

Bedgebury's Birds

A beginner's guide

Bedgebury Pinetum is home to a variety of resident and migrant birds. A walk round the Pinetum and Forest is bound to turn up a good selection of birds. All of the birds shown are residents unless marked with an (M) and the season when you are most likely to see them at Bedgebury.

This leaflet describes just some of the birds you may find here. A bird book may be helpful for more information about these birds and how to identify others.

Water Birds



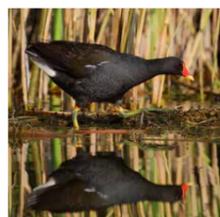
Mallard

Mallard is the most common duck you will see. It up-ends to feed, head underwater and tail upwards. This duck does not dive. The male has a green head and grey body and the female is brown. Both have a blue metallic flash on their wings. Young mallards are brown.



Tufted duck

Tufted ducks are often seen on the lake outside the Visitor Centre. They dive to find food. The male is a very smart black and white duck while the female and young are brown. Both male and female have a crest at the back of the head, longer on the male than the female. Whilst this bird is a resident, during the winter numbers are increased by migrants who may have come from as far away as Russia.



Moorhen

With a dark slate-blue and brown body, long green legs and red bill with a yellow tip, the moorhen is not a duck. It is a type of rail and does not have webbed feet. Although the bird can be seen swimming on water, bobbing its head as it swims, it is often seen walking around on the grass or by the edge of water. Youngsters are much browner than the adults with a dirty white chin, dull red bill and white under-tail.



Coot

The coot has an all dark body and a white face and bill. It is not a duck and does not have webbed feet. Spending much of its time on water, the coot will do a little jump before diving to find food. The young are mainly brown-grey with a white chin and pale bill.



Little grebe

This lovely little water bird with its powderpuff rear end is not a duck. It dives under the water with a little leap to catch small fish and then bobs back up like a cork. Generally, this bird prefers to stay close to vegetation around the edges of a lake. Little grebe will sometimes carry their young on their backs.

Small Birds



Robin

The robin is a common breeding bird at Bedgebury and can easily be seen throughout the year. The adults are very obvious with their red chests. Youngsters, however, are brown and speckled. Although common all year, they are easier to see in the winter as numbers increase due to migrant birds arriving here to escape the cold in northern Europe.



Dunnoek

Once known as the hedge sparrow, this unobtrusive bird is fairly common at Bedgebury, often seen near the ground in, or close to, undergrowth. Seen close up, the greyish head and well-marked back makes this little brown bird quite attractive.



Blue tit

This small blue and yellow tit is a common breeding bird at Bedgebury. During spring and early summer, the birds are seen mainly in pairs or with young. During June, adults can be seen feeding fluffy begging yellow youngsters. In winter it roams around the Pinetum searching for food and is often seen in mixed flocks with other tits. This bird is very acrobatic and will often hang onto small branches whilst feeding.



Great tit

The great tit is our largest tit. It is a black, green and yellow bird. Both male and female have a chest/belly stripe but in the male this is much thicker and easier to see. The young are much more yellow than the adults, lacking a black belly stripe and with a very dull black cap. From February onwards, the male will start to sing. His song seems to say 'tea-cher, tea-cher'.



Coal tit

Smaller than a blue tit, the coal tit is a buff, brown and black bird with a white cheek and a small white patch at the back of its head. Frequently found amongst conifers, this is a common breeding bird at Bedgebury. In winter this bird will also join in with roaming tit flocks. From February onwards, it will start to sing a fast high-pitched, two-syllable song resembling a squeaky bicycle pump.



Marsh tit

Slightly bigger and much less common than a blue tit, the marsh tit is mainly brown and buff with a dark 'bib' and shiny black cap. It does not have the white patch at the back of the head like a coal tit. The marsh tit is often seen in the lower branches of trees rather than high in the canopy. Sometimes a distinctive 'pit-chu' call will help you find this bird.



Long-tailed tit

Roaming flocks of this lovely little bird are a delight to see as they flit from tree to tree trailing a tail that is longer than their body. They communicate constantly with a variety of buzzing, squeaking and 'prrrt-prrrt' calls. By late January or early February, the flocks are breaking up as the birds pair off to breed.



Goldcrest

Our smallest bird and common all year round, the goldcrest is a tiny dumpy bird with dark eyes in a plain face. Both males and females have crests; the male has an orange crest and the female's is yellow. They are usually found in conifers and sometimes high piping calls will alert you to their presence. In winter they will often join roving tit flocks so if you find a flock of tits, you may well find goldcrest also.



Firecrest

The firecrest is similar to the goldcrest, but is much rarer. Its white eye-stripe is very distinctive and gives the bird an angry expression. The bronze patch on each shoulder and its green back can also be quite noticeable. Although resident, numbers increase in the winter when birds arrive from the continent. It may join roving tit flocks. The firecrest often remains fairly low in the undergrowth and can sometimes be located by its repeated high-pitched call.



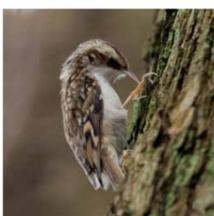
Wren

This tiny brown bird with a cocked tail is common at Bedgebury wherever there is undergrowth. Sometimes it will perch openly, but more often all you will see is a tiny bird with very short wings flying from one area of undergrowth to another.



Nuthatch

The only British bird that can climb down a tree as well as going up, the nuthatch is a fairly common resident at Bedgebury. This short-tailed bird has a blue back, black eye-stripe and white chin. A tapping noise or piercing call can give away the presence of the bird.



Treecreeper

The treecreeper is often seen creeping up tree trunks and branches like a little mouse. It sometimes makes high-pitched calls like a squeaky tap. This bird has a habit of flying low down onto a tree trunk, climbing up and then flying low down on to the next trunk.



Pied wagtail

A small black and white bird with a long, constantly wagging tail is most likely a pied wagtail. In winter they can often be seen close to the Visitor Centre, but can turn up almost anywhere, usually on or near the ground, and occasionally in flocks.



Bullfinch

The male bullfinch is a large colourful finch, with a black head and a prominent pink chest, often seen in a pair with the duller female. Both male and female have a white rump and this can be quite visible when the birds fly away from you. They are shy birds, preferring to hide in shrubbery. Sometimes a soft slowly repeated 'peu-peu-peu' may be the only indication that they are present.



Chaffinch

The chaffinch is a common resident at Bedgebury; the blue head and pink underparts of the male are unmistakable. The females are much plainer and can easily be mistaken for sparrows. Compared with sparrows they are slimmer, longer tailed and have a plainer back with prominent white wing-bars.



Goldfinch

The goldfinch is a colourful small finch with a small thin bill, red and white face, and an obvious gold bar on the wings. A twittering call can alert you to the presence of this bird which, in winter, is often seen in flocks. In spring and early summer the male will often sing from an exposed perch.



Brambling

(M) Autumn/Winter

Closely related and similar to the chaffinch, the brambling visits us in winter. This attractive finch has orange tones on its chest and largely white underparts. It is not pink, like the chaffinch. The most prominent feature, usually seen in flight, is its white rump. It is mainly found in flocks. This bird often favours a roosting area behind the Visitor Centre.



Siskin

Although a resident bird, the siskin is easier to see in the winter since numbers are increased by migrant birds from northern Europe. In winter this small lively, streaky yellow finch is often seen in flocks, sometimes mixed with other finches. The male has a small black cap and bib. The female is mainly streaked. Siskins are very agile often hanging upside down to feed, enjoying alder and birch seeds. They call to each other with a variety of twittering calls.



Willow warbler

(M) Spring/Summer

The beautiful descending song of the willow warbler is becoming much less frequent in the South East, however Bedgebury is still an excellent place to hear and see this small active greenish warbler. It is very fond of birch trees and next to the Visitor Centre lake is a good place to hear them during April and May.



Chiffchaff

(M) Spring/Summer

Common and very similar to the willow warbler in looks, the chiffchaff is another small greenish warbler. The song is the main feature separating these two species. The chiffchaff sings a loud repetitive 'chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff'.



Blackcap

(M) Spring/Summer

This bird, sometimes known as the northern nightingale, sings a wonderful flutey song from shrubberies or low trees. A common bird throughout spring and summer, the male has a black cap and the female and young a brown cap.



House martin

(M) Spring/Summer

Frequently seen soaring in the skies above Bedgebury the house martin catches insects in flight. A slightly forked tail, white underparts and dark upperparts except for a pure white rump (low back) help to differentiate this bird from the swallow.



Swallow

(M) Spring/Summer

A familiar bird of summer, the swallow has all dark upperparts, white underparts apart from the dark head and a strongly forked tail with thin streamers. Specialising in catching insects on the wing, swallows can often be seen flying low over water.

Medium-sized Birds



Blackbird

The blackbird is common all year, but numbers increase in winter as birds escape the cold in northern Europe. Males are black, often with a yellow bill, however young birds or migrants from the continent can have black bills. Females are brown and some, particularly continental birds, can have a pale 'speckly' throat and upper chest. Young blackbirds are initially very speckled, resembling thrushes, and can often be seen being fed by their parents. The black male and brown female will often raise several broods each year.



Song thrush

A small slim thrush with a rufous brown back and pale underparts showing arrow-shaped markings, the song thrush is often seen perched on a tree branch or on the ground near to vegetation. The male will start to sing his repeating song early in the New Year. Usually this bird is seen singly or in pairs, unlike redwing, which are generally in flocks. Song thrushes can have several broods each year and may be seen feeding speckled young throughout the spring and summer.



Mistle thrush

Larger, longer-tailed and rather pot-bellied when compared with a song thrush, this bird is also a colder grey-brown above and has spots on the chest and belly. The mistle thrush is usually seen singly or in pairs and is more likely to be seen in open grassy areas. Early in the New Year, this bird will sing its mournful song from a tree top.



Great spotted woodpecker

This large black and white woodpecker, with conspicuous white patches on its back, is common at Bedgebury, particularly amongst broadleaved trees. In early spring, males will 'drum' on trees to claim territories. This sounds like a large hammer hitting a tree hard, reverberating and then tailing off. The male has a small red patch at the back of his head, the female an all-black head, and the young, when they fledge, have a red cap. The great spotted woodpecker often calls with a loud 'chip' whilst clinging to a branch.



Green woodpecker

Although a woodpecker, you are more likely to see the green woodpecker hunting on the ground for ants. When disturbed it will fly off with a flash of green and yellow and often calls with a 'yaffle' which sounds a little like a sharp laugh. Males have a red centre to their moustache but in females the moustache is solid black.



Hawfinch

(M) Winter

The hawfinch is a very large, colourful finch with a massive bill. Mainly a winter visitor to Bedgebury, the easiest time to see these shy and special birds is as they come in to roost in tall conifers. Before entering their roost, this species will often sit for a period of time at the very top of tall trees.



Redwing

(M) Winter

A winter visitor to Britain from northern Europe, the redwing usually arrives in October and November and departs in April. This is a small thrush with a white eye-stripe, and as the name suggests, has a red underwing. The red is usually just about visible under the wings when they are closed. Often seen in flocks, sometimes with fieldfare, they will move around looking for food. Initially this is berries, but when the berries run out they look for invertebrates on the ground.



Fieldfare

(M) Winter

This colourful thrush, a little bigger than a blackbird, with a grey head and rump, is another winter visitor from northern Europe. They are often seen in flocks, sometimes with redwing, and call with a 'schack-schack-schack' sound. When flying they take several strong wing beats before closing their wings briefly and then flapping again. A favourite perch can be at the top of trees.

Larger Birds



Buzzard

This large brown bird of prey is often seen soaring in the skies over Bedgebury on long, broad rounded wings which may be held in a very shallow V as the bird slowly glides by. A loud mewing call can alert you to the presence of this majestic bird.



Kestrel

The kestrel is the only British bird of prey that habitually hovers. This bird mainly eats small rodents and you may see it suddenly drop down to the ground onto prey. Being a falcon, the wings are pointed and in good light the chestnut back and thick black band at the end of the tail may be visible.



Wood pigeon

A very common, bulky pigeon, with a white mark on the neck and obvious white wing bars in flight. The song has five syllables, 'coo-coo-cuuu-coo-cu'.



Collared dove

Smaller and browner than the woodpigeon, the collared dove has a narrow black band on the neck. This bird is often seen in pairs. The song has three syllables and can sound like the bird is repeating 'u-nite-ed, u-nite-ed'.



Carrion crow

The carrion crow is a common bird at Bedgebury and is often seen in flight in ones or twos. It is smaller than the raven with a short, powerful bill and a square-ended tail. The call is a loud frequently heard 'kraa-kraa'.



Raven

Mainly seen in flight, the raven is very large, very black and has a large heavy bill. This bird often gives itself away with a loud, deep, 'kronk-kronk' call. The tail has a distinctive wedge shape when compared with the much squarer tail of the carrion crow.



Jay

Although a large bird, the jay is quite shy. Often all you will see, as the bird disappears into woodland, is just the flash of a large, white rump patch and black and white wings. When seen well, this member of the crow family has bright blue wing patches and a dusky pink body. The call is a loud harsh screech that can travel a long way.



This leaflet has been created by the Friends of Bedgebury Pinetum to share the wonders of the Pinetum and its extraordinary flora and fauna with our members and visitors to the site.

As a charity, the Friends of Bedgebury Pinetum takes your membership subscriptions, donations and gifts and makes them available to the Forestry Commission as grants for projects and activities across the site. These grants intend to engage people with trees and, in particular, the Pinetum. We support the Forestry Commission in its management of Bedgebury as a world-class centre of conifer research, conservation and education, as a landscape of rare and endangered flora and fauna, and as a site for high quality, healthy recreation.



Please share details of any interesting bird sightings with us by email: membership@bedgeburypinetum.org.uk



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