

# Who is in your garden?

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# What is a songbird?



Almost half of the world's bird species are songbirds, with over 5,000 species in this group.

A 'songbird' is known scientifically as a **passerine**.

Passerines are **perching birds**; they have special feet to allow them to grip onto branches. You can see this blue tit has **three toes facing forward**, and it has **one toe facing backwards** so it doesn't fall off tree branches and other thin surfaces.



Songbirds also have specialised voice boxes, with many of them able to sing beautiful songs. Bird song is one of the main ways that birds communicate with each other, and can sing to warn each other of danger, to find a mate, and to tell other birds where their territory is.

Lots of the birds you see in your garden are songbirds, we've highlighted just a few of them on this leaflet. Have you seen any of them in your garden?

## BLUE TIT



Blue tits can be found in parks, woodlands, farmland and gardens. You might have seen them in your own garden, with a blue crown, tail and wings, and a bright yellow belly! They are noisy and very cheeky, making them easy to spot!

- Average life span is 2-3 years, but some as old as 21 years old have been recorded.
- Blue tits nest in holes in trees or walls or nest boxes.
- They lay eggs in April or May. The eggs are white with small purple or red-brown spots.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Blue tits love to eat insects, seeds, fruits, nuts and buds. A hungry chick can eat up to 100 caterpillars a day! You can help feed the blue tits by making our seedcake recipe with a parent, or by planting flowers.

House sparrows can be found all over the world, near humans, and living in our houses, hence the name 'house sparrow'. They have a grey streak on their head, with red-brown backs and a greyish belly. They are normally with other house sparrows, hunting for food.

## HOUSE SPARROW



- Average life span is 3 years.
- House sparrows build untidy nests from grass and feathers but will also use nest boxes.
- They lay 4-5 eggs between March and July. Their eggs are white with grey speckles.

## DID YOU KNOW?

House sparrows are very resourceful and can live almost anywhere. There have been reports of them living in airport buildings, railway stations, busy factories and even coal mines!

# ROBIN



One of the UK's most loved birds, we can see our robin red-breast in woodlands, gardens and parks. Even though they are a symbol of Christmas time, you can spot these noisy little birds year-round. They are very protective over their territory and sing loudly to let you know!

- Average life span is 3-5 years
- Their nests are built from sticks, grass and moss in a domed shape.
- They lay 4-6 eggs in March or April but have been known to nest as early as January.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Robins normally nest in tree stumps, nest boxes and walls. However, they win the award for weirdest nesting spots, including flowerpots, old boots, hanging baskets and even coat pockets!

Common in UK gardens, blackbirds are easy to identify with their glossy black backs and bright yellow beaks. The 'typical' blackbird you see in the picture are males, and the females are not black, but brown with speckled bellies.

# BLACKBIRD



- Average life span is 3 years.
- Blackbirds nest in hedges and make their nest from twigs, grass and mud to keep it stuck together.
- They lay 3-4 eggs that are a greenish-blue with brown spots.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Blackbirds are not very fussy eaters. They eat insects, earthworms, spiders, berries, fruits and seeds. They have very good eyesight to find worms and can hear them moving under the soil.

# GOLDFINCH



These brightly coloured birds are found in parks, farmland and gardens in the UK. Most goldfinches stay in the UK, but, in winter, some will leave for warmer climates and travel as far as Spain. Goldfinches have striking red faces with yellow streaks in their feathers, with brown backs.

- Average life span is 2-3 years
- They are seed eaters, and love eating seeds from sunflowers, teasels and thistles.
- They lay 5-6 eggs between April and July in a nest made from moss, grass and plants.



## DID YOU KNOW?

In Victorian times, people kept goldfinches in cages due to their bright colours and pretty song. Now we can enjoy their song in our parks and gardens and watch as they fly about in groups called 'a charm'.

These tiny birds look almost completely round with their short neck and little tails, often held completely upright. They are brown in colour, with a light stripe above their eye. Though they are small, they have a powerful song which can be heard far from their shelter in dense bushes.



- Average life span is 2 years.
- Male wrens build the nest from moss, twigs, and leaves, then line them with feathers. Each male will normally build more than one nest, to attract mates.
- They lay 5-6 eggs between April and June.

# WREN



## DID YOU KNOW?

Wrens are so tiny, they are only 9-10cm in length, and their wingspan is only 13-17cm. They weigh about the same as a £1 coin. and can struggle to keep warm in cold winters due to their size.

# GREAT TIT



The largest member of the tit family we have in the UK, great tits are common visitors to our gardens and parks. They have a black head and white cheek patches, a greenish back and yellow belly with a black streak down the middle.

- Average life span is 2-3 years
- These birds are common bird feeder visitors, and eat seeds, berries, insects and nuts.
- They lay 5-10 eggs in April-May and often use nest boxes to lay their eggs.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Great tits have a lovely song, and male great tits that can sing the most songs, have better luck finding a girlfriend, and have more babies than those who know fewer songs!

Starlings may look black from afar, but their feathers contain hues of purple, blue and green that shine in the sun. The whitish spots in their plumage make them look very different from blackbirds. They can be seen in urban areas, woodland, and farmland across the UK.

# STARLING



- Average life span is 5 years.
- Males make the nest from leaves and dried grass, and the females add soft feathers to the middle.
- They lay 4-5 eggs in March-April.
- Starlings eat insects, worms, fruits and seeds.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Starlings are fantastically unique birds, and can be seen in huge groups, called 'murmurations' swooping, twisting and swirling around in the sky at dusk before returning to a roosting site.

# BULLFINCH



Bullfinches are shy birds, and you will probably only see them if you have lots of shelter in their garden for them to hide in. They can be identified by their black head and bright pink-red belly, with grey back. Females are duller in colour, and have a grey-pink belly instead.

- Average life span is 2 years
- Bullfinches change their diet with the seasons, eating flower buds in spring (up to 30 buds in 1 minute!) and seeds and berries in winter.
- They lay 4-5 eggs in May-July



## DID YOU KNOW?

The scientific name for a bullfinch is *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*, which comes from the Greek word 'Purrhos' which means 'flame-coloured'. This name refers to the red coloured belly of the male bullfinch.


Nuthatches are often seen hanging from the branch of a tree, looking for insects to eat. They have sharp black bills to help extract insects and are blue-grey above, with rusty orange bellies and a white chin, with a black stripe across their eye.



- Average life span is 2-3 years.
- Nuthatches often nest in nest boxes, or holes in trees, that were excavated by woodpeckers.
- They lay 6-8 eggs which are incubated for around 2 weeks.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The name 'nuthatch', comes from the old phrase 'nut hacker', because nuthatches often jam nuts into holes in trees and crack the nuts by hammering them with their sharp bills.



# How can you help songbirds?

Songbirds are in decline, and they need **your** help! There are lots of ways you can help songbirds, with a little help from a grown-up:

- Why not try putting up a **nest box** for birds to nest in? Birds want to be safe and warm just like us.
- Put out **food** for the birds in a feeder. This is helpful in winter when birds can't find lots to eat.
- **Plant** nice flowers and bushes so birds can eat the berries and the insects that visit the flowers. Bushes also provide shelter for birds.
- All birds need **water**, just like you and I. You can give them access to water with a bird bath or even just a shallow bowl. Remember if you put out water you need to clean the bowl and put fresh water in regularly.
- If you have a cat, make sure you play with them for 5 minutes each day to keep them from hunting the birds.
- **Learn more about birds by watching them in your garden.** How many different birds can you spot? Can you name them all? What is their favourite food? Which is their favourite tree?



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