

Criteria for categorising Hobby breeding evidence in the UK

EBCC standard breeding categories	Specific interpretation for Hobby	Notes/rationale
Possible breeding		
1. Species observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitats.	One or more birds seen in possible nesting habitat within the same area (observations may be up to 2km apart) between 1 June and 31 August.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Earlier records assumed to be passage migrants. Hobbies range widely early in the breeding season and also feed up to 6.5km from nests. ● Strictly speaking, any Hobby seen in possible nesting habitat between 1 May and 31 August could be classed as Possible breeding. However, given their wide-ranging behaviour, and tendency to gather away from breeding sites early in the season, we suggest limiting site for consideration to the core breeding season of June to August. ● Hobbies occupy heathland, open woodland and farmland habitats, at both low and middle altitudes, and many counties will have large areas of potential habitat, and the species can be grossly under-recorded. ● Because within their core range Hobbies are poorly reported by birdwatchers, we believe that a sighting of a Hobby in an area of suitable breeding habitat during the June to August period can be logged as Possible breeding. This helps provide a background level of occurrence of what can be a widespread species in counties within its main distribution. Frequent sightings in a general area may have to be grouped, however, to avoid duplication. ● In areas away from the main range, one-off sightings may be of wandering or passage birds, so should be excluded unless there is some indication of local colonisation – this has to be very much at the Recorder’s discretion.
2. Singing male(s) present (or breeding calls heard) in breeding season.	Not applicable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● But note - see also comments under Probable breeding regarding breeding calls.
Probable breeding		
3. Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season.	Pairs seen on only one occasion should not be classified as Probable breeding unless there is some further evidence of a territorial or breeding pair.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To qualify for Probable breeding there must at least be an indication of a territory.
4. Permanent territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song <i>etc.</i> on at least two different days a week or more apart at the same place).	Two birds behaving as a pair in possible nesting habitat between 1 May and 31 August indicative of holding a territory.	
5. Courtship and display.	A pair displaying together at a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Members of a pair may call to each other

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	site constitutes Probable breeding.	in the vicinity of a nest site; in Hobby this is most frequently heard on still evenings in the period before egg-laying.
6. Visiting probable nest site.	Hobbies use nests in trees built by other species, typically crows.	
7. Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adults.		
8. Brood patch on adult examined in the hand.		
9. Nest building or excavating nest-hole.	Not applicable.	
C. Confirmed breeding		
10. Distraction-display or injury-feigning.	Not applicable.	
11. Used nest or eggshells found (occupied or laid within period of survey).		
12. Recently fledged young (nidicolous species) or downy young (nidifugous species).	Recently fledged should be interpreted as full-sized young or juveniles which are still being fed by a parent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care should be taken to include only young which appear to have fledged from a nest in the close vicinity. Young birds will sit in trees close to the nest and utter hunger calls when adults are near.
13. Adults entering or leaving nest-site in circumstances indicating occupied nest (including high nests or nest-holes, the contents of which can not be seen) or adult seen incubating.	Nests are typically high in trees and contents are unlikely to be visible, but care must be taken to ensure that a nest site is actually in use to qualify for Confirmed breeding.	
14. Adult carrying faecal sac or food for young.	As with all raptors, care should be taken to ensure that any food being carried is being taken to a nest or to young that have recently left a nest.	
15. Nest containing eggs.	Hobby is a late nester: eggs are laid between late May and early July.	
16. Nest with young seen or heard.		

Notes.

- Hobby is afforded special protection under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.
- Hobbies are wide-ranging and nesting birds tend to be under-recorded because they are elusive when close to the nest, except when young have fledged or are close to fledging, when the hunger calls of the young can draw attention to the site.
- In some lowland counties of England, Hobbies can be frequently recorded hunting in areas, such as water-bodies or near villages, where they are not necessarily nesting. Frequent records from an area though do indicate occupancy and it is these records that can be classified as Possible breeding, thus giving an indication of the size of the local breeding population.
- Tips for finding nests (1): if in one year recently fledged young are located in an area, this provides a good start point for searching in the next year, as in subsequent years, pairs will generally choose to nest in the same tree or within 500m.
- Tips for finding nests (2): They usually breed in fresh Crow's nests, and will also use Crow's nests in national grid electricity pylons (though Peregrines are taking over these in some areas). They will use artificial nests more than once if the Crows do not build a nest above.

- Tips for finding nests (3): Adults will take a kill in a 2km straight line back to the nest. Careful following of this line can produce the nest site. Holman *et al.* found in their unpublished study, in the Northants/Cambs area, that pairs were usually 3km apart. This helped to predict where to start looking for breeding territories.
- Tips for county recorders: all nests and broods can clearly be classified as Confirmed breeding; occupied territories and other indications of a territory should be classified as Probable breeding; other records should be ignored unless there is indication of 1-2 birds being associated with a site when they can be classified as Possible breeding.
- Submissions to the Panel: numbers of pairs should be submitted according to the criteria detailed here. However, if the species has been studied more intensively in the area and a population estimate for the county is possible, this can be given in addition to the numbers based on observations in the year under consideration.
- Reference: Raptors: a field guide for surveys and monitoring pp 176-183. Hardey *et al.* 2009. The Stationery Office. This publication gives more specific data on the behaviour and breeding biology of the species.