



Looking out for birds

## The Spotted Flycatcher

Many of us are familiar with summer visiting birds such as Swallows and Martins but one bird which is not quite as well known and often overlooked is the Spotted Flycatcher. It is not as colourful as the previously mentioned birds but it is a very attractive and dainty bird.

It may be found in churchyards, cemeteries, parks, mature gardens and broadleaf woodlands which have open glades. It mainly overwinters in West Africa, although some travel from as far as South Africa. It is a late summer migrant and usually arrives in Britain during the second half of May. It often returns each year to the same nest to breed and the female will lay one or sometimes two clutches of eggs. Despite this, the Spotted Flycatcher doesn't linger around for long and come August, it will start to return back to Africa.

The species is grey-brown in colour and its breast is pale and striated rather than spotted. The young however are quite speckled. It is the size of a Robin but sleeker. It is its habit of catching insects which makes it a delight to watch. It will perch on a branch and wait for an insect to pass by, then it will dart out to catch the insect, and return to the same perch again. It not only eats flies but also butterflies, damselflies, and bees and wasps and is also known to feed off insects at night which are attracted to street lamps.



Spotted Flycatcher by Jean Parrott

Spotted Flycatchers normally nest in holes in walls or on ledges and will also use an open nest box with a low front. A climbing plant such as Ivy will help to hide the nest so it is not too exposed. It was thought that the Spotted Flycatcher was once a regular victim of the Cuckoo but a recent discovery has shown that it is one of a few species which can tell the difference between its own eggs and those of the Cuckoo. As a result, it is no longer victimised.

Unfortunately, like many other species of birds, the Spotted Flycatcher has declined and is now on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC). Thirty years ago, there were six times as many of these birds breeding in this country. If you live in a rural area and have a mature garden, you may be able to help this bird by attracting it to a nest box.

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