

2 January 2017 - Birds

The two birds of prey which mark the beginning of the stamp year are two small but superfast Gyrfalcons that spread anxiety and fear among our small birds.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*): There are between 2,000 and 6,000 pairs of merlin in Norway. They are spread across large parts of the country. The merlin keeps away from large-scale agricultural areas and dislikes thick coniferous forests where it cannot make use of its hunting technique.



This is the smallest of all falcons in Europe, with a maximum length of just 30cm. Yet it is lethal for small birds and prefers terrain which is open enough for it to grab its prey with a lightning-fast

dive to the ground or just above it.

Eurasian hobby (*Falco subbuteo*): The Eurasian Hobby is approx. 34 cm long. It is easily recognizable by its quick, swallow-like flight. The female birds are the largest and the hobby feeds on small birds and larger flying insects like dragonflies.



With only up to 50 pairs, the Eurasian hobby is one of the rarest falcons in our country. Most are found in Hedmark where the hobby is the county's bird. They prefer areas with a mix of forest and marshland as well as open logging fields.