"When flying from one place to another, without searching the ground, it moves with considerable rapidity, at such a height as to clear the trees and other elevated objects without deviating. It is not known, however, to soar to a great height. On obtaining its prey it usually devours it on the spot, carrying it off only when it judges that it is liable to be molested. When satiated, it retires to some quiet place, or perches on a wall, a stone, or a stump, until digestion is advanced. In its rambles it searches the cultivated fields and pastures, but in summer and autumn is partial to heaths and commons; and in such places it reposes at night and rears its young. Although nowhere very common, it is generally dispersed, and in some districts pretty numerous, in the breeding-season. In Scotland it betakes itself to the hilly tracts and moors from the middle of spring to the end of autumn, but in winter frequents the lower cultivated districts. It is a permanent resident, and does not appear to receive any accession of numbers, or to undergo any periodical diminution."

Like Macgillivray, I have never had the good fortune to find its nest. I shall therefore transcribe a very valuable account of its breeding given by Sir William Jardine.

"In a country possessing a considerable portion of plain and mountain, where I have had the greatest opportunities of attending to them, they always retire at the commencement of the breeding-season to the wildest hills; and during this time not one individual will be found in the low country. For several days before commencing their nest the male and female are seen soaring about, as in search of or examining a proper situation, are very noisy, and toy and cuff each other in the air. When the site is fixed, and the nest completed, the female is left alone, and, when hatching, will not suffer the male to visit the nest, but on his approach rises and drives him with screams to a distance! The nest is very frequently made in a heath-bush by the side of some ravine, and is composed of sticks, with a very slender lining. It is sometimes formed on one of those places called scars, or where there has been a rut on the side of a steep hill after a mountain thunder-shower; here little or no nest is made, and the eggs are laid on the bare earth, which has been scraped hollow. In a flat or level country some common is generally chosen, and the nest is found in a whin or other scrubby bush at a short height from the ground. The young are well supplied with food, I believe by both parents, though I have only seen the female in attendance; and I have found in and near the nest the common small lizard, stone-chats, and young grouse.

"When the birds are perfectly grown, they, with the old birds, leave the high country, and return to their old haunts, hunting with regularity the fields of grain, and now commit great havoc among the young game. At night they seem to have general roosting-places either among whins or long heath, and always in some open spot of ground. On a moor of considerable extent I have seen seven in the space of a acre. They began to approach the sleeping-ground about sunset, and, before going to roost, hunted the whole moor, crossing each other often, three or four in view at a time, gliding backwards and forwards in easy graceful circles, with seemingly little effort or flapping of the wings. Half an hour may be spent in this way. When they approach the roost they skim three or four times over it to see that there is no interruption, and then at once drop into the spot. These places are easily found in the daytime; and the birds may be caught by placing a common rat-trap, or they may be shot in a moonlight night. In both ways I have procured many specimens."

The eggs, which vary from three to five in number, are bluish white, sometimes faintly dotted with brown, and are generally about an inch and three quarters in length by an inch and a third in breadth.

The preceding extracts from the writings of Macgillivray and Sir William Jardine must be regarded as descriptive of the bird at the time they wrote, some thirty years ago; but, as I have already said, it is now not nearly so numerous. Still it is to be found in many parts of England and Scotland; and the Duke of Argyll informs me that a pair of this species nested on one of the moors near his seat at Inverary in the spring of 1867.

Besides the British Islands, the Hen Harrier inhabits the whole of Central Europe, North Africa, Asia Minor, and Persia; and Jerdon states that it is a "winter visitant to India, Bootan, Kumaon, and the north-western Himalayas, perhaps extending to the plains in the Punjab only."

So much difference exists in the size and colouring of the sexes of this and other Harriers, that, had we not abundant proofs to the contrary, we might readily assume that they were distinct species. The adult male is always of a delicate grey; but the young of this sex, for the first, and probably the second year, is brown, like the female, and in this respect resembles the Kestrel and many others of our rapacious birds; and those from foreign countries require as close an investigation to arrive at as intimate a knowledge of them as has been achieved with regard to our own species.

The Plate represents a male, somewhat less than the natural size, with a reduced figure of the female or Ringtail in the distance.