

*This is raptor number 6 in our series of pamphlets featuring the raptors seen on the CCJ estate. To date we have covered the three Sparrowhawks, the European Honey Buzzard, the Black-winged Kite and the African Harrier Hawk. Still to come is the Gabar Goshawk, Common Buzzard and Spotted Eagle Owl.*



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**THE COUNTRY CLUB**  
JOHANNESBURG



## **African Harrier-hawk**

**No.6 in our series:  
Raptors of the Woodmead Estate**



## **Description:**

The African Harrier-hawk (previously known as *Gymnogene*) is a medium-sized raptor about 60–66 cms in length. The upper parts, head and breast are pale grey. The belly is white with fine dark barring. The broad wings are pale grey with a black trailing edge fringed with a narrow white line. The tail is black with a single broad white band. There is a bare facial patch of variable colour, usually red or yellow.



## **Distribution and Habitat:**

African Harrier-hawks are a common raptorial species south of the Sahara, being most commonly found in the tropical regions of western Africa becoming less common in East and South Africa. They are adaptable in their habitat preferences and are able to live in both urban and rural human occupied areas

## **Breeding Season:**

These birds are monogamous. The breeding season starts at different times in different parts of African Harrier-hawk distribution. In South Africa it is November-December.

## **Nests and Nesting:**

Nest sites are most commonly in large trees that are sometimes growing out of or located on a rocky outcrop. Nests are circular and often placed in the main fork of the tree and are below the canopy. Nests can be used for several breeding season. Nests are made of sticks and are lined with leaves from trees neighbouring the nest. The clutch is one to three eggs, Both the male and female help to incubate the eggs and often only the oldest of the chicks survives.



## **Courtship:**

In the courtship display, individuals in a pair soar slowly together, at height, and can often be heard calling during this time. When the male flies on his own he often flies in an undulating pattern and flaps his wings. When the pair fly together, there have been records of the male diving towards the female and touching her back with his talons, and the female turning over and touching talons with the male. The bare facial skin patch can flush reddish-pink, especially during breeding season.

## **Diet:**

The African Harrier-hawk is omnivorous, eating the fruit of the oil palm as well as hunting small vertebrates. Its ability to climb, using wings as well as feet, enable this bird to raid the nests of cavity-nesters (such as barbets, woodpeckers and hoopoes) for eggs and nestlings. It has also been known to prey on feral pigeons, house sparrows and squirrels.



## **Did You Know:**

- An unusual trait of this species is the double-jointed knees it possesses, which enable it to reach into otherwise inaccessible holes and cracks for prey.
- They have no feathers on their face which is helpful when sticking their beaks into small areas to catch prey. This bare facial skin patch is often yellow but can change to deep pink/reddish colour during mating displays.