

## FRIENDS OF



## ASTON'S EYOT

# Hints for recognising bird song

- Start close to home – in your garden or around the streets where you live. You see these birds every day but maybe take them for granted. Take more notice of them and try to memorise their songs and calls. Try to link the song to the image of the bird.
- Do the same when you are walking in your local area – Aston's Eyot is ideal as there is a wide range of resident and migrant birds, as well as water birds.
- Whenever you hear a call or song you don't recognise, try to track it down to see which bird is making the sound – it's easier to remember a song or call when you have seen the bird making it.
- Soon you will have a base of knowledge that can be extended as time goes on. This helps with the process of elimination when trying to identify unrecognised songs and calls – *It sounds like a blackbird but ..... ie 'Same same but different'*

Once you have built up a basic knowledge of the commonest birds you will find that you recognise a song but can't remember which bird you should attach it to. Here are a few pointers to help remind you how to tell similar sounding songs apart, by linking hints to the names of the birds -

### Mnemonics for distinguishing similar bird songs

#### **Robin/Wren/Dunnock**

To a beginner, these three birds can be confused. To separate them try to remember:

**Wistful Wobin** – thin wistful fluting

**Ringing Wren** – a long, powerful trill in the middle of the song

**Diddly-diddly Dunnock** – a very even, level, 'diddly-diddly' song

#### **Blackbird/Song Thrush/Mistle Thrush**

Similarly, these three can easily be confused so....

**Beautiful Blackbird** – probably needs no introduction

**Say it twice Song Thrush** – similar to a Blackbird but higher pitched and repeats phrases

**Mournful Mistle Thrush** – similar to Blackbird but song has a mournful tone, singing for shorter time and ending on an upward, questioning note. Likes the tops of large trees.

### Great Tit/Coal Tit/Blue Tit

**Great Tit** – its most common call sounds like ‘*Great Tit, Great Tit*’ or as is often said – ‘*Tea-cher, Tea-cher*’. But remember that Great Tits have numerous other calls. Bill Oddie says that if you know most woodland birds and hear something you can’t recognise, it is probably a Great Tit.

**Coal Tit** – sounds like the Great Tit ‘*Tea-cher*’ call but less powerful and a bit wheezy – having spent too much time down the coal mine!

**Blue Tee Tee Tee Tit Tit Tit** – common call ‘*Tee tee tee, tit tit tit*’

### Wood Pigeon/Collared Dove

**Collared Dove** – a three note call – *Do Doo Do*

**Wood D D Pigeon** – a five note call, similar to a Collared Dove but finishing with an extra two ‘*Du Du*’ notes.– *Do Doo Do, Du Du*

### Chaffinch/Willow Warbler/Chiffchaff

**Cha-Cha-Cha, Cha-Cha-Cha, Cha-Cha-Cha Chaffinch** – a series of descending notes finishing with a flourish of notes. Chaffinches also often make a plaintive ‘*chink chink*’ call, so also think of the **Chink Chink Chaffinch**.

**Willow Warbler** - also sings a series of descending notes, like a soft Chaffinch song, but with no flourish at the end.

While we’re on Willow Warblers, their plumage is almost identical to the -

**Chiffchaff** - but their call is easy to remember as it says its own name – ‘*chiff/chaff chiff/chaff chiff/chaff*’ and so sounds nothing like a Willow Warbler.

### Crow/Rook/Jackdaw

Like the Chiffchaff, their names are perhaps onomatopoeic -

**Carrion Crow** – a harsh and longish ‘crow’

**Jackdaw** – a shorter, higher pitched ‘jack’

**Rook** – very similar to a Crow but only likely to be heard in the countryside. If you’re in a town, that very large black bird is likely to be a crow.

### Blackcap/Garden Warbler/Whitethroat

**Blackcap** – a rich and varied warble, usually starting with a chattering and finishing with a flourish of flute-like notes. Some people say that you when they get into their rhythm you can detect ‘*duty day/duty done/duty day/duty done*’.

**Garden Warbler – ‘Garbled Warbler’** - very similar to the Blackcap but it’s song is often longer lasting with shorter pauses and is less varied – goes on a bit. They usually sing from a well concealed perch, which adds to the difficulty of identifying the bird.

**Whitethroat – ‘I am a Whitethroat’** – song more scratchy than the Blackcap and includes a frequent five/six note phrase which sounds like ‘*I am a Whitethroat*’. In early spring does prominent ascending/descending song flights.

### **A few other hints.....**

**Green Finch - Green Beret Finch** – staccato, machine gun like piping notes followed by several ‘peow, peow’ notes – like a little boy playing soldiers

**Peeping Bullfinch** – short, thin, single peeping note

**Reed Bunting – Roadie Bunting** – ‘one two, one two, one’

### **Finally.....**

To improve your bird recognition do get an audio or audio-visual guide to birds. These come in all forms these days – not just CDs but DVD ROMs, MP3 files and apps for your iPhone.

Probably the best option for a beginner is the *DVD-ROM Guide to British Birds - Concise Edition (PC DVD)* which is only £14.99 plus £3.99 postage from Birdguides -

<http://www.birdguides.com/estore/p-856-dvd-rom-guide-to-british-birds-concise-edition.aspx>

If you think you might want a bigger range of birds there is the *DVD-ROM Guide to British Birds – Version 9* for £39.99 plus postage, also from Birdguides.

The Birdguides website - <http://www.birdguides.com/home/default.asp> is full of useful information about birds and produces loads of good publications.

Another useful website for easy access to bird songs is <http://www.garden-birds.co.uk/information/tutorials/tutorial01.htm>

And don't forget that our very own <http://friendsofastonseyot.org.uk/> has lists of all the birds sighted on Aston's Eyot in recent years.

And remember, birds don't make life simple for us by having only one song. They often have variations on their songs, completely different songs and various contact calls which all add to the challenge!!! Have fun!!

Tim Lee