



The Green Woodpecker

There are three species of woodpecker in the UK. There are the two black and white woodpeckers, namely the Great-Spotted Woodpecker, which often comes in to gardens and the Lesser-Spotted Woodpecker which is increasingly rare these days. The third woodpecker is the Green Woodpecker and it is the largest of the three.

The Green Woodpecker is an unmistakable bird. The adult is green with paler underparts, and it has a red cap. Both male and female have a moustache but the male's moustache has a red centre. They both have a yellow rump and the tips of the wings and tail are dark. Youngsters tend to be duller in comparison and are much striated. Their red cap is not as bright as the adult's. If you see a Green Woodpecker flying, you will note it is with an undulating manner.

It is a bird of deciduous woodland, farmland, parkland and mature gardens. They do not visit bird tables but you may see them on your lawn. This is because their main diet consists of ants and their grubs whose nests are usually quite prolific in gardens. They love ants and are known to eat about 2,000 a day. The woodpecker has a long sharp bill which it will use to open up an ant's nest. As the ants spill out to protect their nest, the woodpecker will eat them up with its long sticky tongue. If you ever find any Green Woodpecker droppings you will see that it is full of huge numbers of ant body parts. They also eat wood-boring insects and their larvae and you may see them climbing up trees looking for these. Sometimes you may hear the Green Woodpecker before you see it as they have a distinct call known as a 'yaffle' which makes them sound as if they are laughing. In some countryside areas, the bird was once known as the 'Yaffle' and in others it was also called the 'Rainfowl' as it was often associated with rain. They rarely drum like the other woodpeckers but still excavate their nest holes in trees. They tend to be solitary most of the year but during the breeding season the same couples will get together and breed. The female will only lay one clutch of four to six eggs a year.



The Green Woodpecker is a fascinating bird and if you are fortunate to see one on your lawn, it will keep you entertained for quite a while as it searches for ants.

Jean Parrott

Jean is a voluntary Ambassador for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Garden BirdWatch scheme in Nottinghamshire. If you are interested in birds and other wildlife which visit your garden, BTO / GBW may be perfect for you. If you would like a free information pack, please contact Jean at jpbirds@talktalk.net

