

Country Notes for March 2025

It is so easy to take our birds for granted – but they are truly remarkable in so many ways. Unlike us they can walk and fly, although some do hop rather than walk! With few days of winter left and hopefully warmer days to come it is worth reflecting that on the very coldest of days, when we hide away in our warm homes, they spend the night in often minus temperatures and still manage, on the whole, to survive. The smallest weigh less than an ounce with our smallest bird, the goldcrest, weighing less than a quarter of an ounce. How do they cope in such cold conditions?! With spring arriving later in the month it is certain that they will be even more pleased than we humans!

One family of birds that are very easy to overlook are the wagtails. The most frequently seen are the pied wagtails, which are probably best described as looking like very small magpies, with their long tails and black and white plumage. Our pied wagtails in this country are actually a sub species of the white wagtail of continental Europe. The only real difference is that pied wagtails have a black head and back but white wagtails have a black head but a grey back. In the southern counties of England we do sometimes see white wagtails and I feel certain that, to complicate things, they do sometimes inter-breed!

The only other wagtail we are likely to see in our villages is the grey wagtail, which rather confusingly has a yellow stomach: confusing because there are also yellow wagtails as well! Grey wagtails tend to stay near water and can be seen in and around our village streams. Yellow wagtails are however summer visitors to this country and are completely yellow. They also prefer open marshland, wet pastures and upland hay meadows which means that we are very unlikely to see them in our villages.

All the wagtails are distinguished by their constantly bobbing long tails when on the ground and a rattling, tinkling call when in flight. They are all worth looking out for as they are very beautiful indeed.

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