



# IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

## Birds of the high uplands

We urgently need your help  
to monitor upland wildlife

### Make your sightings count!

Upland habitats are special places for people and wildlife, but land-use and climate are changing. How are Scotland's wild lands responding, and what are the impacts on our cherished wildlife? The truth is we don't know. **Not enough people are looking.** By taking the simple step of recording the wildlife that you see when you are exploring the high uplands of Scotland **you really can make a difference.**

### Submit your records!

Your wildlife sightings **really are important.** Please be sure to tell us what you see. For casual sightings of upland birds you can submit your records in three easy ways:

1. **By email.** Contact [whatsup@bto.org](mailto:whatsup@bto.org). Please include details of the species, number seen, date and location (6-figure National Grid Reference).
2. On the **BirdTrack website**. Register for an account then submit data online.
3. Using the **BirdTrack app** (Android and iPhone).

**Why not walk a transect?** Enjoy a hill walk as normal, but note the birds that you see in each 1km grid square above 750m, noting down your sightings on the special recording form.



#### Learn more

Visit the [What's Up?](http://www.whatsup.org) web pages for details of how to take part, information about upland change or to learn about the BirdTrack website and app. Go to [www.bto.org/whatsup](http://www.bto.org/whatsup). Smartphone users can scan this QR code.

This project has been generously supported by Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and is being delivered with the kind help of several other partners.

Address: BTO Scotland, University of Stirling, FK9 4LA Email: [whatsup@bto.org](mailto:whatsup@bto.org)

Registered Charity No 216652 (England and Wales) SC039193 (Scotland).  
Company Limited by Guarantee No.357284 (England & Wales).

  
**Scottish Natural Heritage**  
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba  
All of nature for all of Scotland  
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad



**What's Up?**

*Monitoring change in Scotland's uplands*



**BTO**

Looking out for birds

## Game birds & Waders

**Game birds:** Chicken-like birds with bulky bodies and small heads.  
**Waders:** long-legged birds, frequently running and then pausing to feed. Fast flyers.



**DOTTEREL**

Breeds on **high mountain tops** on moss-covered heath. Despite bright colours can be well camouflaged. Very approachable.



**DUNLIN**

Found on blanket bog. Tiny (much smaller than Golden Plover). Fast, twisting flight, with **rolling 'krreeeee' call**.



**GOLDEN PLOVER**

Favours short turf on moors and grassland. **Often stands on a small mound**, alert. Mournful, liquid 'pyou' call and melancholy display flight 'ooh-eeh-ooh'. Female less strongly marked.



**SNIPE**



Blackbird sized



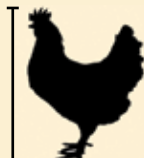
Straight beak as long as body. Favours wet areas and may stand on posts or outcrops. Sometimes **flies out from underfoot**, with twisting, rising flight. Distinctive 'drumming' display causes strange whirring sound.

Low, fast flight with quick bursts and glides. **Explosive 'go-back, go-back' call**. Always in or near heather and may suddenly fly off from very close by.

**RED GROUSE**



Chicken sized

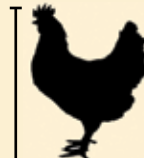


Mottled, and greyer-brown than Red Grouse in summer. White in winter. Likes rocky areas or short vegetation (<5cm), above 700m. Often approachable. **Distinctive croaking call**.

**PTARMIGAN**



Chicken sized



## Birds of Prey & crow family

Large birds, generally wary, most often seen in flight.

**BUZZARD**

A brownish large bird-of-prey. Broad wings with 'fingered' tips. Plumage varies but often shows pale breast band.

**Frequently soars or circles** without flapping but sometimes 'hovers' briefly into headwind.



**HOODED/CARRION CROW**



A scavenger with 'solid' body and stout beak. Carrion (S&E Scotland) all black, Hoodie (N&W) with grey body. **Call a harsh 'aaaar'**, often repeated three times.



City pigeon sized



**KESTREL**

A small bird-of-prey with slender, pointed wings. **Frequently hovers for long periods**, sometimes dropping lower for a closer look. Warm brown upper-parts, paler underneath.



Larger than a crow



**RAVEN**

Much larger than Crows, with heavier beak. Often heard first, with **distinctive deep, croaking 'prruk'**, repeated several times. In flight, cross-shaped body and wings, with tapered tail.



## Songbirds 1

Frequently encountered, generally small birds with high-pitched tuneful songs.



### WHEATEAR

Favours short turf and rocky outcrops. Often perches on boulders giving 'wheet tack tack' call (like someone making a 'tutting' noise).

Commonly seen flying away showing **prominent white rump**. Females browner and less well marked.



### PIED WAGTAIL

Black and white pattern and **constantly bobbing long tail**, with comical waddling run/walk. Undulating flight (~). Approachable.

Call a distinctive 'chis-sick'. Feeds on insects.



### SNOW BUNTING

Chunky with white in the wings and tail. Summer male is black and white with stout black beak. Female has some brown on head and back. **Call is a high-pitched trill**.

In winter, both sexes are warm-brown and white with yellow beaks.



## Songbirds 2



Blackbird sized



### RING OUZEL

Shy. Like a blackbird with a white 'necklace'. Favours short grass near crags and scree. Sings loudly from isolated rocks or trees. **Alarm call a nervous 'chack, chack'**. Females brown and less well marked.



Golf ball sized



### WREN

A tiny, shy bird with a powerful voice (also commonly found in gardens). Skulks in vegetation or among boulders. **Short, often cocked tail**. Often heard first, with sharp, scolding 'tick, tick, tick' and trill alarm calls.



### SKYLARK

Often heard but not seen, hovering high above and **singing non-stop**. A beautiful, continuous flow of variable song. Brownish with white tummy. Bulkier than Meadow Pipit with small crest often visible.



Larger than a Robin



### MEADOW PIPIT

Small, streaky brown bird commonly found in open ground. Never appears crested. Call a **mouse-like 'seet, seet, seet'**. Display flight – 'parachuting' down with open wings, with a song which sounds like a 'squeaky bike wheel accelerating downhill'.



Display flight

Robin sized





LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL

Dark, slate grey back and **bright yellow beak and legs**. In upland areas, will be looking for food and may linger near picnicking hillwalkers.

Larger than a crow



COMMON GULL

Pale grey back, **greenish legs and 'kind' face**. In upland areas, will be looking for food and may linger near picnicking hillwalkers.

Crow sized



## IDENTIFICATION TIPS

When picking up a bird book, it is natural to look at the colours and patterns of the birds. Often these look similar, giving the impression that bird identification is 'hard'.

Thankfully, there are lots of other (often more useful) things to look for which mean that perfect views are often not necessary – helpful when the bird is distant, poorly lit and you do not have binoculars. Try noticing:

**Behaviour** – is it flying, hopping, or walking? How does it move? Is it shy or very approachable? What is it feeding on? Does it bob up and down when walking or in flight?

**Shape** – is it slender (e.g. Meadow Pipit) or chunky (e.g. Skylark)? Is it short- or long-tailed? Are the wings pointed or blunt? What shape are the neck, head and tail? Is the beak thin or stout?

**Size** – compare it to birds that you know, such as a Robin, Blackbird or pigeon (see silhouettes).

**Song/call** – is the noise high or low-pitched, musical or harsh? Is the song the same each time (e.g. Wren) or is it long and very variable (e.g. Skylark)? Is it singing from a rock, tree or in flight?

**Taking things further:** The birds illustrated in this guide are generally males, as seen in the summer months. We have described the females in the text, where these differ. There may be forms, such as juveniles or winter birds, which this guide does not describe.

If you would like to fine-tune your skills, visit the '[What's Up?](http://www.bto.org/whats-up)' website for details of training courses and recommended bird identification resources.

These silhouettes may help you to judge the sizes of birds. These show (from left to right) Robin, Blackbird, city pigeon, crow and chicken.



MOUNTAIN HARE

The only **rabbit-like mammal** likely to be seen in the high uplands. White or grey in winter, brown in summer. Feeds on grass during the summer months.

Mating begins at the end of January and the leverets (baby hares) are born between March and August.



BLAEBERRY BUMBLEBEE

The bright orange-red fur extends over **most of the abdomen** (not just the tip of the tail). Two yellow bands on the thorax (upper body). Associated with upland habitats, feeding on heather, blaeberry and other wildflowers.



MOUNTAIN RINGLET

Small and dark brown with a row of **black-centred orange eyespots** on both upper and underwing. White legs and antennae. Similar to Scotch Argus, which has white dots in the eyespots. Short flight period from late June to early August. Most active in sunshine.

## We are grateful to the following for allowing the use of their photographs/illustrations:

PHOTOS: Carl Baggott (bagawildone.blogspot.co.uk) - Ptarmigan (cover photo); Derek Belsey – Snipe, Wheatear; Neil Calbrade – Hooded Crow; Nigel Clark – Golden Plover; Ben Darvill – Kestrel; Paul Doherty – Buzzard; Peter Eeles - Mountain Ringlet; Edmund Fellowes – Dotterel, Dunlin, Ptarmigan, Raven, Red Grouse, Snow Bunting; Ian Fozzard (Bumblebee Conservation Trust collection) – Blaeberry Bumblebee; Tommy Holden – Common Gull, Ring Ouzel; Jill Pakenham – Carrion Crow, Pied Wagtail, Skylark, Wren; Richard Vaughan – Lesser Black-backed Gull; Peter M Wilson – Mountain Hare; Steve Gantlett (Birding World) – Meadow Pipit.

ILLUSTRATIONS: Mike Langman