

Harrier Campaign 2023 Salamanca.



The **SEO Salamanca** group kicks off its campaign in March with meetings at the university, interviews with the local press and public talks to attract new volunteers.



Over 20 new recruits sign up, making this the largest campaign ever with 35 volunteers. In late March the birds begin to arrive, and on the 30th April the first volunteers go out in small groups to different areas to look for harrier territories.





These territories become apparent when either female or male are seen in the area with nesting material...



Female montagu's harrier

...and more so when a male brings prey for the female, which he drops and she captures in mid-air before taking it to the ground to prepare for feeding.



Male Montagu's harrier



Female Montagu's harrier

On May 2nd permits come through from the regional government, so group coordinators can enter fields to look for nests. Montagu's harrier has been declared Bird of the Year so it is supposed to be a Top Priority.

Every weekend and many weekdays, early morning or late afternoon, volunteers scour the countryside for breeding Montagu's and Hen harriers, in wheat and barley fields.



So far it has been a very dry spring and the cereal is low and sparse. Disappointingly, some of the past breeding areas have already been reaped, for use as forage.



On May 14th the first Montagu's nest is discovered, with 5 eggs, followed by two more nests the same day. The race is on to find as many territories and nests as possible.



Farmers with nests in their fields are contacted, and if a nest is in danger from harvesting or is too exposed, eggs are taken to the local rescue centre, where they will be incubated and hand reared before being placed in semi-captivity using the hacking method.

More talks are given and an information stand is put up in the centre of Salamanca.



During May and June more nests are found, some with chicks of varying ages. Those which are deemed to be in danger are carefully removed to the rescue centre.



Montagu's chicks



Hen harrier chicks

Farmers are contacted to ask when they plan to harvest, and to negotiate their collaboration. In June and July volunteers fence off nests which require protection. They step lightly to avoid trampling the crop, before surrounding the nest with protective fencing. By now it is very hot: mid or upper 30s.



Meanwhile several volunteers begin building a large holding structure for the hacking, modelled on one used by colleagues in Andalucia.



Salamanca hacking cage in progress



Original Andalucian model

Back at the rescue centre the incubated eggs begin to hatch and the rescued chicks are hand reared. Volunteers feed them tiny lumps of meat. When old enough they will be taken to the hacking area.



The hacking cage is finished and set up in the enclosure of previous years, now with the advantage of total protection from predators until their subsequent release.



The first young Montagu's harriers, all ringed, are brought to the hacking cage. Every day domestic hen chicks are fed through an opening to the side of the cage by volunteers, without being seen. Wasps in the area mean that feeding trips are very brief.



In July nests are still found, some birds will have flown in time to avoid the harvesters.



There are tragic moments: a case of Cainism or siblicide between two chicks and their younger sibling at the rescue centre, others suffering malnutrition are rescued but later die. Some nests are ruined after storms or predated. Nests are harvested before the farmer has been contacted, one farmer has been contacted but harvests the field without prior warning, resulting in one chick killed, another with a wing amputation. Most farmers collaborate, though, and look out for the birds.

Young birds are ringed in the nests before they have fully fledged: many are impossible to catch by now.



Hen harrier chick



Montagu's harrier chicks



On August the 18th the hacking cage is opened for the last harriers, who are now fully fledged, and they practise their flights in the enclosure. They are free to come and go, and will continue to be fed for another week or so until they leave the area. A trail camera is placed nearby to monitor their movements. They hang around for a while in the enclosure. Three Hen and five Montagu's harriers go through the hacking method in all.



A young hen harrier which was rehabled in the rescue centre is released nearby.



The 2023 Salamanca SEO Harrier Campaign comes to an end.

Summary of Campaign in data:

Total nests located: 33 + one new territory

Harriers found: 121

Harriers saved from the harvest: 93

Harriers taken to hacking: three Hen and five Montagu's

Montagu's harrier:

Nests	26
Eggs or chicks	92
Failed	19
Harvested	9
Died	1
Predated	1
Fledged	30
Possible*	42

saved from the harvest 72

Hen harrier:

Nests	7
Eggs or chicks	29
Failed	-
Harvested	-
Died	4
Predated	-
Fledged	15
Possible*	6

saved from the harvest 21

*No longer in nest around time of fledging, unable to confirm if safely flown

link to Video on YouTube: https://youtu.be/7_8NV-5mCmE