

Over the next few months we will be printing a series of pamphlets featuring the raptors seen on our CCJ estate.

These include the Black Sparrowhawk, Little Sparrowhawk, Ovambo Sparrowhawk, Gabar Goshawk, Long-crested Eagle, Common Buzzard, African Harrier Hawk, European Honey Buzzard and Spotted Eagle Owl.



Want to learn more about the exciting environment of the Greater Woodmead Estate?

**Join our WhatsApp info group...
Email your details to Chelsea to be added to the group:
chelseak@ccj.co.za**



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THE COUNTRY CLUB
JOHANNESBURG



European Honey Buzzard

**No.4 in our series:
Raptors of the Woodmead Estate**



The European Honey Buzzard was one of the birds sighted at the February bird walk.

Description:

The fabulous European Honey Buzzard stands out since it's actually larger than many related species. Whilst it looks similar to the Common Buzzard, it can be distinguished by details of its colouring, its longer neck and more slender tail. The female is slightly larger than her male counterpart. Overall, individuals average about 52 – 60 cm in body length. Wingspan averages 135 – 150 cm.

Distribution:

Fortunately, the European Honey Buzzard evolved as native to a relatively broad section of the globe. It also engages in seasonal migrations, like many other birds. Firstly, it lives its warmer seasons across the majority of the continent of Europe. However it escapes the northern winter months and migrates to more tropical regions in Africa, including South Africa. It thereby effectively inhabits two separate ranges.



Habitat:

It displays adaptability regarding its choice of precise habitat within those broader ranges. In the more pristine ecosystems it makes appearances in, it displays a strong preference for areas of woodlands. It nonetheless shows little reservation about making its home in areas with a moderate human presence.

Diet:

The main food source of the European Honey Buzzard is the larvae of wasps, bumblebees, and hornets. It gains access to these larvae by digging their nests out of the ground. To a smaller degree, it also feeds on other insects and small vertebrates, such as frogs, rodents and reptiles.



Breeding:

Builds a medium sized nest in coniferous or deciduous trees. The female lays 1-3 eggs, which are incubated for up to 37 days. After hatching, the young stay in the nest for up to 47 days and continue to be fed for several weeks after leaving the nest.



Epic Migration:

A female European Honey Buzzard was fitted with a satellite tracking system. It spent the summer around the town of Reitz in the Free State. On 20th April, she left Reitz heading north and on the 2nd of June, she finally reached Finland where she stayed for the summer months before returning again to South Africa.



Here is an image showing the data received from the tracker which plots out her route. In just 42 days she covered over 10 000km at an average of more than 230km every day! She took a straight line north except for when she had to fly over water. She turned right at the source of the Nile and followed it. After that deviation, she returned to the same longitudinal line she started. Truly amazing.