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The birds may seem quieter now, but that's not necessarily because there is more human activity – it's more because this is a quieter time for birds. Most checks have fledged and some of our summer visitors are starting to head back to their winter homes.

But over April and May in particular, more people had the opportunity to slow down a little and notice more of their local bird life. Songs were sung loud and clear, and in the absence of heavy traffic you may have heard more birdsong than ever before.

We are going to split today's session into 3 sections – the first will focus on common garden birds, the second on birds of prey and the 3rd on a few other species you may spot out and about. Please put any questions you may have in the chat box, and we will have a few minutes for questions after each section.

All the photos within this document are either from the AONB system or from the Wildlife Trust website. All photographers are credited.

For more information about identifying birds, listening to bird song or advice regarding feeding garden birds please visit www.rspb.org.uk or www.bto.org

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Everyone has their favourite garden visitor – but for those of us who maybe aren't very good at identifying different species, we may not be sure what all of our garden visitors are.

So we are going to start by introducing the more common garden birds and how to identify them via sound as well as sight.

RSPB lead on their Garden Birdwatch every year in late January – if you haven't already taken part you definitely should! This gives us some idea of the top 10 birds seen in gardens nationally – but that may not be the same around East Lancashire.

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Our first favourite is the loveable **Robin**! Robins are very distinctive, and are a regular helper to gardeners, as they make the most out of looking for worms and other treats from upturned soil. Their red breast is a prominent feature, and both males and females look the same. Young robins, however look quite a bit different and are brown throughout. Robins sing the entire year round.

Did you know that some Robins migrate? During winter you might think your resident Robin has gone shy and pale, that's because this robin might be from cold Russia or Scandinavia. They come to us for Christmas, as it is warmer, and are shy because these Robins are not use to humans. Your summer garden robin, might head to the south coast to spend Christmas on the Isle of Wight!

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Blackbird – another one of our favourites in the wonderful blackbird. Another vocal species, both robins and blackbirds tend to be 2 species who sing earliest in the morning. Again, particularly for the males, these birds are very distinctive black in colour. Females, however are speckley brown. Blackbird also have a favourite song.

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House sparrow © Mark Hamblin 2020VISION



Another common visitor – especially in my garden – is the **house sparrow**, which came out top in the RSPB Big Garden Bird watch. Male sparrows have a grey patch on the top of their head, and a cream chest, but most of their feathers are brown and black. Female sparrows are slightly less colourful and they don't have the same head colours.

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Species of **tit** – Different members of this loveable family are regular garden visitors. There is the larger **Great tit** – green and yellow. The smaller **Blue tit** – blue and yellow.

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The charismatic **long tailed tit** – a cooperative breeder, the long tailed tit can be very noticeable in flocks of around 20 birds. Noticeable by its long tail.

Unlike other garden birds, Long tailed tit chicks fledge the nest, but stay with their parents through winter looking for food together, they might even become next year's nest helpers. Super helpful children.

To round off our most common garden tits – we have the **coal tit**. More grey and black than blue tit and great tit.

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Species of **finch**. A finch can be identified by its beak. They tend to be short and triangular but can differ dependent on what they like to eat.

Chaffinch - male chaffinch has an orange chest and the female is grey as well as brown. But you probably won't see a chaffinch on your bird feeder – they prefer to gather food from underneath a bird table. But you will hear them!

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Greenfinch male © Adam Jones and Greenfinch female © Mark Hamblin 2020VISION



Greenfinch – less common, but a great sight. Males are green, and females brown but both have a yellow streak.

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Goldfinch © Neil Aldridge



Goldfinch - a surprising entry in the RSPB Garden watch top 10 for some - the goldfinch is definitely one of our most colourful visitors!

Goldfinches have perfect fine pointy beaks to pick out seeds from a thistle or teasel, preventing them being spiked by the spiky leaves. In winter, some UK goldfinches fly to Europe for a warmer winter holiday.

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Bullfinch male © Bob Coyle and Bullfinch female © RSPB



Bullfinch – Distinctive pink chest in the male, and a paler orange chest in females. These birds love to feed on buds off trees.

You might have spotted that female garden birds, and most birds actually, are not as bright coloured as the males. This is due to their main role in nesting, being camouflaged and hiding from predators. The males also want to attract the females, so they have to try and stand out and be the most colourful or sing the loudest. In some species, like this Bullfinch, it is clear who is going to spend more time on the brown nest with the eggs.



We also may have a few larger visitors to our gardens. These may include **starlings**, **woodpigeons**, or **magpies** – and of course **crows**. Sometimes these birds are thought of as pests, but they all fit within the natural world and have their essential roles in each habitat.

Woodpigeon © Gillian Day

Starling © Wildstock





Birds of prey are magnificent creatures, some in the UK are very rare and you won't see them unless you go to certain areas. Others are more common.

We are just going to talk about 3 species which we see quite regularly.

Sparrowhawk - the Sparrowhawk is probably the bird of prey you are most likely to see in your garden. Watching a Sparrowhawk appear to take a smaller garden bird as its prey can be quite dramatic but its all part of the circle of life. Sparrowhawks are relatively small birds of prey, and where the males are quite blue, the females are more grey/brown. They are very swift and flexible as they fly through small gaps and up to 50 kmph in short bursts.



Kestrel – another smaller bird of prey – but one you probably wouldn't see in your garden. However, you are likely to see a kestrel hovering by the side of a road or motorway. They hover and then dive down for their prey. They have pointed wings and a long tail.



Buzzard – a favourite sight of mine is watching a buzzard soaring across the skies. A regular sight for me when I am driving along the A682 – sometimes I see 3 together. When they soar, wings are in a shallow 'V' and the tail is fanned. Buzzards don't just eat small mammals and birds – they can also feast on earthworms and larger insects if other prey is in short supply.

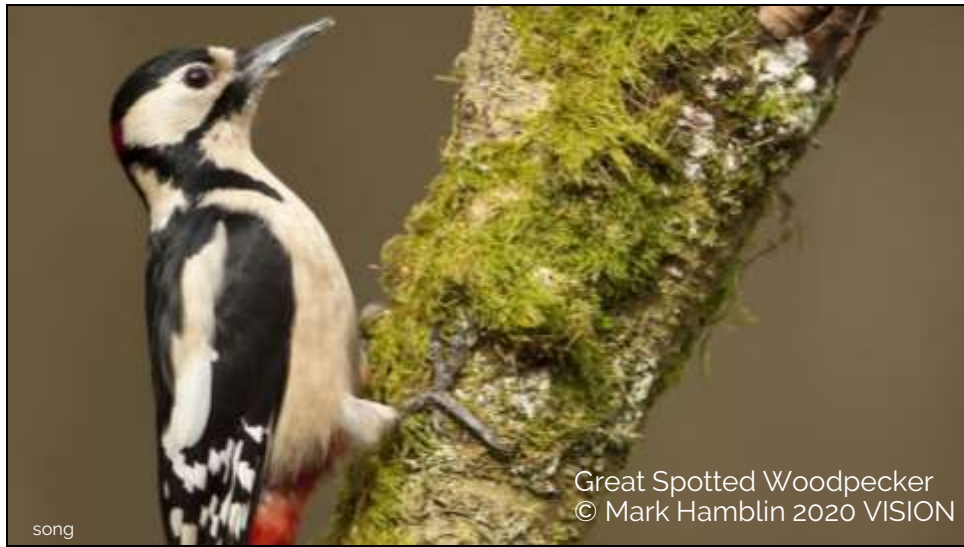
Unlike garden birds, female birds of prey have similar markings to the male and neither are brightly coloured. Female birds of prey tend to be larger than the male, for a range of potential reasons. The female has the main nesting role, being bigger to fight off others and able to incubate the eggs for longer. The males are smaller, so they can catch smaller prey. Males evolved to be smaller because small live prey is more abundant than large prey, and the male does more hunting when the female is incubating.



We are lucky enough to be surrounded by lots of other bird species in the wider countryside and in our local parks. We are just going to go through a very small number of other species you may see when out and about.

Curlew – for us this is one of our most iconic birds across and around Pendle Hill. Curlews appear inland in early spring, from the shores and stay over spring and summer. They nest on the ground, and are identifiable by their iconic call, as well as their curved beak. Curlews are in huge declines across the UK for a number of reasons and we are super lucky in East Lancashire and North Yorkshire where I live to still have pairs that manage to nest and breed – however still nowhere near the numbers that we should have. In areas down south, there now just remains one or 2 breeding pairs.

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Great spotted woodpecker – A drumming noise will give this one away, in rapid succession of blows on a wooden surface, mainly a tree, but sometimes a telegraph pole! This is to mark out territories, find a source of food under the bark and to make a nesting hole bigger. It has a distinctive bouncing flight. The male has a red patch on back of head



Mallard – Most common surface feeding duck in Britain with its broad beak allowing to filter food from the water. It eats anything from insects, to berries and plant matter. I bet we have all been to feed the ducks bread at some point in our lives, but did you know bread is not ideal for birds. We have all done it, me included. Leftover bread is OKAY for the birds—as long as it is given in small amounts and isn't the main food source provided. Bread provides very little nutritional value to birds. Soaked bread is better than dry bread and brown is better than white! Please don't feed bread to ducks down at your local pond, park, canal or river. As well as providing little benefits to birds, left over bread can also cause algal build-up and other issues in the water itself,

Mallard flight is an odd thing to watch, it is almost vertical into the air from a position on the water surface. The male is called a drake and has bottle green head, the female is dull buff brown, with a greenish yellow beak.

Grey heron © Neil Aldridge

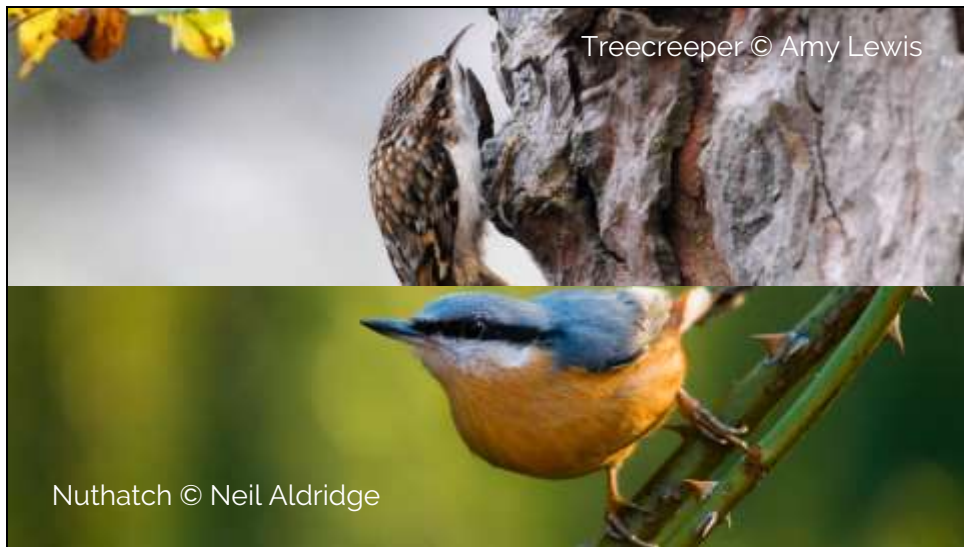


Heron – Herons look very prehistoric, with their tall thin long legs. They can stand so still with their neck stretched out, or be hunched down with their neck bent over their chest, looking for food. They eat small mammals, ducklings, fish and even amphibians. Herons actually nest in tree tops called Heronries, where they make nests out of twigs.

Wren © Andy Rouse 2020 VISION

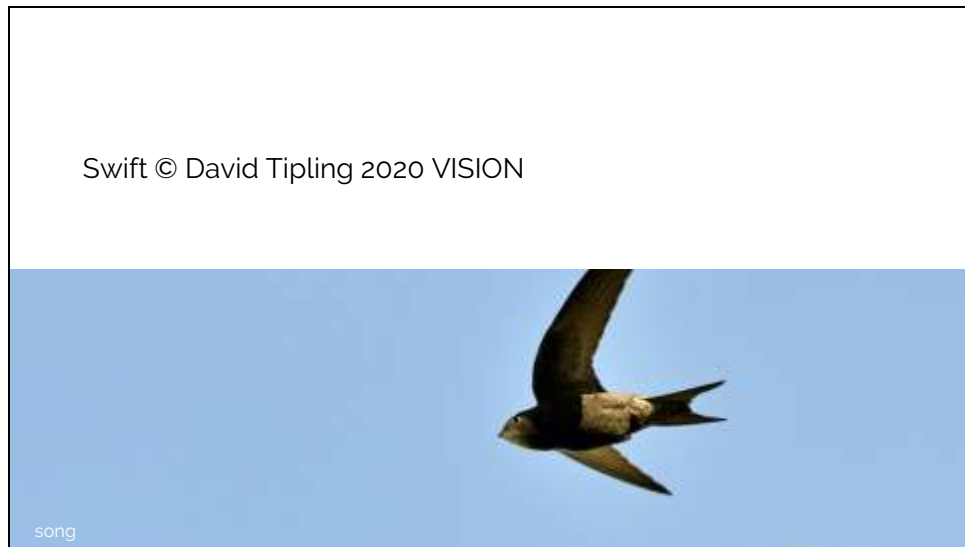


Wren – For the 2nd smallest bird in Britain, it has a very loud song. It's repeated audible song can be heard up to 100 meters away. The male builds ball shaped nests from grass, moss and leaves within hedges and trees. The female then selects her favourite and lines it with feathers. She then feeds and broods the young, while the male keeps making nests for other females!



Nuthatch vs treecreeper – These 2 species are both woodland specialists. The nuthatch lives up to its name eating acorns, seeds, beechnuts and hazelnuts. They anchor these in crevices of tree bark, to keep them in place, while they use sharp bill to split the nut open. They have feet that allow them to hop up and down the tree with ease.

Treecreeper has large claws on their feet allowing it to hop up trees, using its long tail for balance. However, it cannot descend in this way, so flies to another trunk to start its journey up a tree looking for insects within the barks with its curved sharp bill.



Swift – Swift arrive from Africa in the summer, and only stop flying to lay eggs, they do everything else on the wing. They feed only on air borne insects. A young bird will spend its first 2 years flying until it is ready to breed. They are black with lighter patch on chin and have a sickle shaped wings.

Swallow © Mark Hamblin 2020 VISION



Swallows are similar, feed off insects while flying. They have blue-black upper body and a male has a reddish throat with long tail streamers. They normally gather on telegraph lines between July and September, before they make their journey back to South Africa.

House Martin © Dawn Monrose



House martins are another summer visitor, arriving from Africa in April. They used to be a cliff nesting bird, but now can be seen nesting in mud built cup, attached to sides of buildings. They are blue-black back, with white undersides, with a short shallow forked tail.