

Beginner's guide to birdwatching

Get to grips with identifying the
birds you see in and around London



London
Wildlife
Trust

Birdwatching can be done almost anywhere: in a park or garden in one of London Wildlife Trust's 36 nature reserves across London or just outside your window.

There's nothing more satisfying than being able to identify what you spot, and this guide will give you some tips on how to get started and some of the birds you are likely to see.



Getting started

What you might need

- Patience
- Binoculars (can be helpful)
- Bright calm weather (many birds 'disappear' in heavy rain)
- Practice!

How to start:

Visit your local park, look out your window, visit one of London Wildlife Trust's nature reserves.

When should you birdwatch?

The birds we've highlighted in this guide can be seen in London all year round.

Some things to consider

What season is it?

Some birds live in Britain all year round, some migrate from other countries at certain times of the year (some in the spring, others in the autumn)

What habitat are you in?

Some birds are more likely to be found in specific habitats, so consider your environment when trying to identify a bird.

Great tit

Defining features:

The great tit is a familiar garden bird with a black head, white cheeks, green back, yellow belly and black stripe down its breast. It is the largest of the tit family.



© Bob Coyle

● **Where to spot (habitat):**

Parks, gardens, woodland, wetlands with trees & scrub

● **Where to spot (locations):**

Woodberry Wetlands, Centre for Wild Gardening,
Totteridge Fields

● **When to see:**

All year round

● **Listen out for:**

A distinctive repetitive song that sounds like a bicycle bump and a “teacher teacher” call

Goldfinch

Defining features:

The goldfinch is a small, brilliantly colourful finch that is gingery-brown above and pale below, with black-and-yellow wings, a black crown, white cheeks and a bright red face. Have a distinctive rapid-fluttering undulating flight.



© Jon Hawkins - Surrey Hills Photography

● **Where to spot (habitat):**

Gardens, parks, scrub, wasteland and meadows with clumps of tall vegetation - such as teasels and thistles

● **Where to spot (locations):**

Centre for Wildlife Gardening, Hutchinson's Bank, Farm Bog, Yeading Brook Meadows

● **When to see:**

All year round but some will migrate as far south as Spain to avoid the worst of the harsh weather in winter. Increasingly common due to bird-feeding in London and other conurbations

● **Listen out for:**

A cheerful song that is often described as twittering

Coot

Defining features:

The coot can be distinguished from the similar-looking moorhen by its larger size, entirely black body (with no white patches), white 'feathery' feet, and bright white bill. Coots spend much of their time away from the bankside, diving for food.



● **Where to spot (habitat):**

Lakes, ponds, and open water, including in parks, and slow-flowing rivers and canals, wetlands and reservoirs

● **Where to spot (locations):**

Woodberry Wetlands, Park Road Pond, Camley Street Natural Park but any park that has a sizeable pond

● **When to see:**

All year round, very common

● **Listen out for:**

A loud, sharp 'pitt' - especially around feeding time

Pied wagtail

Defining features:

The pied wagtail is a familiar black-and-white bird, with a white face, white belly, and white bars on the wings.



© Chris Lawrence

● **Where to spot (habitat):**

Inner-city open spaces, car-parks, streets, parks, and recreation grounds

● **Where to spot (locations):**

Walthamstow Wetlands, Clapham Common, Camley Street Natural Park, South Bank

● **When to see:**

All year round. In winter they often gather in large numbers in trees

● **Listen out for:**

A sweet, twittering song and a high-pitched “chis-ick” call often heard in flight

Blackcap

Defining features:

The blackcap is dark grey; males sport the black cap they are named after, while females have a gingery-brown cap. Easily confused with the marsh tit and willow tit, it can be distinguished by the lack of a black bib.



© Jon Hawkins - Surrey Hills Photography

● **Where to spot (habitat):**

Woodland, scrub, parks, and gardens

● **Where to spot (locations):**

Braeburn Park, Ickenham Marsh, Dollypers Hills, Denham Lock Wood, New Cross Gate Cutting

● **When to see:**

Mostly a spring migrant but can often be seen in gardens in winter. Increasingly resident all year round in London, due to relative warmth of the city

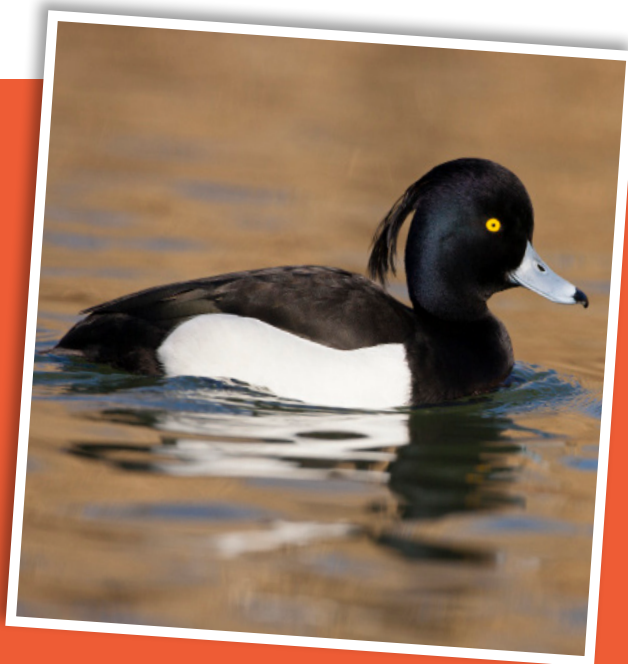
● **Listen out for:**

A chattering warbling song that breaks into louder, clearer flute-like notes bump and a “teacher teacher” call

Tufted duck

Defining features:

The tufted duck is very distinctive: the female is entirely a rich chocolate-brown, while the male is black with bright white flanks and a long tuft at the back of the head.



© Guy Edwardes/2020VISION

● Where to spot (habitat):

Lakes, reservoirs and large ponds, slow-flowing rivers and canals

● Where to spot (locations):

Walthamstow Wetlands, Woodberry Wetlands, Burgess Park, Welsh Harp

● When to see:

All year round, the second-commonest duck in London after mallard

● Listen out for:

A harsh crow-like call

Goldcrest

Defining features:

A tiny bird, the goldcrest is olive-green above, buff-white below, with a double white wingbar. The male has a bright orange crown, edged with black; while the female has a yellow crown.



© John Bridges

● **Where to spot (habitat):**

Woodlands, scrub, parks and gardens with mature tree cover

● **Where to spot (locations):**

Sydenham Hill Wood, Brookmill Park, Walthamstow Wetlands, Oak Hill Wood

● **When to see:**

All year round but in autumn, resident birds are joined by large numbers on migration. It is elusive, so be patient!

● **Listen out for:**

A high-pitched song (so high-pitched that it can't always be heard by everyone)

Long-tailed tit

Defining features:

The long-tailed tit does, indeed, have a long black-and-white tail that is bigger than its body. It has a black, white and pink back, a white head with a wide, black eyestripe, and a pale pink belly.



© Jon Hawkins - Surrey Hills Photography

● Where to spot (habitat):

Woodland, scrub, parks and gardens, and other habitats where clusters of tall trees are present

● Where to spot (locations):

Totteridge Fields, Crane Park Island, Ten Acre Wood, Gunnersbury Triangle, Sydenham Hill Wood, Bramley Bank

● When to see:

All year round and in winter can be spotted roaming about in flocks of 20 or more

● Listen out for:

A high-pitched twittering song and a call that sounds like “tsee-tsee-tsee”

Little egret

Defining features:

The little egret is a white heron with black legs and yellow feet. It has a black bill and long plumes on its head and neck during the breeding season. The similar great white egret, also occasionally found here, is taller with yellow legs and bill.



© Gary Cox

● **Where to spot (habitat):**

Wetlands, lakes, reedbeds, grazing marsh and occasionally woodland (they nest in trees)

● **Where to spot (locations):**

Denham Lock Wood, Walthamstow Wetlands, Wilderness Island

● **When to see:**

All year round, increasingly common London after first breeding here - at Walthamstow Reservoirs - in 2006

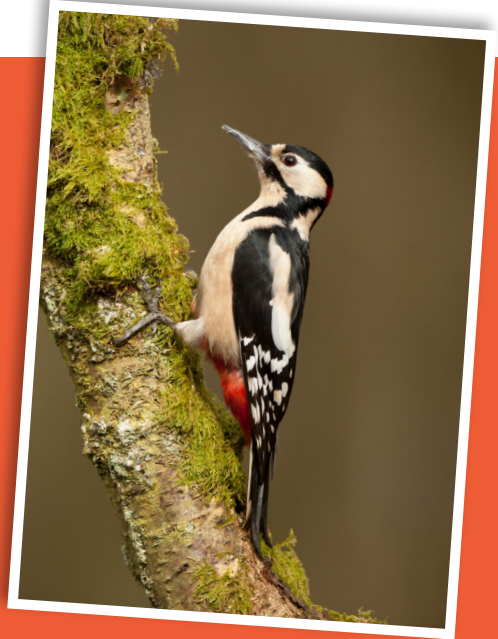
● **Listen out for:**

A harsh 'khaah'

Great spotted woodpecker

Defining features:

The great spotted woodpecker is black and white, with white shoulder patches and red underneath the tail. Males have a red patch at the back of the head. Only likely to be confused with the lesser spotted woodpecker which is much smaller (and now virtually absent from London). Has a characteristic undulating flight.



© Mark Hamblin/2020VISION

● **Where to spot (habitat):**

Woodland, parks and gardens with mature trees, veteran trees

● **Where to spot (locations):**

Crane Park Island, Gutteridge Wood, Sydenham Hill Wood, Oak Hill Wood, Denham Lock Wood, Threecorner Grove, Richmond Park

● **When to see:**

All year round

● **Listen out for:**

A “yik yik” sounding call and the familiar drumming on a tree trunk



**Need
more help
identifying**

**Head to our website:
wildlondon.org.uk/wildlife-explorer/birds**

© Eleanor Church

About us

London Wildlife Trust is a driving force for nature conservation across the capital. With our dedicated supporters and volunteers, we work tirelessly to protect wildlife across London.

We take action every day to help wildlife flourish through practical conservation work; we engage, inspire and enable people to connect with nature; and through campaigns and consultancy, we give wildlife a voice.

We can't do any of this without our members and volunteers, who help make sure that nature can thrive across London, now and in the future.

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