

## The Pied Wagtail

Whenever I see a Pied Wagtail, I am always reminded of John Clare's poem entitled "Little Trotty Wagtail". Clare, who wrote many poems about the natural world, wrote this little ditty when he was in Northampton Asylum. It is an amusing little poem which well describes the mannerisms of this characterful black and white bird which is small in size and has a long tail and, in the words of Clare, waggles its tail and 'nimbles' about. Indeed, it seems to be always active as it searches about for insects which make up most of its diet. Its fine bill is perfectly designed for this purpose.

The Pied Wagtail tends to visit my garden only during very cold winters and when there is snow on the ground. However, I often see it flying around my vicinity at most times of the year and usually its call brings it to my attention. I also sometimes see it on the roof tops of nearby houses.

Once considered to be a species in its own right, it is now classed as a race of the continental White Wagtail which is very similar but has a grey back rather than a black back. If you travel to mainland Europe, it will be the White Wagtail you see.

The Pied Wagtail is usually found by rivers, streams and other stretches of water. Austin Dobbs in his book "The Birds of Nottinghamshire" remarked that the Pied Wagtail is a great follower of the plough and notes that at winter fishing matches it is partial to raiding the maggot tin. The species is equally at home in built up areas and may be found in supermarket car parks or around factories, hospitals and sewage treatment works. During winter at dusk, huge numbers of these birds will congregate in communal roosts. In the



countryside their natural roost is in reed beds but in towns and cities they will roost in trees, and on or in buildings. In Nottingham city centre, high numbers are known to roost in the few trees that are dotted about. All these places offer security, warmth and shelter from the elements.

Although this endearing little bird may not make that many appearances in your garden, do look out for it and read John Clare's poem, which I am sure you will agree gives a very apt description of this bird.

*Jean Parrott*

*Photo: Pied Wagtail by Jean Parrott*

*Jean is a voluntary Ambassador for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Garden BirdWatch scheme in Nottinghamshire. If you are interested in participating in the scheme, contact her on 0770 4809741 [orjpbirds@talktalk.net](mailto:orjpbirds@talktalk.net) for a free information pack.*