

Bird survey

Birds spotted on the Chisholme Estate, Scottish Borders, TD9 7PH

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

"I value my garden more for being full of Blackbirds than of cherries and very frankly give them fruit for their songs" - Addison

Brambling *Fringilla Montifringilla*

Winter visitor from Scandinavia and Northern Russia. Their numbers here reflect the severity of the winters there. Often flock with other species in search for food, particularly beech mast. Nests in birch or mixed woodland.

Buzzard *Buteo Buteo*

White or bluish-white eggs with brown spots or blotches. Becoming more common in this area. Prefers wooded valleys and open hillsides. Hunts rabbit (population declined dramatically after the myxomatosis outbreak of the 1950's) and other small mammals. Our commonest bird of prey. Nests are large and incubation is 1 month.

Canada Goose *Branta Canadensis*

Seen on the lake just once. Introduced as a decorative bird for parkland lakes in the 17th century. Now well established.

Chaffinch *Fringilla Coelebs*

Maybe 7 million pairs in Britain plus winter visitors. Population has decreased since the 1950's. Eats insects and seeds from the ground. Favours mature deciduous woodland or farmland with scrub. Breeds April-May, both birds tending the young which fly in 12-15 days. The song has regional dialects; 4-5 seconds long repeated 5-10 times a minute. Tends to flock together outside the breeding season - mainly in same sex flocks. So closely related to the Brambling that they have been known to interbreed.

Coot *Fulica Atra*

Eggs similar to the moorhen but more and finer markings. The coot has a white bill as opposed to the red of the moorhen. Aggressive in defence of territory. Dives for submerged plant life. Chicks have red heads and are independent after 8 weeks.

Crossbill *Loxia Curvirostra*

3-4 bluish-white eggs with purplish markings. Male red, female green. The mandibles of the beak are crossed to help with the extraction of seed from the cones of conifers. Also eats seeds of grasses, thistle, weeds, hawthorn, rowan, ivy etc., plus flies and beetles. Gregarious. Nests in conifers, one brood per year. Incubation 13-16 days, leave nest 2-3 weeks later but dependent on parents for a month afterwards. The bills are not crossed for the first three weeks.

Cuckoo *Cuculus Canorus*

In decline since the 1940's as a result of chemicals, loss of hedgerow, colder, damper springs and summers. It is the male bird that gives the distinctive call. Arrives from Africa in April. In May, the

mother lays up to 12 eggs, each in a different nest, having first ejected one egg. Host is normally a small bird. The hatched cuckoo ejects the other eggs.

[Curlew *Numenius Arquata*](#)

Breeds on the moors and overwinters on the coasts. Europe's largest wader.

[Dipper *Cinclus Cinclus*](#)

White eggs. Inhabits the Churnton Burn. White throat and breast, chestnut waistband, short tail. Plump and wren-like. Can walk under water against the stream looking for insects, tadpoles etc.. Often prefers to swim. Can spend the whole year on the same stretch of water. Lays late March, normally 5 eggs, beneath bridge or overhang. Chicks hatch in 15-18 days and fly in 3 weeks and can swim even earlier. Fed by both birds. Sweet warbling song.

[Dunnock *Prunella Modularis*](#)

Has been called the Hedge Sparrow but not related. Often chosen to rear Cuckoo chicks.

[Field Fare *Turdus Pilaris*](#)

A type of Thrush. Winter visitor. Grey head and rump, chestnut back, black tail and spotted underparts. Few breed here but arrive in Britain to overwinter. Noisy and gregarious. Eats seeds, insects and berries.

[Goldcrest *Regulus Regulus*](#)

Tiny and tame. Prefers coniferous woodland.

[Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps Cristatus*](#)

Not to be seen on Chisholme's lake but at Branxholme Loch nearby.

[Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*](#)

4-6 greyish-white, pale greenish blue eggs with sparse speckle of reddish-brown, black or lilac. Nests in any tree but not dense woodland. Starts breeding in late April/May. 2-3 broods per year.

[Gull, Black-headed *Larus Ridibundus*](#)

Gull, Common *Larus canus*

Not all that common except in Scotland and N.W. Ireland.

[Heron *Ardea cinerea*](#)

House Martin *Delichon urbica*

Summer visitor from Africa

[Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*](#)

[Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*](#)

Rounded and heavily speckled red eggs. Incubation 4 weeks by the female. Britain's commonest bird of prey. Hovers with head perfectly still and then drops in stages onto the victim. Numbers reduced in the 50's and 60's but now recovered.

Lapwing or Peewit *Vanellus vanellus*

Also known as the Green Plover

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

The commonest wild duck. Most domestic breeds derive from it.

Moorhen *Gallinula Chloropus*

Eggs buff with fine reddish-brown speckles. Red bill. Both moorhen and coot regularly breed on the lake. From Anglo-Saxon 'mor' - mere or bog. Found on any stretch of fresh water where it feeds on plants, seeds, insects, spiders and worms. Particularly long toes for spreading weight when walking on aquatic plants. No webbing, hence jerking of head when swimming. Can swim underwater and stay submerged when alarmed, with just the bill above the surface.

Owl, Barn *Tyto alba*

3-11 white eggs, depending on the food supply. Reputation as a bird of ill omen. Roosts in old barns and buildings etc.. Also natural holes in trees (Elm) and cliffs. Long breeding season from February onwards. Sometimes 2 broods. The male feeds the female for the 32-34 day incubation period. Hunts rats, mice and voles at night. The call is a prolonged shriek.

Owl, Tawny *Strix aluco*

Rounded white eggs. Single clutch of 1-7 laid at intervals of up to a week apart. Incubation starts with first egg so young vary greatly in size. To-whit-to-wooo. Nests in tree holes. Eats small mammals, birds, fish, worms and large insects. Owls are silent in flight because of soft plumage and comb-like leading edge to wing. Inhabits woodland and scattered mature timber.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

2-4 eggs in shallow scrape. Buff with bold blotches, fine speckles and streaks of blackish - brown Black and white plumage, orange bill. Shore bird but nests inland in north. Flocks overwinter here late summer to spring. When flocks break up, breeding occurs. South - mid April, north - May, June. One brood per year.

Partridge, Red-legged *Alectoris rufa*

10 - 20 eggs per clutch. French partridge. One seen here in 1988. Red bill, red legs, heavy barring on sides. Population derives from introductions, the first in 1673, more introduced 18-20th C, commonly from France and Spain. Today, does not occur north of the Midlands. In some areas, e.g. East Anglia, it outnumbers the native. Not popular with the sportsman as covey spreads and runs rather than flies. Heaths, Downs, ploughed fields, open countryside. Sometimes lays 2 clutches, one hatched by the male.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Originally from China, introduced late Middle Ages and common by the end of 18th C.

Pipit, Meadow *Anthus pratensis*

Like most birds which breed in open country, the meadow pipit has a conspicuous song flight.

Pipit, Rock *Anthus spinoletta*

Seen at Chisholme is the mountain race of the Rock Pipit, ie the Water Pipit.

Pochard, European *Aythya ferina*

Sometimes seen on the lake.

Raven *Corvus corax*

Largest of the crows. Once more common but now driven to the wilder parts by centuries of persecution.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

When it does nest here (which is seldom) it prefers rhododendrons, but essentially a visitor (Oct-April).

Reedling, Bearded *Panurus biarmicus*

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Scaup *Aythya marila*

Seen on Branxholme loch

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

Very pale blue eggs speckled. 3-5 Favours conifer seeds. Once restricted to Scottish Highlands but now widespread. Gregarious.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

3-5 off white or very pale green eggs speckled brown or olive. Widespread everywhere but avoids towns.

Sparrow Hawk *Accipiter nisus*

Rounded, blueish-white eggs with spots or blotches and streaks of chocolate-brown. Short rounded wings are ideal for woodland flying. Plucks its prey before eating it. Larch twigs favoured for nest building.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Swallow *Hirundo daurica*

Swan, Mute *Cygnus olor*

Winter visitors to the lake. So called because quiet birds relative to other swans.

Thrush, Mistle *Turdus viscivorus*

Also known as the 'storm cock' from its habit of continuing to sing in stormy weather.

Thrush, Song *Turdus philomelos*

Tit, Blue *Parus caeruleus*

Tit, Great *Parus major*

Tit, Long-tailed *Aegithalos caudatus*

In its nest, it has to hold its tail over its head.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Britain's commonest diving duck.

Wagtail, Grey *Motacilla cinerea*

Wagtail, Pied *Motacilla alba Yarellii*

Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Mainly a bird of upland Britain, heathlands and the coast, it arrives in March from Africa. 'Hwit' - white, 'oers' - rump. Anglo-Saxon

Wood Pigeon *Colomba palumbus*

Only bird with ability to swallow water rather than having to tip it down its throat

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

Pale fawn, speckled brown and grey eggs. Originally a wader which now prefers damp woodland with open clearings. Needs soft ground which it probes for insects etc.. Nests in shallow scrape in ground. Performs a territorial flight, 'roding', at dusk. Both parents tend young. At times of danger, freezes and relies on camouflage.

Woodpecker, Great Spotted *Dendropos major*

Present all year and migrants to Ireland. Both sexes drum as territorial exercise. Elaborate swirling flight as courtship display. Woodlands, but has spread to towns. Female incubates but both feed insects from the bill. Commonest of the woodpeckers. Male has red on rump, female does not have the neck colouring.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

5-8 white eggs, speckled black or reddish brown at larger end. Badly hit by severe winters, being small. Male builds a number of nests, the female choosing one and lining it with feathers before laying eggs