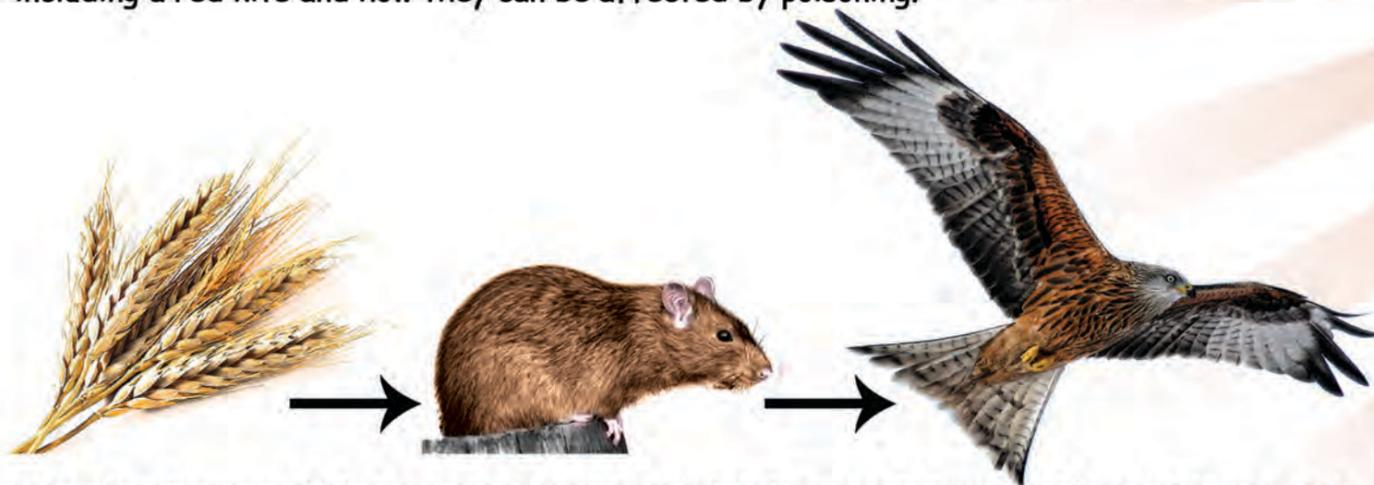


Hen harrier nest



**Poisoning**

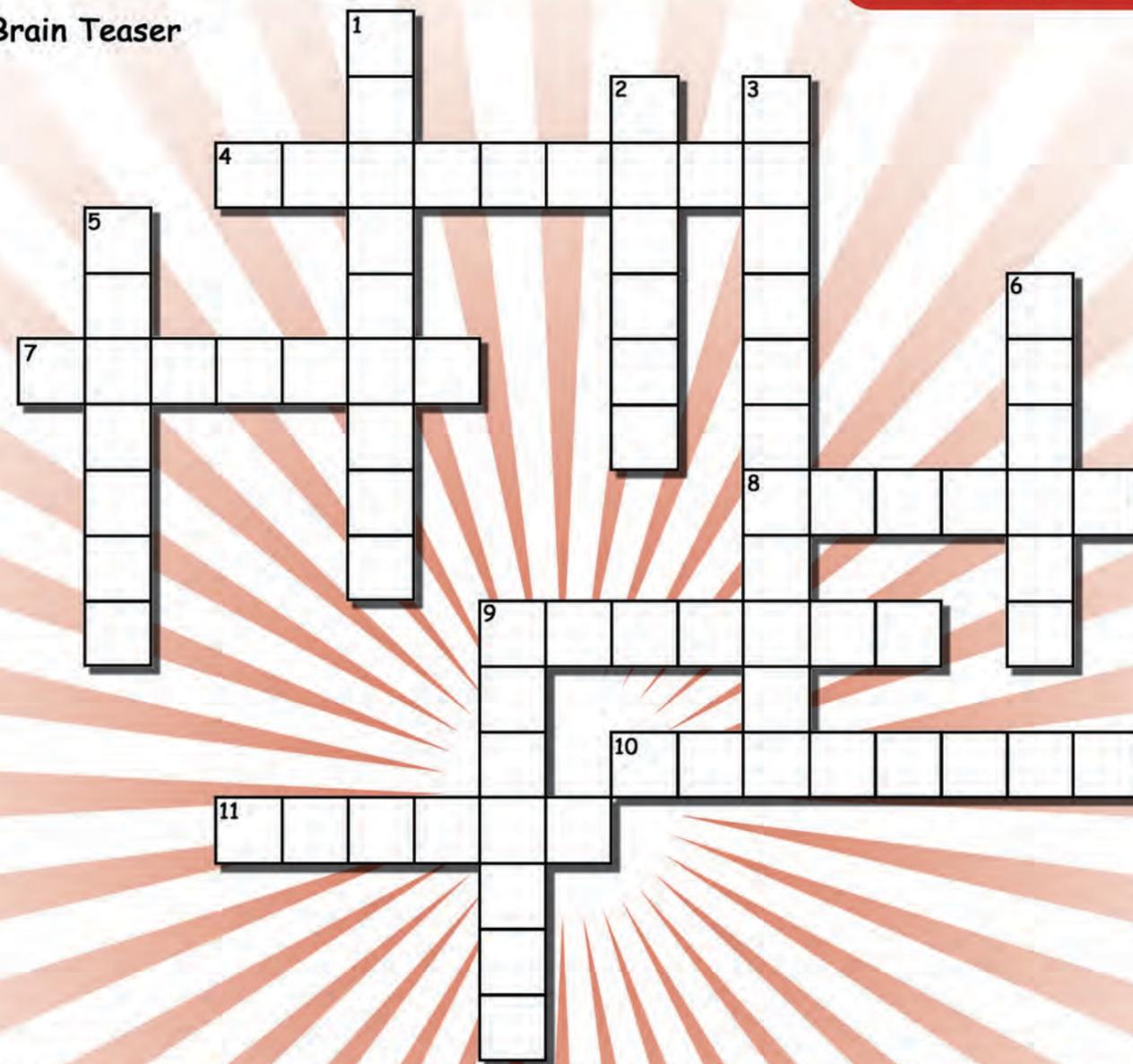
You may know about food chains and how they work. Below is an example of a food chain including a red kite and how they can be affected by poisoning.



Now what happens if the rat eats poison instead. When people have problems with rats and mice they might leave poison out to get rid of them. The danger for birds of prey is that if a rat eats the poison then dies out in a field, a bird of prey like a red kite or a buzzard might see it and think it's an easy dinner. By eating the rat the bird is also eating the poison and will now probably die as well. This is called secondary poisoning.

It is important that people know how to safely use poison to kill unwanted rats and mice to ensure a safe environment for our birds of prey.

**Brain Teaser**



**Across**

- 4. I'm not fussy about eating vegetables, but I love meat!
- 7. You'll see me soaring high up in the sky.
- 8. Another name for a bird of prey.
- 9. I might not be able to see, but this amazing sense lets me hunt in the dark.
- 10. I'm a raptor who likes to hunt at night.
- 11. I'm a very small bird of prey, maybe even the smallest.

**Down**

- 1. I may not be the biggest, but I'm definitely the fastest!
- 2. This sometimes hides in my food and makes me very sick.
- 3. I like to live on the high ground and nest in heather.
- 5. This means I'm not very active at night.
- 6. They help me build my nest, but they're also a lethal hunting tool.
- 9. If they keep taking it away there will be no more raptors!