

CORVIDS

Crows have a mixed reputation in gardens. Their intelligence and curiosity has meant they are sometimes persecuted, though less so now than in the past. This same behaviour can make them one of the most rewarding garden birds to watch and follow. It is probably for these reasons that the corvids are so present in folklore and superstition.

Several species are distinctive enough to be told apart at a glance, but there are pitfalls – particularly among the entirely black species. Fortunately, our gardens give us opportunities to watch these birds more closely than in open countryside, and we can begin to notice what makes each species unique.

CARRION CROW

Found in many habitats, this is a common and 'typical' black crow. Uniformly black, glossy-looking plumage, with dark legs and beak. The base of the beak is feathered. Sometimes urban juveniles can have paler wing feathers due to poor diet. Their call is generally a simple "caw" with a more raucous alarm sound. In flight, they have a slightly rounded tail and broad wings.



Slimmer bill than Raven

HOODED CROW

The most common crow in Ireland and the Isle of Man, Hooded Crows are the same size and build as Carrion Crows, with a distinctive pale cowl extending across the underside and back. In Scotland it is common to see hybrids between Hooded and Carrion Crows, particularly where the two populations meet. The hybrids typically have less 'clear' markings than Hooded Crows, with more black on the underparts and back. Their calls are also very similar, a trumpeting "creeaa-creeaa-creeaa" sound.



JACKDAW

These widespread small corvids are very comfortable in urban environments, nesting in chimneys, churches, tree cavities and large nest boxes. They have dark grey plumage with a paler grey nape, and distinctive pale blue-grey eyes. In gardens they are often seen feeding on invertebrates in lawns. They are rarely seen away from their partner, and even in large flocks pairs can be made out. Their call sounds similar to a squeaky dog toy.



ADULT

JUVENILE



MAGPIE

A distinctive bird, with striking black and white colouration and subtle iridescence. The long tail means they are distinctive even in profile. Inquisitive and clever, they seem to be constantly on the search for food, a habit which sometimes puts them into conflict with farmers and gamekeepers. Widespread across most of the UK and Ireland, except northern Scotland.



Thicker bill than
Carrion Crow

RAVEN

The largest corvid in the UK and a rare garden visitor, preferring open countryside. Black in colour, with a thick bill and shaggy throat feathers. In flight, they have a wedge-shaped tail. They are more likely to be encountered flying over a garden than visiting, but they may come to large rural gardens, or those near Raven hotspots. Their call is a low gravelly "cronk", which can sound quite goose-like.

ADULT



ROOK

Similar in size to Carrion Crows, Rooks also have black plumage, a notable big beak, with pale skin in adults. In flight, they have a long, rounded tail. Rooks are associated with farmland, where big flocks can be seen working through fields looking for grubs and other morsels. Rural gardens are most likely to report Rooks, but they can show up in urban areas taking advantage of feeding stations.

JUVENILE



JAY

There are no other regular garden visitors that are likely to be mistaken for Jays, with their easily identifiable mix of colours. Traditionally a bird of oak woodland, our gardens can also be very productive for them, particularly if there are mature trees present with nuts that they can cache in autumn. They will often announce themselves with a harsh call that is sometimes described as cat-like.

