

*BIRD-WATCHING HINTS: PART 1

ASK YOURSELF:

Are you in the right area of the country?

Some birds can only be seen in certain parts of the country. HOWEVER... many birds are spreading and even moving location due to climate change.

Are you in the right environment?

Main Environments: (More Later)

Sea: they rarely come into land, except to breed: *albatrosses, shearwaters, auks, divers*

Coast: they live most of their time on cliffs – or breed there. *Gannets, kittiwakes, white tailed eagles...*

Salt Water: estuaries and marshes – However... some may visit inland lakes, even fields.

Fresh Water: lakes, marshes, rivers – However... some may go to the coast at certain times of the year

Woodland: mature deciduous trees; bushes and shrubs in copses, gardens

Mature coniferous trees: some birds prefer these; others never go there.

Grasslands: high moorland: only certain birds can cope with this

Low moorland, scrubland, commons, (even wild edges of motorways)

Fields: agricultural crop-growing fields: different at different times of the year.

With animals: some birds prefer these as the flies that are attracted by dung are good bird food.

Air: some birds live most of their lives in the air and only land to breed, or for gathering (eg: powerlines). *Swifts, swallows, martins*, many seabirds.

Gardens: Rural – can be visited by woodland, grassland birds as well as the so-called ‘garden birds’

Towns and cities: car parks, cemeteries, rooftops, parks, squares, gardens, roof-gardens, rubbish tips: many birds have learned to survive by adapting to our built-up areas. They use our tall buildings as ‘cliffs’. They have learned that our detritus is ready-available food.

Is it the right time of the year?

Residents: (including some migrants who have decided to stay in some areas)

Summer migrants:

Winter migrants:

Storm-blown rarities:

Day bird or night bird?

Size? How does it compare to... [there are many ways to measure a bird – some below]

	STRUCTURE	WING LENGTH	WING RATIO TO BODY	TAIL RATIO	NECK RATIO	LEG RATIO	BILL RATIO
Huge:	COMMON CRANE	Mute Swan					
Very Large	MUTE SWAN	Heron		Swallow	Heron	Avocet	Curlew
Large/ Long:	GREYLAG GOOSE	Rook	Swift (for size)	Magpie	Cormorant	Common Crane	Woodcock
Medium-large/long:	ROOK	Lapwing	Rook	Blackbird		Heron	Heron
Medium:	BLACKBIRD	Blackbird	Starling (equal)	Sparrow	Mallard	Starling	Starling
Medium-Small/short:	ROBIN	Skylark	House-Sparrow	Black-head’ gull	Woodpigeon		Robin
Small/ short	GREAT TIT	House sparrow	Magpie (long tail)	Heron	Sparrow	Sparrow	Sparrow
Very-small/ very short:	GOLDCREST	BLUE TIT		Mute Swan!		Kingfisher	Blue Tit

Plumage? Sounds easy BUT...

- A lot of **LBJs** (*little brown jobs!*)
- They can move **too fast** to see details
- If the **light is bad**, you may only get a silhouette (in bright sunlight as well as dusk)
- Do you look for: beak colour? Leg colour? Wing marks? Head? Breast? Flight wing marks?
- Are they only distinguishable by song? If so, does it refuse to sing?!

Behaviour (JIZZ)? REALLY IMPORTANT IN RECOGNITION! (Brackets: examples only)

- **Walking**; hopping (*blackbird*); strutting (*jackdaws*); running (*wagtail*); very still (*owls*).
- **In trees only**: flitting from tree to tree (*siskins, tits, etc*); climbing up trunk (*treecreeper, woodpecker, sometimes bluetit*); climbing down trunk (*nuthatch + up trunk*); upside-down (*tits*); singing close by, following you (*robin*); Tapping on tree (*woodpecker* – but sometimes other birds looking for insects); high up in tree (male song birds: *chaffinch, blackbird, song thrush, etc*); mid-level (*robin, tits,*); in the low undergrowth (*dunnock, wren*)
- **In scrub and undergrowth** (shy): loud call (*wren*); loud song (*blackcap, cetti's warbler*), scuffling in the leaves (*blackbird*)
- **On lawn** (*green woodpecker, blackbird, pigeons and collar doves, thrushes, robin* in dug earth, *dunnock* round edges part hidden)
- **Flights**: singing in flight (*finches, skylarks- hovering*); undulating flight; flap/glide (*harriers*); riding the thermals (*harriers, eagles, buzzards, crows and rooks*); swooping (*hawks*); slow whoosh (*swan*); fast (*pigeon*); in formation (*greylag geese*); in flocks (small: *finches and linnets*); from tree to tree in groups and calling (*siskins and redpolls; long-tailed tits*);

Song / call? A difference: males sing; females (and males) call (talk).

- Some birds use wing beats (*raptors*), flaps and coughs (*pigeons, pheasants*), shakes (*grouse*), stand up in water (ducks), as communication.
- Males use certain perches at different heights to give their song

There are many CDs, tapes and iPad Apps for learning birdsongs. All worthwhile getting as it gives you a great advantage to know at least some of the most common birdsongs.

Try and keep a record of what you see. Birds often stick to the same areas. For example: you will see Kingfishers usually at certain spots on the river. Lapwings often keep to the same set of fields. You will no doubt have noticed specific blackbirds and robins in your garden – though they might be different in the winter to the summer!

Note down:

1. date, time, place (easy to forget one of these!)
2. weather (little birds don't like windy days – they will be hiding somewhere nearby, but on a sunny spring day, they will be everywhere)
3. for possible 'special' birds, or ones you can't be sure about, note the following:
 - how far away it was
 - if you were using binoculars / telescope
 - what the light conditions were (silhouetted or not)
 - your angle of vision – looking out at it, up at it, through leafy branches, bare branches, down at it, between trees, scrub, etc.
 - what made you think it was special / different
 - what it was doing: roosting, preening, swimming, flying, flitting from branch to branch, bush to bush, tree to tree, singing, feeding in a field, long grass...
 - whether you wrote down notes / sketch at the time or later
 - whether it was seen by anyone else
 - whether you looked it up at the time.

Other facts: those confusing bird books!

Many books (not all) use the formal Bird Order – which means you can't find the one you are looking for! So I am listing the ORDER below: [birds in brackets are examples, not a comprehensive list – it's not an index!] Also note that many books are UK + EUROPE: many birds listed, we don't get in the UK, except as a rarity: TWITCHER STUFF!

- Divers [Loons] (*great northern diver, red-throated diver, black-throated diver*)
- Grebes (*little grebe (known as dabchick), great crested grebe, red-necked grebe*)
- Shearwaters / Petrels / Gannet (*sooty shearwater, manx shearwater, fulmars, storm petrels, gannet*)
- Cormorants (*cormorants, shags*)
- Herons (*bittern, little egrets, grey heron*)
- Swans (*mute swans, Bewick swans, whooper swans*)
- Geese (*greylag geese, pink footed geese, Brent geese, barnacle geese, Egyptian geese, shelduck*)
- Ducks dabbling: (*mallard, gadwall, shoveler, wigeon, gargany, teal*)
- Ducks diving (*pochard, pintails, tufted ducks, scaup, eider, scoter, long-tailed duck, goldeneye*)
- Ducks sawbills (*smew, goosander, merganser, ruddy duck*)
- Raptors or Birds-of-Prey (*golden eagles, buzzards, red kite marsh harriers, hen harriers, osprey, sparrowhawks, goshawks, kestrel, peregrine falcons, hobby, merlin*)
- Game Birds (*black and red grouse, ptarmigan, red-legged partridges, grey partridges, pheasants, quail*)
- Rails / Coots (*water rail, moorhens, coots*)
- Crane (*Common Cranes*)
- Waders (*huge list: oystercatchers, stilt, ringed plovers, grey plover, golden plover, lapwing (also called 'common plover' or 'peewit'), dunlin, knot, sandpipers, godwits, curlew, redshanks, snipe*)
- Skuas / Gulls (*Great skua, black-headed gulls, kittiwake, herring gull, great black-backed gull*)
- Terns / Auks (*Common tern, little tern, guillemot, razorbill, puffin, little auk*)
- Doves / Parrots / Cuckoo (*woodpigeon, stock dove, collared dove, ring-necked parrots, cuckoo*)
- Owl / Nightjar (*barn owl, tawny owl, little owl, short-eared owl, long-eared owl, nightjar*)
- Swift / Kingfisher / Woodpeckers: (*swift, kingfisher, bee-eater, green woodpecker, great spotted woodpecker, little spotted woodpecker*)
- Larks / (*skylark, wood lark*)
- Swallows (*house martins, sand martins, swallows*)
- Pipits / Wagtails (*meadow pipits, water pipits, rock pipits, tree pipit*) pied wagtail, grey wagtail, yellow wagtail)
- Wren / Dipper / Waxwing / Dunnock /
- THRUSH FAMILY: (large) Robin (*Nightingale, redstart, wheatear, stonechats*)
- Thrushes (as we know them); (*Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Redwing, Fieldfare, Blackbird*)
- Warblers (*garden warbler, blackcap, whitethroat, Cetti's warbler, reed warbler, marsh warbler, sedge warbler, willow warbler, wood warbler, chiffchaff*)
- Crests (*goldcrest, firecrest*)
- Flycatchers (*spotted flycatcher, pied flycatcher*)
- Tits (*great tit, coal tit, blue tit, crested tit, willow tit, marsh tit, long-tailed tit, bearded tit (now called 'bearded reedling')*)
- Nuthatch / Treecreeper
- Shrikes (*great grey shrike*)
- Crows (*magpie, jay, jackdaw, chough, rook, carrion crow, hooded crow, raven*)
- Starling / Oriole (*golden oriole*)
- Sparrows (*house sparrow, tree sparrow*) [*the 'hedge sparrow' is a 'dunnock' not a sparrow*]
- Finches (*chaffinch, brambling, linnet, twite, redpoll, goldfinch, greenfinch, siskin, serin, bullfinch, hawfinch, crossbill*)
- Buntings (*reed bunting, snow bunting, yellowhammer, corn bunting*)