



Looking out for birds

The Nuthatch

You are very likely to encounter the Nuthatch if you visit Clumber Park, Sherwood Forest or Rufford Abbey as this species is a woodland bird and often you will see it fly down to the food stations which are usually scattered around these places. If you live close to an area of woodland, you may, therefore, be fortunate enough to have the Nuthatch visit your garden.

It is a small active bird, with a large head and short tail and it is about the size of a Great Tit. It has a greyish-blue back and orange-buff underparts. It has a black eye stripe and a long dagger-like bill which is not dissimilar to a woodpecker's bill. It uses this bill to probe for insects and beetles underneath bark, and when eating seeds or large nuts, it will place a one of these in a crevice and then proceed to hack away at it. It is thought the name Nuthatch comes from the Middle English 'nuthak' which means nut hacker. The bird also has powerfully strong legs and claws which enable it to work its way underneath branches and crawl down a tree trunk, face down. No other British birds can do this.

During summer it will eat mainly invertebrates but as winter approaches, it will eat seeds, hazelnuts, beech mast and acorns. It will also cache its food. It will visit bird tables and feeders where you may notice its intolerance of other birds. Because the bird is sedentary, it is highly territorial and will often bully other species. Nuthatches are monogamous and a pair will maintain the same territory throughout the year. They therefore get to know their "patch" very well.

In the breeding season, the female will find a hole in a tree or possibly a bird box in which to nest. She will line it with bark chippings from conifers. If the size of the entrance hole is too large, she will collect mud to make it smaller. The male will feed her while she is incubating.

The Nuthatch is doing quite well and since the 1970's it has increased its range dramatically. Before the 1990's it was only found in England and Wales but now it has established itself in southern Scotland. How satisfying to know, that a bird species is flourishing rather than declining.

Jean Parrott



Jean is a voluntary Ambassador for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Garden BirdWatch scheme. If you enjoy participating in the RSPB's Big Garden Bird Watch which is on 24th and 25th January 2015, why not join the BTO's Garden BirdWatch scheme which you can do all year round. For details, contact Jean on 0770 4809741 or jpbirds@talktalk.net

Nuthatch by John Godfree / BTO