Introduction

This is a complete and authoritative photographic guide to the wild birds of Britain and Ireland. It covers all plumages likely to be recorded of every species accepted onto the British and Irish lists up to the end of March 2016, including rarities. It also covers a few species that have recently been identified but not yet officially added to the lists. Many other species have been recorded as escapes from captivity or introductions, and a number of these have bred in the wild. Those that seem most likely to become established or lead to confusion with regular species are included, either with the relevant species or in a separate section at the end of the book (p. 522). While primarily an identification guide, the book also presents up-to-date population estimates for regular breeding, wintering and migrant birds, and, for rarities, a summary of the number of records. For the increasing number of species that are of conservation concern, information is included on their status based on current knowledge and assessments up to January 2016.

At the end of the book is a complete list of all the species on the British or Irish lists, presented in scientific (taxonomic) order. Uniquely, this list summarizes the conservation status and relevant EU and domestic conservation legislation relating to each species (see p. 524). This will be useful to birdwatchers, conservation managers, landowners and estate managers and local authorities alike, and has been verified by experts at Biocensus ecological consultants and the RSPB.

Producing this book has been an ambition of WILDGuides for many years, but without the help and advice readily offered by so many people this ambition could not have been fulfilled. Without the photographs, in particular, this project could never have been completed. Although the majority of the images were taken by the authors, bird photographers from all over the world have enthusiastically offered their images: the photographs themselves stand as testament to the quality of their work, and the outstanding collection of pictures presented reflects their very considerable skill and countless hours of dedicated effort. Most of the photographs were taken in Britain or Ireland and include, where possible, images of individual rarities that have been recorded. The photographers are acknowledged individually at the end of the book (p. 541), and details are given of who took each of the images. A special mention must go to the staff at the Agami Photo Agency in the Netherlands, since without their invaluable and enthusiastic assistance the project would inevitably have stalled.

Each regular breeding, wintering and migratory species has a map, annotated where appropriate to show the destination of birds migrating to, from or through Britain and Ireland. The maps have been adapted from base maps kindly supplied by BirdLife International, the international authority on the range and status of wild birds.

This book has evolved considerably during its preparation. New rarities have been discovered, new decisions made that affect the British and Irish lists, and new identification criteria continue to be proposed and tested for difficult species. It is intended that the book will be updated and revised to reflect future changes in status and new records. But it would also be extremely valuable to have input from readers in other ways: if you have suggestions that would help improve the book’s accuracy or ease of use, they would be very welcome. While the authors have done everything possible to ensure accuracy, should you find errors or omissions please contact WILDGuides.

Using this book

The book will help birdwatchers at any level of experience and expertise to identify what they see, using a simple step-by-step approach. You should be able to find a bird by looking at the contents list or the following gallery of thumbnail images, and turning to the relevant section if you know roughly what you are looking at – a duck, a wading bird, a woodpecker, or a small
songbird. Possibilities can then be narrowed down using the group introductions. These give
a brief overview of the species within each section, and subdivisions help further to narrow
down the possibilities (and to highlight other options that might need to be excluded).
Alternatively, you can scan through the book to find the likely group or pinpoint the bird that
looks like the best fit. However, it is essential to read the text and check the maps and status
details in conjunction with looking at the photographs. One of the most common causes of
misidentifications is jumping to a wrong conclusion without checking all available facts.
The book contains more than 3,200 photographs and presents an incomparable set of images
of British and Irish birds, so browsing and finding those that look most like your bird will be a
rewarding experience – but it is all too easy to go wrong.
Once you find a likely answer to your identification problem, check all the material on the
pages – is the bird in the right location, in the right habitat, at the right season? Is there a
commoner, or more likely, alternative? One feature might seem just right, but is it overruled
by others – the tail colour, the wingbar, the bird’s size, or the shape of its bill? A single feature
is never as reliable as an overall assessment.
Checking the texts and pictures against the bird as you watch it can be invaluable, but you
may not have time: it is better to concentrate on the bird while you can. Taking photographs
can be invaluable and enjoyable but again may reduce the time you have actually watching
and enjoying the bird. Making notes and sketches, if you can, helps you look at each part of
the bird more closely and systematically (you cannot write down the colour of the legs or bill,
or undertail coverts, without looking at them first!) and to build up an overall assessment of
what it looks like, how it behaves and how it calls or sings.
The birds in this book are deliberately arranged to allow close comparison of similar species
(rather than appearing in strict taxonomic order, as in the list at the back of the book (p. 524)).
This guide begins with water birds (those that habitually swim) and then moves to seabirds
(from Gannet through shearwaters, gulls and terns to auks). It then covers waterside birds,
including those conventionally termed ‘waders’ (or shorebirds), followed by herons and
egrets and ‘crakes and rails’ (including Moorhen and Coot). Following these are the grouse
and partridges, pigeons, owls and birds of prey, and a mixed group including kingfishers,
cuckoos and woodpeckers, before the large and varied grouping known as Passerines, or
perching birds.
As well as showing all the species that have been recorded in the wild in Britain or Ireland,
details are provided of all the subspecies (or races) known to have occurred – as well as
distinctive plumages, where relevant. Some birds that may be seen apparently ‘wild’
(even though most are introduced or escapes from captivity) are briefly described in the
relevant section for comparison, or are listed at the back of the book (p. 522).
The photographs – many taken especially for this book – have been carefully selected
to enable detailed comparisons to be made of birds in similar poses and similar lighting.
In designing the pages, close attention has been paid to ensuring that the images are
scaled appropriately. When trying to decide on a bird’s identity, it is important to bear in
mind that colours can be affected by many factors, such as bright sunlight, dull conditions,
or reflections from water.
There is an abundance of books, regular journals and magazines catering for all degrees
of interest and experience, and many organisations to consider joining. You can learn much
more, become involved in conservation or bird survey work and support conservation
locally and internationally, by joining a local bird club, a Wildlife Trust, the RSPB (the Royal
Society for the Protection of Birds), the BTO (the British Trust for Ornithology) or the WWT
(the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust) or their Scottish, Welsh and Irish equivalents.
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**INTRODUCTION**

### The Species Accounts

The species accounts that follow are divided into 30 broad sections, each with an introduction summarising the number of species recorded and their key identification features.

Most birds you are likely to encounter are wild and native, or indigenous. A few have been introduced, and some have ‘escaped’ from captivity and begun to breed: many ‘escapes’ are one-off occurrences but brief details are included of those that have bred ‘in the wild’ and might become established, just like the Greater Canada Goose, or Little Owl. The various categories are listed and explained on p. 524.

Technical jargon is avoided and everyday terms are used in the book, but a few specialist terms will help – for example ‘pale tips to the greater coverts’ is more precise than ‘spots on the wing’. Sometimes judging relative lengths of tail, wingtip and tertials, for example, must be attempted – so knowing such feather groups is interesting, informative and invaluable. Where they are important to specific identification in a particular group (e.g., waders, gulls and buntings), these terms are explained in the introduction to that group. As far as possible each species account is presented in a consistent manner, as shown by the annotated page below.

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**Meadow Pipit**  
Anthus pratensis

**English name** | **Scientific name**
---|---
Meadow Pipit | Anthus pratensis

**Measurements**

Small, steady bird, walks on ground. Toes joined (Anthrax pratensis). Head pattern striking, pale eyering often most striking. Breast with soft buff; sides buff, flanks buffy. Wings and tail longer than in Tree Pipit. Tail with rounded or slightly forked. Flank streaks more indistinct, more white on flanks. 'Rare beware' and using the accounts

**Overview and description**

Conservation status: IUCN Red List  
Conservation status: BoCC

**Conservation status codes**  
IUCN Red List  
(PE) Possibly Extinct  
(RE) Regionally Extinct  
(CR) Critically Endangered  
(EN) Endangered  
(VU) Vulnerable  
(NT) Near Threatened

BoCC  
Red listed in Britain  
Amber listed in Britain  
Red listed in Ireland  
Amber listed in Ireland

**Legal protection**

**Status**

**Distribution map**

**Habitat**

**Status/distribution map codes**

- All-year-round
- Summer visitor
- Winter visitor
- Migrant
- Rare migrant/vagrant

**Annotations**

- CB male (♂♀ males)
- CB female (♀♀ females)

On its own, a male or female symbol indicates an adult bird.

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**‘Rare beware’ and using the accounts**

Always read the status and habitat preferences. You may find that, for example, a ‘yellow’ wagtail is likely to be a Grey Wagtail (or a passing harrier more likely to be a Hen than a Montagu’s) at certain times of year; or that the brown owl in an Irish wood is probably a Long-eared, not a Tawny Owl. Although any bird can occur almost anywhere, overwhelmingly often the bird you see will be the one that should be there, in that habitat, at that time of year. Nevertheless, be aware: similar species are referenced for comparison, and a ‘rare beware’ symbol indicates rarer possibilities and/or birds of captive origin. For the rare species emphasis is given to those plumages that have been recorded in Britain or Ireland, or are most likely. A few species are included that have been reliably identified but are not yet officially included on the British List.

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For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu
THE SPECIES ACCOUNTS

English and scientific names
Each species has a common English name and scientific name (in italics).

- English names vary between authorities. This book uses those names recommended by the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) and adopted for the Irish List, as they are best known to most people. Local English names for species are shown (in brackets) if the name is in frequent usage.
- The scientific name consists of two words – the first refers to the genus, which classifies those species that are closely related, the second refers to the species. The combination of these two words is unique to a species and applicable worldwide. A species can be variable in appearance and voice across its range and often these variations are classified as subspecies (or races). These races are identified using a third word and are covered in the relevant species accounts. In some cases where scientific names have changed as a result of recent taxonomic research the former name is included in brackets to prevent confusion.

NB a ◆ symbol after a name indicates that the species has only been recorded in Ireland.

Measurements
The length (bill-tip to tail-tip laid out on a flat surface) and wingspan of the species are given as a range, (with male and female separate if appropriate). NB A very long bill or tail feathers, as a range, (with male and female separate if applicable) . NB A very long bill or tail feathers, as a range, (with male and female separate if otherwise) the species is in Britain and Ireland (see p. 525).

Overview and description
A summary of general appearance and behaviour leads into detailed notes on different plumages (where relevant) according to age, sex and time of year. Important or diagnostic points are highlighted in bold. Descriptions begin with ADULT MALE in breeding (summer) plumage as the basis for comparisons, followed by WINTER MALE, FEMALE, and young birds.
- JUVENILE indicates a bird with feathers grown for its first flight.
- 1ST-WINTER indicates a bird that has undertaken its 1st-winter partial moult. Subsequent age definitions vary according to species, some being almost indistinguishable from older individuals when just one year old, while others take several years to mature.

Where useful, a description of the bird IN FLIGHT follows, and an approximation of its calls and song. While vocalizations can be essential, writing them in words is difficult – they serve as useful aide mémoires if you have heard the bird already, or give a good impression of what to expect.

Annotations
Short notes highlighting key features, those relating to flight are in blue text.

Conservation status, legal protection and Irish records
- Species (or races) on the Red or Amber list, as a Bird of Conservation Concern (BoCC) in Britain or Ireland (see p. 525), are indicated by an appropriate colour-coded dot.
- Species listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as Threatened or Near Threatened, globally or in Europe, and that are on the IUCN Red List (see p. 526) have a colour-coded square. Squares with a black border indicate the European Red List status.
- Species afforded legal protection are indicated by a black square with a number referring to the page on which information regarding that species can be found.

Status
The Status box indicates how common (or otherwise) the species is in Britain and Ireland, with an estimate of the population, and the time of year it is generally seen. Birds referred to as ‘migrants’ travel to and from Britain and Ireland, or pass through or close by, on an annual cycle.
- Rare migrant: >1,000 records in total, or usually >100 recorded each year.
- Very rare migrant: >300 records, or >50 recorded each year.
- Vagrant describes a species that is off its usual migration route. The area of origin for these species is given. Area modifiers are as follows: N = North, E = East, S = South, SE = South-east, NW = North-west, NE = North-east, C = Central. NB N Europe includes Scandinavia. Numbers of records are given in close approximations (e.g. <5, <100).

Distribution map and habitat
Maps for all regular breeding, wintering and migrant species show summer, winter or all-year-round distribution, and typical migration routes where relevant. A box below the map gives most likely habitats in which to find a species. For rare migrants and vagrants this information is given in their status box.