



Identification of perched Montagu's and Pallid harriers

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Despite the quite extensive treatment of the identification of Montagu's and Pallid Harriers in the literature (eg Forsman 1995 and Lontkowski 1995, which deal mainly with the species in flight), two important field marks that distinguish the two species when they are standing on the ground, their usual resting place, have been largely overlooked.

These two field marks are the relative leg length and the position of the wing tips relative to the tail tip. Montagu's Harriers have shorter legs than do Pallid Harriers. As shown in the accompanying photographs, standing Pallids appear more erect, whereas standing Montagu's appear more horizontal. When individuals of both species are standing together, this is especially noticeable.

Also, on standing harriers, the wing tips of Montagu's reach the tail tip, but those of Pallid fall more than 6cm short of the tail tip. This is the more useful of the two field marks; it can be seen from almost all angles on standing harriers and especially from the side, as in the accompanying photographs.

The illustrations in Lontkowski (1995) fail to show the differences in leg length and relative wing tip positions, but the photographs in Lontkowski (1995) and Forsman (1995) do show them well.

Adult males of the two harriers are rather easy to distinguish in flight, but are not as easy to identify when perched, especially when seen from the rear (when differences in the underparts are not visible). The dark bar across the secondaries is not always visible on perched adult male Montagu's Harriers, but the differences in leg length and relative wing tip positions will separate them. In addition, adult male Pallid Harriers have a more distinct head pattern, compared to the more uniform grey head of adult male Montagu's Harriers.

The more distinct facial discs of adult female and juvenile Pallid Harriers compared to those of Montagu's, as discussed in Forsman (1995) and Lontkowski (1995), also serve as an important field mark. This can also be seen well in the accompanying photographs.

References

- Forsman, D. 1995. Field identification of female and juvenile Montagu's and Pallid Harriers. *Dutch Birding* 17: 41-54.
 Lontkowski, J. 1995. [Identification of Hen *Circus cyaneus*, Montagu's *C. pygargus* and Pallid Harrier *C. macrourus*.] In German with English summary. *Limicola* 9: 233-275.

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Readers are referred to the two references listed by Bill Clark for detailed treatments of the full range of characters for the identification of harriers (particularly in flight), while an excellent summary of the main features can be found in Lars Jonsson's *Birds of Europe* (1992). *Eds.*

Plate 1: adult male Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*, India, December 1996 (Bill Clark). Note the short legs, almost horizontal stance with drooping wings, and wing tips that reach to the tail tip. The black bar across the secondaries is not always visible. Note also the uniformly grey head.



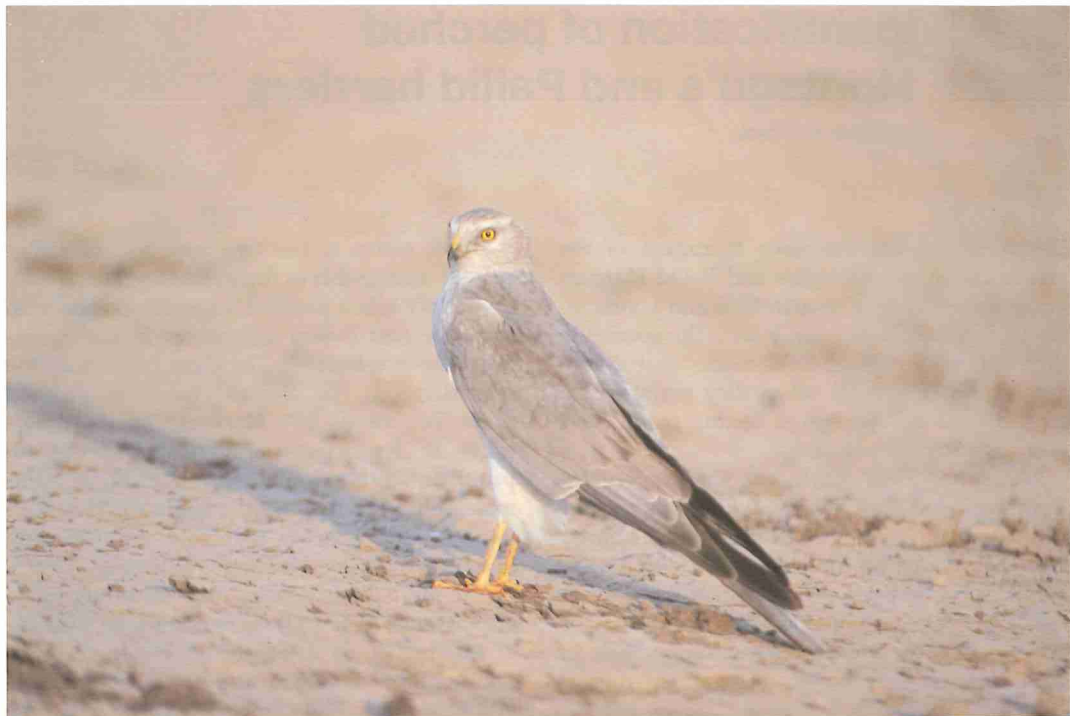


Plate 2: adult male Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, India, December 1996 (Bill Clark).
Note the long legs, upright stance, and wing tips that fall well short of the tail tip. Note also the grey-and-white head pattern.

Plate 3: adult female Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, India, November 1992 (Bill Clark).
Note the long legs, upright stance, and wing tips that fall well short of the tail tip. The head shows a distinct pale surround to the facial discs. The dark eye indicates that this is a young adult female.





Plate 4: adult female Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*, India, December 1996 (Bill Clark). Note the short legs, almost horizontal stance with drooping wings, and the wing tips that reach the tail tip. Note the indistinct border to the facial disc.



Plate 5: juvenile Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*, India, December 1996 (Bill Clark). Note the short legs, almost horizontal stance with drooping wings, and the wing tips that reach the tail tip. The facial disc surround is indistinct.

Plate 6: juvenile Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Oman (Conrad Greaves/Aquila). Note the long legs, upright stance, and the wing tips that fall well short of the tail tip. The head shows a very distinct, wide, pale surround to the facial disc.

