



©Margaret Holland

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## Green Woodpecker

*Picus viridis*

A monotone, piercing, laughter like call follows the flash of a dazzling yellow rump exploding from the grass in an undulating torpedo flight heading towards the nearest tree, this is the typical first encounter with a green woodpecker. Wait a while and it will almost certainly return to continue probing the ground again, where it spends much of its time searching for ants and other small invertebrates. Both male and female are fitted out in matching olive wings, an apple green back, and a scarlet crown which on the male comes complete with matching moustache.

### find me

Bouncing around meadows and grassy areas, spiking the ground in search of ants and small bugs. Droppings are cylindrical, resembling cigarette ash, and crumbled into the palm of the hand produces a glitter of invertebrate exoskeletons and wing casings.

There are contrasting opinions as to how this plover got its name, one describes its lolling and tumbling flight, the other is its habit of feigning injury by flapping one wing, as if broken, in order to draw predators away from a nest site. A really smart looking black and white bird, of similar size to a moorhen, wearing a long wispy crest that streamers in a breeze, whilst the back and wings shimmer with a lustrous iridescent green. When airborne the wings appear oversized and paddle like, accentuating the loose, floppy flight, which is often accompanied by a plummeting cartwheeling fall, skilfully pulling out of the drop at the last moment.

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4, 6

## Lapwing

*Vanellus vanellus*

### find me

All year round on wetland scrapes and bunds often in large flocks calling its haunting famous old 'Peewit' name.



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## Cetti's Warbler

*Cettia cetti*

Passing a bush occupied by this sparrow sized warbler when it decides to break into song can be quite a startling experience, explosive metallic chimes of powerful volume clatter and ripple in sporadic bursts. Stocky, rufous brown, with an ash grey throat, belly and eyebrow stripe, this bird can be very difficult to spot as they move between locations with almost phantom like invisibility. It is generally believed that

### find me

All year round, skulking deep within shrubs and bushes close to water blasting out the 'listen!.... listen!.....What's my name?.... Cetti!.... Cetti!.... that's it!' call.

cetti's warblers don't migrate, although many have been found wintering some distance from their breeding sites, and on sunny winter days can often be heard shattering the icy silence.

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A truly magical looking bird, pure snow white, the back and wings a pale chestnut fawn with ash grey patches and white dot detail, the male tending to be much paler, with fewer specks on their chest and belly. The bright white heart shaped face, feathered in a concave fashion, is the barn owl's greatest asset when hunting, funneling the sound made by voles, shrews and mice towards the ears, which are shaped differently to each other as well as being at different heights. The left listens for sound from below, the right focussing on sound from above, creating a three-dimensional sound picture, making it possible to pinpoint prey with deadly efficiency even in pitch darkness.

## Barn owl

*Tyto alba*

### find me

Throughout the year often hunting in the daytime, but the best time is dawn or just before dusk, quartering over meadows, ditches and farmland verges with a ghostly white moth like flight.

# birds

hard to find

Skylarks Nature Reserve

zone  
2, 4, 6



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## Kingfisher

*Alcedo atthis*

A piercing 'Zii!...Zii!' call incises the silence of a reed bed. Looking towards the water's edge you may be rewarded with one of the most dazzling colours found anywhere in the natural world, the unmistakable electric, iridescent, azure back and rump flash from a kingfisher fly by. With wings a blur, buzzing at hummingbird like speeds, the kingfisher rockets past close to the water with a purposeful and direct flight. Measuring 17 – 19cm from bill tip to tail, the silhouette of this firework of a bird appears to be all weapon, a large head boasting a long, fierce, spear like bill, with a body that tapers away to a virtually non-existent tail. Even on the dullest days, the shimmering cerulean crown and wings, along with clashing fiery orange belly and eye stripe can burn through the landscape with a breath-taking brilliance.

### find me

All year perched on reeds or branches that hang low over ponds and lakes, eyeing the water, waiting for the right moment to strike, and then darting into the water to catch any small fish, a favourite being sticklebacks.

One of the oddest non vocal sounds made by any animal is the 'drumming' of the snipe, the male, as part of his mating display will perform a fluttering, circling flight interrupted by steep dives, whereupon the outmost tail feathers are held away from the tail almost at right angles, the rush of the air passing across these feathers creates an eerie rattling and bleating sound. However, for the rest of the year, this shy wader stays out of sight, probing the water's edge with a sewing machine like action in search for invertebrate food. Patterned with impeccably cryptic markings of rich chestnut, tawny and fawn dapples, bars and streaks, all aid the disappearing act, blending perfectly against the foliage along the waters edge.

### find me

In winter around the edges of lakes and pools, brilliantly camouflaged amongst grasses and reeds. Often accidentally flushed from these areas with an explosive, erratic, zig zag flight.

## Snipe

*Gallinago gallinago*

zone  
4, 6



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# birds

a **real** find

## Skylarks Nature Reserve

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### Avocet

*Recurvirostra avosetta*

Passing from the east coast in summer to the south west coast in winter means that for any travel weary avocet an inland wetland site, such as an old gravel pit, can become a very welcome service station, where two days of shelter, rest, preening and feeding could be vital to surviving the remaining journey. An exquisite wader, with a porcelain delicacy to its features and markings, long sky blue legs carry a slim snow-white body, ink black markings detail the wings, crown and

*find me*

Stopping off en-route in spring to wade in shallow water, the up-curved bill being swept from side to side in order to loosen any invertebrates from mud sediment, or at rest on one leg with the bill tucked under the wing.

back of an elegant neck, the curve of which perfectly complements the graceful, needle thin upturn of the bill.

*find me*

After returning from Africa in March or April, the male broadcasting the famous 'goo-ko' call from prominent perches. Or on fence posts feeding on hairy caterpillars.

We are all familiar with the cuckoo in one way or another, whether it be its association with clocks, its call or its habit of never building its own nest, but not so well known is its cunning mimicry, a deception in two parts. First is to mimic the egg of the species chosen to rear its chick, second is to replicate the appearance of a sparrow hawk, similar in both size and shape and looking particularly hawk-like in flight, a slate blue grey head, throat and upper body, the white belly heavily marked with thick Breton stripes reaching down to an extravagant fan like tail. This fakery scares the targeted host from the nest long enough for the rogue egg to be deposited.

### Cuckoo

*Cuculus canorus*



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### Stonechat

*Saxicola rubicola*



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Only slightly smaller than a robin, this resilient, striking little bird is a short distance migrator, moving inland from breeding sites in dunes and heathland beside the sea in order to avoid the harsh conditions that come with coastal living. The male is very clean cut, a black-coffee brown head with a white collar patch each side of the neck, salmon pink breast and oak brown back, wings and tail, each wing dabbled with a single white patch.

*find me*

In winter perched proudly on top of low bushes, brambles and fence posts, a prickly chacking call sounding like pebbles being clacked together, restlessly flicking the wings before rapidly flying the short distance to the next vantage point.

Nottinghamshire

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