

Monthly Newsletter



ISSUE 3

www.blackburnbirdclub.com

December 2025



Photo: Brian Taylor



Photo: Brian Taylor

November Indoor Meeting

The talk from our Chairman, Jonathan, was a huge success. Jonathan took us on a fascinating look at Britain's stunning wildlife, sharing his depth of knowledge and enthusiasm throughout. His engaging presentation took us from the deer rut at Tatton Park to the soaring cliffs of Bempton, and even to the delightful red squirrels at Shap — always a favourite with everyone. The talk also featured some of the club's recent walks at St Aidan's and Langden Valley, highlighting the diverse landscapes our members have explored.

November Field Walk – Elton Reservoir, Bury

Our recent club walk took us to Elton Reservoir, where despite challenging weather the group enjoyed a rewarding morning in the field. The site offered plenty of interest, and having two local experts with us made the visit especially worthwhile.

Paul, for whom Elton is a regular patch, guided us through the area's key spots and shared his knowledge throughout. We were also joined by Dennis Atherton, one of our regular speakers, who knows the reservoir equally well. Their combined insight gave members an excellent overview of what this site has to offer.

Only Brian braved the rain with his camera, so we've shared a small selection of his photos on Facebook, even though there were plenty of birds about on the day.

Thank you to everyone who attended. This is certainly a walk we'd be pleased to feature again in a future programme.

December Indoor Meeting

Kilimanjaro & a Serengeti Safari

We're looking forward to our next indoor meeting, where club member Kevin Scott will take us on a photographic journey through Tanzania. His presentation will feature the dramatic landscapes around Mount Kilimanjaro and the vast plains of the Serengeti, showcasing the region's rich and diverse wildlife.

Expect stunning images of both iconic African mammals and an impressive variety of birdlife, all captured during Kevin's recent travels.

It promises to be a fascinating evening, and we hope to see you there.

Novembers Indoor Meeting And Field Trip

What's On in December & January

Bird Sightings

Quiz

Bird Of The Month

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January Field Trip – Martin Mere

We don't have a field walk in December, as we know this is a busy time of year for everyone. Our next outing will be on **Monday 12th January**, when we'll start the new year with a visit to Martin Mere, the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust reserve.

We will meet at **10am**.

At this time of year, large numbers of waterfowl gather on the reserve, including wintering Whooper Swans, all of which can be viewed in comfort from several excellent hides.

Please note that there is an entrance fee to the reserve unless you are a WWT member.

Postcode: **L40 0TA**

We hope you'll join us for our first field trip of the year.

Recent Bird Sightings Around Lancashire (November)

- Whooper Swan – 141 on pasture north of Bank End Farm, Bank End.
- Wigeon – 2,530 at Cockerham Marsh during low tide.
- Curlew – 760 at Cockerham Marsh.
- Knot – 650, Dunlin – 380, Bar-tailed Godwit – 50 at Bank Houses slipway.
- Pink-footed Goose – 4,000+ arriving over Lytham Marsh.
- Fieldfare – 41 at Lytham Marsh.
- Redwing – 8 at Lytham Marsh.
- Tree Sparrow – 8 around Westfield Avenue.
- Snow Bunting – 1 continuing around the slipway rocks at Lytham.
- Short-eared Owl – 1 hunting over the saltmarsh at Freckleton Naze Point.
- Egyptian Goose – 1 juvenile with Greylags at Freckleton Naze Point.
- Pink-footed Goose – 11,000+ recorded coming into Martin Mere.
- Teal – 1,000+ visible from the Ron Barker Hide, Martin Mere.
- Little Egret – 14 at Foulridge Reservoir.
- Goldeneye – 1 (female) at Slipper Hill Reservoir.



What Birds Can We Expect to See in December

December is a busy month for bird activity as autumn migration winds down and winter visitors settle in. Around Lancashire, members can look out for a good mix of late migrants, early wintering birds, and returning favourites.

On the Reservoirs & Wetlands

- Goosander and Goldeneye starting to build in numbers
- Wigeon, Teal, and Shoveler on most wetland sites
- Whooper Swans moving through or settling in
- Lapwing, Golden Plover, and mixed wader flocks on the estuaries
- Occasional Great Northern Diver or Red-breasted Merganser on larger waters

In Woodland & Parkland

- Redwings and Fieldfares arriving in flocks, feeding on berries
- Brambling mixed with Chaffinch gatherings
- Siskin and Lesser Redpoll around alder and birch
- Goldcrest and the occasional Firecrest on migration

Coastal & Estuary Highlights

- Large numbers of Knot, Dunlin, and Bar-tailed Godwit
- Pink-footed Geese moving between feeding areas
- Twite returning to winter on the coast

Raptors

- Short-eared Owls appearing on moorland edges and coastal marshes
- Hen Harrier possible on upland moors or roost sites
- Merlin with wintering wader flocks

Around the Garden

- More frequent visits from Long-tailed Tits, Nuthatches, and Great Spotted Woodpeckers
- Jays busy caching acorns
- The first signs of winter Blackcaps turning up at feeding stations

November is always a great month for surprises, with unusual gulls, ducks, and late migrants turning up across the county—so it's well worth keeping binoculars close at hand!

Multiple-Choice Quiz

1. Which bird is known as the “ghost of the moorlands”?

- a) Merlin
- b) Hen Harrier
- c) Kestrel

2. A male Bullfinch has which colour breast?

- a) Red
- b) Yellow
- c) Blue

3. Which wader is famous for its “pee-wit” call?

- a) Redshank
- b) Lapwing
- c) Oystercatcher

4. What is the flight call of migrating Pink-footed Geese?

- a) Deep honk
- b) Pinking “wink-wink”
- c) A whistle

5. Which bird often hovers to hunt?

- a) Buzzard
- b) Kestrel
- c) Sparrowhawk

6. Redpolls mainly feed on:

- a) Berries
- b) Seeds
- c) Caterpillars

7. Which bird commonly visits gardens in winter?

- a) Swallow
- b) Robin
- c) Swift

8. A large flock of starlings is called:

- a) A whirl
- b) A murmuration
- c) A cloud

9. Which bird is a winter visitor to Martin Mere?

- a) Whooper Swan
- b) Little Tern
- c) Wheatear

10. Which owl is most often seen at dusk on farmland edges?

- a) Snowy Owl
- b) Short-eared Owl
- c) Barn Owl

Answers On Last Page

Photo Brian Taylor



Bird Of The Month/Robin

December is here, and what better bird to feature in our newsletter than the robin?

Everyone loves this charming little bird — a familiar sight that never fails to make people pause and watch its inquisitive nature. Photographers can't resist turning their lens towards that bright splash of red and curious tilt of the head. Full of character and confidence, the robin seems the very picture of sweetness — but are they really as gentle as they look? In truth, these beloved birds are fiercely territorial and will fight to the death to defend their patch.

Despite their feisty reputation, robins remain one of Britain's most endearing birds. Their year-round song brightens even the bleakest winter day, and their boldness brings them close to gardeners and birdwatchers alike. Whether perched on a frosty fence post or following a spade in search of worms, the robin has truly earned its place as a favourite symbol of British wildlife — and, of course, of Christmas itself.

A Familiar Friend

Few birds are as instantly recognisable — or as loved — as the robin. With its bright orange-red breast, large dark eyes and upright stance, it's a welcome sight in gardens, woodlands and parks across Britain. Though common, its tameness and curious nature make every encounter feel special. Gardeners often find a robin keeping close watch, waiting for a turned worm or unearthed insect.

A Song For All Seasons

Unlike most birds, robins sing throughout the year. Males use their clear, melodious song to defend territory in spring and summer, while both sexes sing in autumn and winter to mark feeding areas. Their winter song has a gentler, more wistful tone — often the only melody on a cold December morning.

Their sharp "tick-tick" call signals alarm or irritation, especially when a predator or rival approaches.

Fierce Defenders

Beneath their friendly image lies a fiery temper. Robins are highly territorial, and both males and females will defend their patch with surprising aggression. Rival robins may engage in intense song duels or even physical fights, sometimes to the death. It's estimated that as many as 1 in 10 robin deaths are due to territorial conflict — proof that this sweet garden visitor is no pushover!

Seasonal Visitors

British robins stay here year-round, but some of the robins seen in autumn are visitors from northern Europe — particularly Scandinavia and Russia — escaping harsher winters. These migrants tend to be shyer than our resident birds.

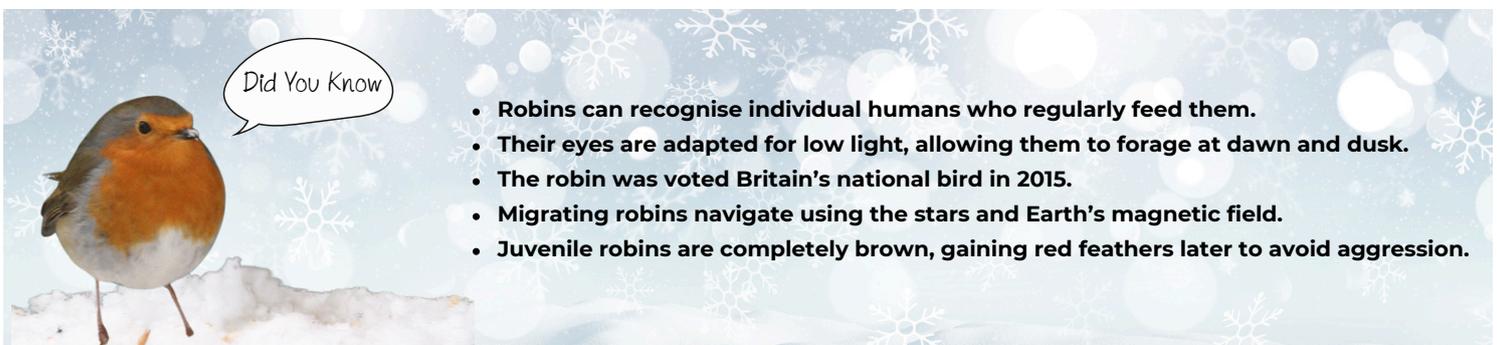
Conservation Status

The robin is on the UK Green List, meaning it's widespread and stable, with an estimated 6–7 million breeding pairs. Harsh winters can temporarily reduce numbers, but they usually recover well.

Encouraging Robins to Visit

To make your garden robin-friendly:

- Offer mealworms, suet, or soft fruit on a low table or ground feeder.
- Keep an area of dense shrubs or ivy for nesting and shelter.
- Provide fresh water for drinking and bathing year-round.
- Be patient and gentle — robins quickly learn to trust calm, familiar movements.



Did You Know

- **Robins can recognise individual humans who regularly feed them.**
- **Their eyes are adapted for low light, allowing them to forage at dawn and dusk.**
- **The robin was voted Britain's national bird in 2015.**
- **Migrating robins navigate using the stars and Earth's magnetic field.**
- **Juvenile robins are completely brown, gaining red feathers later to avoid aggression.**



Jays & Acorns

Jays and Their Acorn Caching

Jays are famous for their remarkable habit of caching acorns each autumn—one of the most important behaviours in our woodlands.

How it works:

- During autumn, Jays collect hundreds of acorns, often choosing the biggest and healthiest ones.
- They carry them in a special pouch in the throat, sometimes transporting up to 5 acorns at a time.
- Each acorn is buried individually in soft soil, leaf litter, lawns, flowerbeds, and woodland floors.
- Amazing memory:
- Jays have an incredible spatial memory. They remember the locations of thousands of buried acorns using visual landmarks—trees, rocks, paths, even garden features.
- Why it matters:
- The cached acorns act as the Jay's winter food store, helping them survive when insects and berries are scarce.
- Many acorns are never retrieved, and these forgotten acorns often germinate into oak saplings, meaning Jays play a crucial role in naturally spreading oak woodland.

Fun fact:

Jays are so efficient at this that entire oak forests have been shaped by generations of Jays burying acorns in suitable spots.

Helping Jays With Stored Acorns

We've had a bumper year for nuts and berries, so if you're lucky enough to have Jays visiting your garden, now is the perfect time to collect a few acorns to help them later in the winter. You can still gather fallen acorns and dry them for use when the ground is frozen or covered in snow. Jays are wonderful birds to watch, and offering stored acorns gives them a valuable natural food source during tougher weather.

How to dry and store acorns:

- Collect only fresh, firm acorns with no holes or soft spots.
- Spread them out in a single layer on a tray or newspaper in a warm, dry place for about one to two weeks.
- Once fully dry, store them in a paper bag, cardboard box, or a breathable cloth bag. (Avoid plastic bags—they trap moisture and cause mould.)
- Keep them in a cool, dry cupboard until needed.

When the weather turns icy or snowy, simply scatter a few acorns in your garden or under shrubs. The Jays will be quick to find them, and you'll be supporting one of our most colourful woodland birds.

They're always entertaining to watch, and a handful of acorns on a frosty morning is guaranteed to keep your local Jays happy.

Bird Club Library – Free for All Members

Did you know that our club has a library of books and DVDs available for members to borrow? The collection includes a wide range of titles, from UK bird identification and behaviour to wildlife and birding from further afield.

All items are free to borrow, and John will be happy to help you choose something at our meetings. If the library proves popular with members, we'll look at adding more books and resources in the future.

It's a great way to explore new topics, deepen your birding knowledge, or simply enjoy some wildlife inspiration. Feel free to have a browse!

Garden Bird Recording Forms

We'd like to remind members that we have a simple form available for anyone who wishes to record the birds they see. You can use it in whatever way suits you best:

- record every bird you spot when you're out and about,
- note your garden birds once a month, or
- just jot down any notable or unusual sightings.

Traditionally, only a few members have picked up the form, even when we've encouraged everyone to join in. We'd love to see more people taking part, as these records help build a useful picture of local bird activity over the year.

Forms are available from Mike at all meetings, so do grab a cuppa, pick up a form, and enjoy keeping track of the birds visiting your garden. When you've filled it in, simply bring it back to the next meeting and hand it in.

Christmas Cards to Support the Club

We've had several packs of Christmas cards kindly donated to the club. Each pack contains 8 cards and is priced at £5, with all proceeds going towards boosting club funds.

Some of you may already have bought your Christmas cards for this year, but you can always pick up a pack to use next year—they're great quality, and there will be a sample card available for you to see at the meeting.

Please help support the club by buying a pack if you can. Every little bit helps!

Have Your Say

At our next meeting we'll be handing out a short questionnaire, and we hope as many members as possible will take part. This is your chance to share your thoughts, let us know what you enjoy, and suggest anything you'd like to see in the future. It's a simple multiple-choice form with space to add your own comments if you wish.

Jonathan will pause the meeting briefly so everyone has time to complete it. There is an option to include your name, but this is entirely optional.

Your feedback will help us shape the club for the benefit of all members, so please do take a few moments to have your say.

Christmas Wishes From The Chairman

As we come to the end of another busy year, I would like to say a huge thank you to all our members, both new and "long-standing" (let's not say old!). Your enthusiasm, support, and involvement really do make the club what it is. A special thank you also goes to the committee for all their hard work behind the scenes. I hope you all enjoy a wonderful Christmas and a peaceful New Year, and I look forward to seeing everyone again in January for more birding adventures.

Jonathan

1 b | 2 a | 3 b | 4 b | 5 b | 6 b | 7 b | 8 b | 9 a | 10 c

GROUP

