

# Where and how they live.

**Blackbird**  
(*Turdus merula*)



**Characteristics:** 25.5 cm long and weighs approx. 90 g. The male plumage is all black with a narrow yellow eye-ring and yellow bill. The female plumage is mostly brownish with a dark brown back, slightly lighter brown underpart, a mottled throat and a duller bill. Young Blackbirds resemble the female but are distinctly speckled and streaked with buff.

**Call:** When excited or alarmed its call is a loud *chink-chink-chink* call, also given when marking its overnight territory in the evenings. The Blackbird's song is a beautiful, clear and melodic arrangement of fluting notes, delivered rather slowly and culminating with a soft twitter.

**Habitat:** Traditionally the Blackbird was purely a woodland bird. Today it can be commonly spotted in areas of human habitation and in gardens and parks. The Blackbird is a summer visitor to Central Europe between April and October but in Britain the resident population is joined by a large number of immigrants in winter.

**Distribution:** The Blackbird is widely distributed across parts of Europe, South Asia and North Africa.

**Biology:** Diet consists of snails, worms, insects, fruits and berries. Blackbirds nest in hedges, bushes and on windowsills and roof beams that are mostly only a couple of meters above the ground. The Blackbird builds a large nest from plant matter and earth.

The clutch consists of between 4 and 7 greenish-blue eggs with dense brownish mottling. 2 or even 3 broods a year; clutches from March.

**Song Thrush**  
(*Turdus philomelos*)



**Characteristics:** 23 cm long and weighs approx. 68 g. All brown back with buff-washed creamy underparts featuring numerous black-brown spots arranged in a lengthwise pattern. Its warm-buff coloured underwings are visible during flight. Male and females have identical colouring.

**Call:** A sharp *sipp* contact call, often given in flight. Its song is quite loud and highly characteristic: short musical phrases are repeated two to four times before the next one begins. Its song therefore comes across as quite rhythmic. The individual musical phrases include mimicries (imitations) of other birds.

**Habitat:** The Song Thrush is found in gardens and parks, hedgerows and most types of woodland. It is a summer visitor to Central Europe between the months of February and November but occurs all year round in Britain.

**Distribution:** This species is widespread in Central and Northern Europe and Central Asia.

**Biology:** Song Thrushes feed on snails, worms, insects and spiders and in autumn on fruits and berries. They nest in bushes, hedges and trees (close to the trunk). They build a strong nest made up of woven grass and plant matter, the cup is lined with a smooth finish of dried mud. The female lays between 4 and 6 light blue to turquoise coloured eggs that are lightly spotted with black. Clutches from April; 2 broods a year.

**Blackcap**  
(*Sylvia atricapilla*)



**Characteristics:** 14 cm long and weighs approx. 18 g. Olive-tinged brownish back, ash grey underparts and sides of the face, whitish belly. The male has a neat black cap, extending to the eye. The female is slightly browner overall with a chestnut-brown cap. The Blackcap lives mostly in hiding and usually only attracts attention through his song, but in recent decades it has become a familiar winter visitor to suburban gardens in Britain.

**Call:** The contact call is a hard, deep *tacc tacc*, very similar to the call of some of its closest relatives. Its song is a rich warble which characteristically ends with a short series of flute-like notes, reminiscent of a Blackbird.

**Habitat:** The Blackcap is found in gardens and parks with bushes and trees, glades and woodlands with sufficient ground cover. It is a summer visitor to Central Europe between the middle of March and the end of October but in recent times the Central European population has started to winter in milder parts of Western Europe instead of migrating to Africa.

**Distribution:** The species can be found across almost the whole of Europe and as far as Asia and parts of Northwest Africa. **Biology:** Diet consists of insects and their larvae, spiders when available. In autumn and winter they switch to berries and fruit and may be attracted to bird tables by the provision of apples. The nest is built in thick vegetation close to the ground as well as in bushes. The blades used for building the nest are wrapped around the plants so that the nest is firmly anchored in the vegetation. 4 to 6 eggs with a whitish, grey or brown base and speckled with ash grey or dark brown. 1 brood a year; clutches from May.

**Garden Warbler**  
(*Sylvia borin*)



**Characteristics:** 14 cm long, weighs 17 to 19 g. Male and female identical, amongst the plainest of all our birds. Characteristic soft grey patch on neck-side, strong lead-grey legs and feet.

**Call:** The contact call is a Blackcap-like *tacc tacc tacc* but it is less vocal than most warblers. The song however is rich and varied, similar to a Blackcap but is more sustained and lacks the Blackcap's terminal flourish.

**Habitat:** Found in deciduous and mixed woodlands with sufficient ground cover. On migration it occurs in a wide variety of habitats such as parks, gardens and hedgerows, but is always very unobtrusive in its habits and is easily overlooked.

**Distribution:** The Garden Warbler is a summer visitor to most of Northern and Central Europe (end of April to September/October) and winters in Africa.

**Biology:** Garden Warblers feed on insects and spiders and additionally on berries in the late summer and autumn. The nest is loosely woven from blades of grass and can be found in dense plant vegetation and in bushes that are low to the ground. The female lays between three and five eggs with varied colouring. The base colour is a whitish to light brownish colour with brown and grey speckles that are sometimes concentrated at the larger end. 1 or sometimes 2 broods a year; first clutch from mid-May.

**Robin**  
(*Erithacus rubecula*)



**Characteristics:** 14 cm long and weighs approx. 18 g. Very distinctive appearance: Upperparts warm brown with olive tinge; breast, sides of its head and forehead are an intense orange bordered with a narrow bluish band. Males and females have the same colouring. Juveniles lack the red front but have dark brown plumage spotted with yellow-brown and a mottled brownish breast. Robins have a plump appearance. They twitch their tail and wings often, a characteristic often observed on the ground.

**Call:** The contact call is a highly characteristic hard, twittering *tick-ick-ick*, often delivered in an almost stuttering tempo. The Robin's slow and melancholy song is varied, but usually begins with sharp, high-pitched tones and ends with fluting and bubbly passages that taper off.

**Habitat:** Found in larger gardens, parks, and deciduous, mixed and coniferous woodlands with ground cover. Many Robins overwinter in Central and Western Europe (partial migrants) and can be spotted at bird tables.

**Distribution:** Robins are widespread across almost all of Europe and the Near East.

**Biology:** Robins feed on insects, worms, snails and small invertebrates but they also eat berries. The nest is made of plant matter and is woven between the roots of trees or in other hollows. The clutch consists of between 5 and 7 lightly coloured eggs with varying degrees of dark mottling. 2 broods a year; clutches from the end of April/early May.

**Nightingale**  
(*Luscinia megarhynchos*)



**Characteristics:** 16.5 cm long and weighs between 24 and 28 g. A bird with rather featureless plumage that is one of the best singers in Europe. It is essentially warm brown above, lighter below with a bright rusty tail. Both sexes have the same colouring.

**Call:** Its contact call is a soft *huitt*, but also a harsher, almost frog-like *krrr* sound when nervous. Its song begins with a rising series of *took took* calls that become louder and faster and end in a sobbing crescendo. Sings by day as well as at dusk and at night and mostly while perched deep in the cover of trees or bushes.

**Habitat:** The Nightingale can be found in larger overgrown gardens, graveyards, parks with damp thickets, deciduous and mixed woodlands with abundant ground cover.

**Distribution:** It is a summer visitor to Central and Southern Europe between April and October but in Britain it is confined to the south-east as a breeding species.

**Biology:** The Nightingale forages for its food on the ground. Its diet consists of insects and their larvae, spiders, snails, worms and other invertebrates as well as berries. The nest is built on the ground and hidden in dense and creeping shrubbery, in nettle bushes or similarly dense vegetation. The clutch consists of 4 to 6 olive-brown eggs. 1 brood a year; clutches from the beginning of May.

# Where and how they live.

**Bluethroat**  
(*Luscinia svecica*)



**Characteristics:** 14 cm long and weighs between 17 and 20 g. The male is brownish above, whitish below with a brightly coloured iridescent-blue, white and orange bib. The female has a similar overall colouring but lacks the extensive and brightly coloured bib. Both sexes have bright orange-rust patches at the base of the tail, conspicuous in flight.

**Call:** The usual contact call is a very quiet, deep *thack* and may be the first sign of the presence of a Bluethroat lurking in the shadows. The song is fast and varied, a rich blend of melodious and harsh sounding passages, often incorporating mimics (imitations) of the songs and calls of other birds.

**Habitat:** The Bluethroat is found in moors, thickets in swamp areas and bushes on the banks of rivers and lakes.

**Distribution:** The Bluethroat is a summer visitor to Central and Northern Europe, arriving in March and departing by October. In Britain it is a rare passage migrant but it has occasionally nested in Scotland.

**Biology:** The Bluethroat feeds on insects and their larvae and on other small animals as well as berries. It builds a cup nest from plant matter in dense vegetation low to the ground. A full clutch consists of 5 to 7 greenish or brownish eggs. First clutch at the end of April; 1 brood a year.

**Redstart**  
(*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)



**Characteristics:** 14 cm long and weighs between 14 and 19 g. The male has a slate grey back and orange-chestnut coloured underparts. It has a striking black face-mask bordered with a dash of white across the forehead; the rump and tail are bright rust-orange in colour. The female is much duller with a grey-brown back and yellowish-brown underparts, but has the same rusty tail and rump as the male. The Redstart is noted for its erect carriage, distinctive "curtseying" movement and the frequent quivering of its tail.

**Call:** Its contact call is a rising *hweet* or *hweet tick tick*. It has a pleasant sounding song which starts with an extended high note, then followed by shorter and deeper individual notes that often incorporate mimics (imitations of other bird sounds).

**Habitat:** The Redstart is found in gardens, parks, orchards, bright deciduous, mixed and coniferous woodlands.

**Distribution:** The Redstart is a summer visitor to Central and Northern Europe, arriving in April and departing by October. It occurs throughout Britain but is rare and a localised breeder in Ireland.

**Biology:** The Redstart feeds on insects and their larvae and spiders. It nests in hollows including both tree hollows and cavities in brickwork or stonework. It also nests in roof beams and similar places. The clutch comprises between 5 and 7 bluish-greenish eggs. 2 broods a year are quite common with the first clutch from the beginning of May.

**Collared Flycatcher**  
(*Ficedula albicollis*)



**Characteristics:** Just under 13 cm long and weighs approx. 13 g. The male's breeding plumage is extremely rich in contrast with a black back, white underparts, broad white collar and white forehead and wing patches. The female is grey-brown where the male is black but has a similar extent of white in the wing.

**Call:** The song consists of short, rather high-pitched and slower paced strophes that sound like *trew tsit trew tsit*. In addition refined *seeb*, *heet* or *fyit* contact calls can also be heard.

**Habitat:** The Collared Flycatcher is found in mature deciduous woodlands, parks, graveyards and orchards. It requires natural tree-holes for nesting but will readily avail of nestboxes where they are made available.

**Distribution:** The Collared Flycatcher is a summer visitor to Central Europe, arriving in April and departing in September. Its very close relative, the Pied Flycatcher, occupies a similar niche over a much wider area of Europe, including western and northern regions of Britain.

**Biology:** The Collared Flycatcher's diet is primarily made up of insect prey which, like all flycatchers, it is adept at snatching in the air. It usually nests in tree hollows and builds an untidy structure out of blades of grass, leaves and moss. The clutch comprises between 3 and 8 plain coloured pale blue eggs. 1 brood a year; clutches from May. The male may mate with several female partners.

**Willow Warbler**  
(*Phylloscopus trochilus*)



**Characteristics:** Just under 11 cm long and weighs between 8 and 10 g. The Willow Warbler is one of the commonest European birds. It is rather drab in appearance being basically olive-brown on the upperparts with whitish underparts washed faintly yellow. Its most striking plumage feature is a pale yellow stripe above the eye and a slightly darker stripe through the eye. Its legs are usually light brown.

**Call:** Its contact call is a rising *hooet*, faintly disyllabic. The Willow Warbler's song is characterised by its descending scale, opening with a rapid series of clear, high notes, the pitch dropping evenly to end with a terminal flourish.

**Habitat:** The Willow Warbler is found in a wide variety of habitats, from the lowlands to high mountains. These include larger gardens and parks with tree populations, bright woodlands and forest outskirts as well as wetland forests and bushes on the banks of waterways.

**Distribution:** This species is widespread across Central and Northern Europe and Asia, arriving in April and departing in September.

**Biology:** The Willow Warbler feeds on insects and their larvae, spiders and on berries in late summer and autumn. The domed nest is made of grass and other parts of plants. It is well hidden close to the ground and between plants or under low bushes. Full clutches consist of 5 to 7 whitish eggs finely speckled with red. Clutches from the beginning of May; 1 or 2 broods a year.

**Woodlark**  
(*Lullula arborea*)



**Characteristics:** 15 cm long, weighs between 26 and 29 g. Like other lark species its plumage is basically brown above, streaked blackish with paler underparts. It has a striking pale stripe over the eyes meeting on the nape and a prominent black and white mark on the front edge of the wings. It is shorter tailed than the Skylark.

**Call:** The flight calls of the Woodlark can be described as a melodic *did-lu-ee* uttered every few seconds. Its exceptionally beautiful song is interspersed with *loo loo loo loo* warbles and a *looralooraloo* sound that tapers off. The woodlark sings from a watch such as a treetop or performs its song during a circling song-flight.

**Habitat:** Woodlarks can be found in sandy heathlands, in expansive pine heaths and on forest outskirts. It is a summer visitor to Central and Northern Europe, arriving in March and departing for Southern Europe in October. In Britain, however, it is mainly resident.

**Distribution:** This species is widespread across almost all of Europe. To the south, their geographic area extends as far as North Africa and Asia Minor.

**Biology:** The nest is built in a hollow in the ground. The female usually lays between 4 and 5 eggs. They can be whitish, grey or sand coloured with spots that are between a brownish and violet colour and feature some pale mottling. The first clutch is usually in April with the second brood in May/June.

**Golden Oriole**  
(*Oriolus oriolus*)



**Characteristics:** 24 cm long and weighs between 68 and 75 g. The male is striking with a magnificent yellow plumage, black wings and black tail tipped with yellow edges. A wide black stripe runs between its eye and its reddish beak. The female has an inconspicuous colouring. Her back is greenish while the underpart is whitish-greenish with rows of darker streaks. Her wings and tail are dark green and the tail is edged with yellow. Like the male's, her beak is a reddish colour.

**Call:** Golden Orioles are given away by the resonant and loud fluting strophes of its song that sounds like *whela-wheello*. When excited, the bird can be heard making raw and raspy calls.

**Habitat:** The Golden Oriole inhabits deciduous forests in the lowlands as well as parks with large tree populations.

**Distribution:** This species is a summer visitor to Central and Southern Europe, arriving in May and departing in September. In Britain it is a very rare and localised breeding species.

**Biology:** The Golden Oriole feeds on insects and their larvae and berries. Its nest is elaborately woven together and suspended in tree forks that have grown horizontally. The female lays between 3 and 4 eggs with a whitish-pink background and fine brown or black speckles. One brood a year; clutches from mid-May.