

The Song Thrush



The first Sunday in May is an important day for birds, not that they realise that of course, but on that day we humans will be celebrating International Dawn Chorus Day. At this time of year, bird song will be reaching a crescendo and one of the most beautiful songs to hear is that of the Song Thrush. It is quite easy to recognise the song of this bird as it repeats its song phrases. You may recall Robert Browning's poem "Home thoughts from abroad" in which he describes it thus,

*'That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,
Lest you think he could never recapture the first fine careless rapture'.*

It's easy to be confused between the Song Thrush and the Mistle Thrush. The Song Thrush is the smaller of the two birds and it is a warm brown colour. Its speckles, which are smaller and fewer, are like arrowheads on a buff background and become more elongated and rounded on the belly and flanks. The Mistle Thrush is a grey brown colour, has heavier speckling on a white background and its stance is more upright. The mannerisms between the two species also differ. The Song Thrush is rather a shy bird unlike the feisty Mistle Thrush and it often gets intimidated by another member of the Thrush family, the Blackbird.

You may be surprised to learn that in the early twentieth century, the Song Thrush was more abundant than the Blackbird. Between 1970 and 2010 the Song Thrush population declined by 54% and as a result is red listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC). The use of pesticides is one cause of its decline. This has led to adults being unable to supply their fledglings with enough food and many perish within their first year. The main source of food of the Song Thrush is the earthworm but if it can't find earthworms it will turn to eating snails. This occurs mainly when it is hot and dry or when the ground is frozen, making it harder to penetrate through the hard soil. To extract the snail, it will use a stone as an anvil and smash the shell until the snail can be easily removed. During the winter months, it will also eat berries. It does not, however, use hanging feeders, preferring to feed on the ground. On Sunday 3rd May, rise early and listen to the dawn chorus and you may just pick out the sound of the Song Thrush.



Song Thrush by Peter Howlett / BTO

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Jean is a voluntary Ambassador for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Garden BirdWatch scheme in Nottinghamshire. If you enjoy watching birds and other creatures in your garden, then BTO/GBW may be perfect for you. If you would like to receive more information about the scheme, contact Jean at jpbirds@talktalk.net