

The movements of chick 21197 in 2004-2005

Summer 2004

The radio was programmed to transmit at 6 day intervals until 7th August and from then transmit at a just over a daily schedule throughout the migration. Early transmissions were received from the breeding area on the Tay estuary.

The bird had moved about 4 kilometres towards Dundee on 7th August but returned to the estuary on 8th, and started its migration that or the next day. The young harrier surprised us by moving across Scotland and was located in late morning of the 9th on the island of Bute. Ian Hopkins, Rothesay, Isle of Bute went to look for the marsh harrier on evening (12th August) after he finished work. Earlier in the day I had telephoned him with details. After searching the area around Loch Fad, he was returning to Rothesay when he saw the marsh harrier hunting over ripe barley fields near the loch at 8.10pm. It crossed the road near him and he was even able to see the radio aerial to confirm it was this bird. Ian says this is the first marsh harrier he has ever seen or known about on the Isle of Bute. The bird remained on the Isle of Bute for 9 days (during a period of frequent rains and low clouds), frequented various parts of the south of the island and apparently visited Inchmarnock island off the west coast on 16th.

17 August 2004

We were very lucky with the transmission period because it covered the time when the young harrier departed from the Isle of Bute, two hours later it was 42.5 kilometres south a short distance to the east of the Isle of Arran. The next transmission is expected tomorrow evening when the bird will presumably be back on the Scottish mainland.

18 August 2004

Three transmissions between 5pm and 9.30pm came from the south-west coast of the Isle of Bute near Scalpsie indicating that the bird had returned north after being recorded off the Isle of Arran at 2pm on 17th. This at sea transmission was

of class 1 accuracy signal indicating a location within one kilometre. Apparently a case of false starting.

19 August 2004

The bird was a little further north and west on the island of Bute, transmission was at 9pm so she would have been starting her night time roost. Very wet weather still predominating in Scotland, although a change to clearer colder weather is forecast for the weekend with northerly winds, which may encourage migration.

August Migration

20 August 2004

The weather improved and when I flew south by plane that evening I could see the islands of the Clyde right across to Kintyre and northern Ireland. The lochs on the Isle of Bute were shining in the evening sun and a class 2 accurate signal sent at 3.30am showed that the harrier roosted overnight on a small hill east of Scalpsie Bay on the south-west coast of Bute. Next day in good weather, sunny, clear skies and light northerly winds it flew 166 kilometres to the south crossing the Solway Firth into England.

22 August 2004

Early morning, she was at Westward Park, just SE of Wigton and about 10 kilometres SW of Carlisle in Cumbria and must have roosted in that area overnight.

23 August 2004

By morning, she had migrated a further 89 kilometres to cross northern England and at 8am was at some small lakes just west of Blaydon, west of Newcastle in Northumbria. Four hours later she was near Hadrian's Wall near Throckley. Her journey is certainly taking her back and forth across the country. Next day she was along the River Tyne a little to the west and on 25th still outside the city but just a little further north.

30 August 2004

A good signal in the morning showed that she was hunting along the River Blyth, just west of the A1 trunk road at Stannington just north of Newcastle. She had moved to this area on the 27th August. As before she has decided to stop over in this area, after the journey from Bute, via Carlisle.

31 August 2004

Midday and early afternoon, she was in open space just north-west of Killingworth junction with the A19 road, on outskirts of city. I wonder if any of the locals are seeing the harrier during her stay around Newcastle?

01 September 2004

During the early evening, she was hunting just south of the airport but by dark she had moved to an area of lakes and marshes near Beacon Point, north of Newbiggin-on-Sea. This is a journey of 25 kilometres but harriers are known to move to secure roosts before nightfall. This harrier is certainly exploiting a range of different areas. Is she going back each evening to a favourite roosting site? The radio has been set to transmit at 22 hour intervals so on some days signals/positions are obtained for daytime and on others for night.

04 September 2004

Position at 4.30am was near Whalton, north of Belsay, while after dawn she was along the valley of the river Blyth just south of Stannington. With high pressure building over England this weekend I wonder if she will start migrating again after a 12 day stay around the north of Newcastle.

05 September 2004

A 5 am signal of the roosting bird was from the valley of the River Blyth, SW of Stannington. John Miles emailed to say that BirdGuides website reported a marsh harrier at Prestwick Carr, 5 kilometres to the south at 8.30am - it is a regular hunting and roosting site for marsh harriers. This could easily have been this individual.

06 September 2004

Still living north of Newcastle - afternoon signals on were north of Ponteland, not far from Prestwick Carr, and also some kilometres over the North Sea at 3pm (but this was not an accurate satellite fix) while signals on 7th were further north and by 6.30pm were near Tranwell, south of Morpeth.

08 September 2004

At 7.30pm the harrier was near the River Blyth, SW of Stannington just north of Newcastle, presumably near its roost.

09 September 2004

Last night I received the most accurate signal to date and the bird was again in the same area. She was within 300 metres of Bellasis Farm beside the River Blyth, SW of Stannington. This marsh harrier is clearly finding good hunting and roosting conditions along the River Blyth and has now spent 18 days in the Newcastle area.

Overnight on 10/11th the harrier roosted near the River Blyth SW of Stannington, but at 6.30am there was a signal 7 kilometres out to sea NE of Blyth. The next report was for 6.20am 12th September and it was near Alnmouth, further north in Northumberland, but by 10am the harrier was again along the River Blyth valley near Belsay.

NOTE: Peter Francis wrote to tell us that the harrier's favourite area along the River Blyth, near Bellasis, is an area managed for pheasant and duck shooting as well as fishing and is a good area for raptors. There are no sizeable reed beds but there are a few small ponds and marshy areas. The farmland includes tall maize crops and he wonders whether the harrier might be roosting in the maize. A couple of years ago a male marsh harrier spent the winter in the Blagdon/Prestwick area.

14 September 2004

Transmissions started in the early afternoon when the harrier was still near its usual haunts north of Newcastle, but by 3.45pm it was migrating into the North York Moors, being located over Danby on Eskdale. The harrier continued migrating strongly southwards and by 5.30pm it was on the north side of the Humber estuary, just west of the Humber Bridge. It covered 170 kilometres during the afternoon at a mean speed of 42.5 km/hour, although the latter part of the journey was at 48km/hour.

I asked Peter Francis for a report on the weather conditions which may have encouraged the harrier to restart its migration after 21 days around Newcastle. He reports "The weather was good in Newcastle this morning with warm, bright sunshine and, I think, a S/SW breeze (approx.10-15mph). By lunchtime there was a lot more cloud and the wind had increased slightly and swung round into

the NW bringing heavy showers in the afternoon. It was also noticeably colder pm. p.s. A Marsh Harrier was reported from Prestwick Carr this evening so there is still at least one bird in the area". The change to colder northerly winds was probably the stimulus.

15 September 2004

The first signal of 15th September was poor quality from northern France, and it was not until 1854GMT that an accurate signal showed that the young marsh harrier had flown 453 kilometres south since the previous evening and had definitely crossed the English Channel.

It was located in open country about 10 kilometres SSE of Abbeville in northern France, near Allery, east of Oisemont. The local weather was isolated light rain showers with a 18km/hr NW wind. A signal two hours later was one km further south so the bird was roosting in that area. After spending 3 weeks living around Newcastle this bird has moved very fast to the south and may have flown continuously for ten hours. Looking at the map, the SSE track fitted exactly with the track heading of 14th, directly to the shortest sea crossing from England to France.

16 September 2004

11pm first signal received - poor quality from near Vendome, north of Tours, but a better quality transmission at midnight showed the harrier was in open country, about 20 kilometres NW of Blois, probably near the River Cisse. This is a journey of 260 kilometres for the day. The new map shows how the young harrier held a SSE track to the short sea crossing from Kent to North France, and then turned more to the south.

18 September 2004

First signal at 0418GMT was from near Nontron, 60 kilometres SW of Limoges in southern Limousin, so the harrier appears to be heading fast for Spain having covered 243 kilometres yesterday. This is very similar to the previous day's journey of 260 km.

19 September 2004

The young harrier roosted west of Mirande, in the foothills of the Pyrenees, SW of Auch. This is 230 kilometres south of last night's position so the bird is still migrating strongly south. At 8am local time she was near St Michel along the River Grande Baise which leads up into the mountains, but two hours later she was further west rather than south. The weather is clear and calm, with good conditions for crossing the high altitude passes into Spain.

20 September 2004

Morning signals in northern Spain near Monzon, NW of Lleida, show that the harrier made a direct crossing of the high passes of the Pyrenees in near enough a direct line in yesterday's good weather. It covered 255 kilometres yesterday but this morning signals over 4 hours came within 19 kilometres suggesting it slowed down to hunt and feed. It has made a remarkably fast journey since leaving Newcastle.

21 September 2004

Signals at 3pm local time in Spain gave the bird's position as near Bonete, 25 km. west of Almansa in Albacete, and the track showed she had changed direction much more to the south west heading for North Africa. Almansa is 308 kilometres from Monzon, so she is travelling fast through Spain in good weather conditions.

22 September 2004

6pm local time; the marsh harrier was crossing the western Mediterranean Sea being one hundred kilometres south of Motril out over the sea. Motril is east of Malaga. The afternoon's position is a further 402 kms so the harrier has been maintaining a strong migration. The weather was sunny with clear skies and light northerly winds, perfect for crossing to Africa. A later poor quality signal at 9pm suggested the bird was getting near the Moroccan coast but we need to see tonight's transmissions.

The harrier is now over 2300 kilometres from the Tay estuary and in the last 9 days of migration has flown 2066 kilometres which is 238 kilometres per day. This young harrier has carried out a very competent migration to date.

23 September 2004

Just one poor quality signal at 2042GMT. The young marsh harrier has continued its southwards migration and is now in the High Atlas of Morocco, somewhere near El Rachidia. The radio transmission schedule was for the middle of the night and with the bird roosting in high mountain ranges, the chances of clear signals to the satellite were poor. El Rachidia is 436 kilometres from the position at sea the previous evening. Now it will be interesting to see if she slows down and finds a good stop-over habitat or continues a fast journey on to Senegal.

25 September 2004

Poor quality midnight signal from SW of Zagora - at the moment the schedule is for night time transmissions but that will change soon. This was a journey of 212 kilometres during daylight on the 24th September and continuing to migrate slightly west of south towards Senegal.

26 September 2004

Early morning signals showed further movement southwards, with a good transmission at 0635GMT to the west of Tinfouchy in the Hammada du Draa. Yesterday's migration was 134 kilometres and the young marsh harrier has left the high mountains and is now starting out over the deserts of North Africa. Hour and a half later it was a further 49 kilometres southwards.

27 September 2004

The young harrier is now travelling across the Sahara Desert. At 0753GMT she was near Maraboutia in the Erg Iguid deserts of Algeria, and just over three hours later she was near El Biodh on the border of Algeria and Mauritania. During this morning she travelled at 38 kilometres per hour and her previous day's journey was 238 kilometres so she is travelling fast across the deserts. I wonder if she is migrating on her fat supplies or catching prey either end of the day - may be hoopoe larks in the deserts or more likely northern passerines also migrating south for the winter.

28 September 2004

The over-desert migration continues with the harrier near Eg Glab Tiguesmat in Mauritania at midday - a further 253 kilometres. Four and a half hours later she was a further 109 kilometres passing through the Rall Amane desert in a south-westerly direction towards Senegal.

29 September 2004

By the evening the harrier had traveled a further 209 kilometres and was near Daya Hamami in stone and sand deserts. During the day it crossed the Tropic of Cancer.

01 October 2004

Last night, she roosted in the stony deserts of Makteir, east of a 640 metre high mountain range near Aghrejit. Two signals came in for 9pm and 11pm from the same location. She is heading towards Atar, the first big town, and is only about 100 kilometres from the edge of the desert. Yesterday's migration (30th September) was 250 kilometres which is a very good distance, considering she has been 7 days crossing the Sahara desert, a distance of over 1200 kilometres at an average daily journey of over 170 kilometres.

02 October 2004

Overnight she roosted in semi-desert west of Talorza; two good fixes two hours apart during the night from exactly the same place. Yesterday, she flew another 245 kilometres, a similar journey to that on 30th September and she is now just 350 kilometres to the Senegal River. By tonight she should be just about there - then it will be interesting to see where she settles after the long desert migration.

03 October 2004

Early this morning, the marsh harrier was at the Lac d'Aleg in Brackna, southern Mauritania, close to the Senegal River. This is an important wetland for birds with a count of up to 116000 waterbirds in September 1987, so the harrier is now in excellent hunting habitat. Yesterday's journey was another 243 kilometres. I wonder if she will stay there after her huge cross desert migration?

Description of Lac d'Aleg from Birdlife International website:

BirdLife IBA Factsheet for MR013 Lac d'Aleg, Mauritania (Edited down version).

Area: 4275 ha; Altitude 30m. Lac d' Aleg is situated 5 km to the north-west of the town of Aleg in the south-west of the country. The lake is a closed depression in an old course of the Senegal River fed by rainwater run-off from Oued Katchi, which drains a catchment of 3,420 sq km. The Katchi is a seasonal watercourse which was formerly a tributary of the Senegal River, but now cut off from it by dunes. The lake is endorheic and semi-permanent and typically varies in depth from 1 to 2 m at the end of the dry season to a maximum of 3 to 4 m at the end of the rains. At its maximum size, usually attained in October, it is 22 km long and 4 km wide. The area of the lake varies considerably from year to year depending on rainfall. The vegetation of the lake forms concentric rings. The banks are characterized by woody species and grasses. The southern edge of the lake is bounded by the Nouakchott to Aleg road. There are various conservation problems.

More than 116,000 waterbirds were recorded here in September 1987. Peak counts are Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) 2380; Fulvous Whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) 9000; Spur-winged Goose (*Plectropterus gambensis*) 5000; Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) 33000; Garganey (*Anas querquedula*) 50350; Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) 760; Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) 1613 and Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*) 2000.

04 October 2004

She did not stay at the lake but kept on south; by this morning she was south of the Senegal river near Ngour and had travelled a further 109 kms since yesterday. It is her shortest distance for many days. The young bird is now in good marsh harrier wintering habitat and we can expect her to stop somewhere soon. We have been extremely fortunate as well because the satellite transmitter will now switch to its winter schedule of once every 10 days, when we will get less information on a regular basis. But we should be able to log her movements into 2005 for as long as the battery is working.

Winter 2004-2005

14 October 2004

Very good signal from up river near the Senegal River in Senegal. Just 95 km from the position of 10 days previously so the young marsh harrier is now in her wintering range.

25 October 2004

Good signal at 0405GMT on the Mauritania side of the Senegal River, east of Matam. This position is 44 kilometres east of the location of the bird on 14th, so the young marsh harrier seems to have settled in a wintering area either side of the Senegal River. Next update expected on 4th November.

04 November 2004

During the daytime, signals were back on the Senegal side of the river, 52 kilometres west of the last position on 25th October. Between 1034GMT and 1503GMT the bird had moved in an area of up to 15 kilometres but the signals were not fully accurate so this is only an indication of daily hunting range.

14 November 2004

Two good signals from same area to the west of Matam, Senegal, so the bird has settled down to a wintering area.

25 November 2004

Three signals early today showed that the young harrier had moved 272 kilometres further south and was now in Gambia, near Cheesal Bessel, 40 kilometres south-east of Georgetown in the upper reaches of the Gambia river. The best signal at 0622GMT was accurate to one kilometre. The weather today was clear skies, 31C and 4mph NE wind. Steve Moyes has had one previous sighting of a wing-tagged harrier in The Gambia. It will now be interesting to see

if she settles down in a new wintering area, after her six week stay on the Senegal River.

05 December 2004

Three signals during the morning but not high quality - she has moved 77 kms NE and is now west of Tambacounda in Senegal.

15 December 2004

Two accurate signals during the day. At 1537GMT the harrier was just 13 kilometres from her position 10 days earlier. A very accurate class 3 position came in for four hours later when she would have been at her night time roost. This was 14 kilometres from the earlier location so she seems to be hunting in an open area with small rivers near Boba about 25 kilometres west of Tambacounda in Senegal.

25 December 2004

Just one signal at midnight while the harrier was roosting and she is still in the same area of Senegal.

05 January 2005

Several signals late in day, the one good one was just 1.5 kilometres from the bird's location ten days earlier, so it has settled down in a wintering area.

15 January 2005

Still in the same area - several signals during the morning.

25 January 2005

Three signals in the evening from the same area.

05 February 2005

Just received three signals between 2100 hours last evening (4th February) and 0250 GMT this morning. All were poor quality, the best being a B, but all three came from the same general area and the data also indicates the bird is still alive. The location of these signals is near the River Bafing, north of Mamou in Guinea, 430 kilometres SE of the Senegal wintering area. Has the harrier moved or are these incorrect data, we will not be certain until the next transmission on 15th February. The location area is in mountainous country rising to over 1000 metres, and this along with the fact the harrier would be roosting low down in vegetation at the transmission time might be the reason for the inaccuracy of the signals. If she has moved then it's really interesting and we wonder why she has flown another 430 kilometres to the south into Guinea. This young harrier has proved to be a very interesting bird!

15 February 2005

Two very poor signals early morning suggested the bird was in the previous Senegal area so either the signals of the 5th were incorrect, or the bird has returned, or the latest signals are so poor they are not useful. Hopefully we will get better class signals next time.

25 February 2005

Just one non-accurate signal at 3pm GMT at the normal Senegal wintering site; signals indicated bird was alive and moving, so it is impossible to say whether the position on 5th was a technical mistake or whether the young harrier went on a fly-around, and then returned to its wintering area just north of The Gambia. The poor quality signals may be due to the battery declining in strength.

07 and 18 March 2005

One poor quality signal each date came from the usual Senegal wintering area. The battery strength is declining and not sure we will get much useful data during the spring migration - but fingers crossed.

29 March 2005

Three transmissions yesterday afternoon, but none had a location but the activity sensor did show she was still alive. The battery is now close to running out so we might not get any further locations. No further transmission received - but interestingly a marsh harrier was seen in SE England in May carrying a satellite transmitter. No proof it was this bird as a few harriers were satellite tracked from Sweden in 2004.