



COACH TOUR

We are planning a coach visit to **RSPB Dearne Valley – Old Moor, Barnsley on Saturday 2nd May 2026, approximately 1 hour 30–45 minutes from Blackburn.**

Old Moor is a fantastic wetland reserve and a great place to see species such as Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Kingfisher, Avocet, Lapwing and spring warblers, along with plenty of other wildlife. Nearby sites including Gypsy Marsh and Bolton Ings may offer additional interest for those who wish to explore further.

The main reserve has a café, shop and toilets, and most paths are flat with a few gentle slopes.

Further information can be found here: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/days-out/reserves/dearne-valley-old-moor>

Entry fee: £6 for non-RSPB members, free for RSPB members.

Travel details

- **Depart Blackburn: 7:30am**
- **Leave Old Moor: 4:30pm**
- **Cost: £20 members | £25 non-members**
- **(The club is subsidising the coach.)**

To make the trip viable we need to fill the coach close to capacity, so please let us know as soon as possible if you would like to come. Friends and family are very welcome.

Places will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Should any member or visitors not have binoculars, they are available to hire on the day for a minimal price from the reserve.



RSPB Dearne Valley Coach Trip

Unlike our field trips, once we arrive and step off the coach you are free to:

- Go off in your own small group
- Join up with others on the day
- Move between hides at your own pace

No one will be left on their own — we will make sure everyone is comfortable and part of a group if they wish.

Further details (timings, meeting point, suggested areas to visit, etc.) will be sent out once we have enough names for the trip to go ahead.

Cost

- £20 – Members
- £25 – Non-members

Family and friends are very welcome to join us.

Booking your place

If you would like to come, please email

 **blackburnbirdclub@gmail.com**

to confirm your place.

Payment is required as soon as possible so that we can secure the coach booking.

You may also pay at the March indoor meeting if you prefer, but please still email to confirm your intention to attend.

Bank transfer details

Account name: Blackburn and District Bird Club

Account number: 22617940

Sort code: 05-02-52

Bank: Virgin Money, 40 Church Street, Blackburn, BB1 5AW

Thank you — we hope you can join us for what should be an excellent day at Dearne Valley.

Indoor Meeting

Scilly - An Island Paradise

Rare Vagrants and Migrant Seabirds

An evening with Gary Hobson

Get ready to be swept away to Britain's ultimate rarity hotspot!

We're delighted to welcome Gary Hobson to the club for what promises to be a fascinating journey to the Isles of Scilly, one of the most exciting birding destinations in Europe.

Gary will share field sightings from his holidays on the islands, bringing to life the experience of birding on Britain's Atlantic edge. Through his stories, photographs and first-hand encounters, we'll explore the thrill of searching for rare vagrants and watching migrant seabirds moving past these legendary shores.

 **Tuesday 4th March**

 **7.30pm start**

 **Non-members £3 admission**

 **Raffle • Bird food • Refreshments available**

Tonight's meeting will be held upstairs while maintenance work is taking place in the main hall.

Field Trip

Sizergh Castle & Foulshaw Moss

Field Trip – Sizergh & Foulshaw Moss

Led by Paul Whiting

We're pleased to have Paul Whiting leading this visit – a regular at Sizergh and very familiar with the best spots for our main target, Hawfinch.

Sizergh is one of the most reliable locations to look for these impressive finches, often watched from the veranda overlooking the car park. From there we'll enjoy a gentle 3-mile walk around the estate, including a visit to the hide where Bittern and Marsh Harrier are possible.

We'll then continue on to Foulshaw Moss, where we'll be hoping for an early Osprey.

 **Tuesday 10th March**

 **Meet at 7.30am**

 Meeting point: Left-hand side of the visitor car park at Sizergh Castle to avoid disturbing the birds.

 Parking: Charges apply for non-National Trust members (estate entry free).

 **Postcode: LA8 8AE**

Field Trip Summary Feb 2nd Marshside

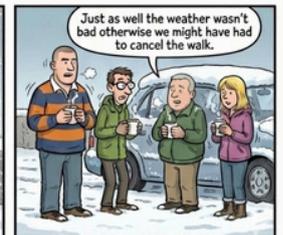
Seven members braved a very cold, typically February day for last month's field trip to Marshside, Southport, and Hesketh Outmarsh. A strong offshore breeze meant the high tide never really developed, however we had a respectable 35 species recorded.

Among the highlights was a hybrid Swan Goose, along with eight species of duck and two species of swan.

While sheltering in the hide, a mink was briefly seen moving along the side of the hide before quickly disappearing from view — very much a blink-and-you-miss-it sighting.

The standout moment of the day, however, was the sighting of two harrier species — a Marsh Harrier and a female Hen Harrier, the latter often known as a ringtail.

BLACKBURN BIRD CLUB



Just Another Day in the Field...

All four seasons before lunchtime!

Illustration by Mike Maxted (Club Member)

Third Sunday Monthly Walk

On the third Sunday of each month we meet locally at 10am for a relaxed walk, and our most recent outing took us to Marles Wood at Dinkley.

The morning began rather dull and overcast, but by the time we arrived the conditions had improved and it turned into a very pleasant few hours in the field. The woodland paths were a little slippery in places, leading to one or two slightly hair-raising moments underfoot, but nothing that dampened spirits.

Birdwise it proved to be a rewarding morning. Highlights included Kingfisher, Heron, Goosanders, Treecreepers and Nuthatch, along with a good supporting cast of woodland species. It was a thoroughly enjoyable walk in good company.

If you fancy blowing away the cobwebs and joining us for a friendly, informal stroll, do come along on one of our third Sunday walks – everyone is very welcome. An email will be sent in advance with details of the meeting point and time. We would love to see you there.



Few Members Looking For The Kingfisher



First Signs Of Spring



Heron Enjoying A Moment Of Calm.

Dawn Chorus

“A fun take on the very real magic of the dawn chorus.”

The dawn chorus is nature’s very own chart-topping concert – a feathered festival of love songs and rivalry. As spring stretches the daylight hours, birds switch into breeding mode and the boys take centre stage. For many male birds it’s time to belt out their greatest hits – the tried-and-tested classics that say, “*Look at me, I’m gorgeous, I’ve got territory, and I can sing better than next door!*” It’s all about impressing the ladies while warning the lads to keep off their patch. Think of it as Britain’s Got Talent in the hedgerow – no judges, no buzzers, and definitely no jugglers – just a lot of puffed-up chests and a battle for the number one spot on the woodland airwaves.

The best part? It all kicks off at an hour when most sensible humans are still negotiating with the snooze button. While we’re debating a second cup of tea, the Blackbird is already halfway through his power ballad, the Robin is giving it the acoustic treatment from the garden fence, and the Wren – tiny but mighty – is somehow producing a sound big enough to fill an arena. Every species has its own style. Some go rich and mellow, others fast and frantic, and a few sound like they’re still tuning up. But to a female bird it’s not just noise – it’s a full résumé: volume means confidence, variety shows experience, and stamina proves he can out-sing the chap in the next shrub.

The headline tour runs from mid-March to early May, but some keen performers start sound-checking well before the official opening night. Give us a bright morning in late January and you might hear a Song Thrush or Great Tit warming up, while the ever-reliable Robin carries on as the year-round pub singer who never actually leaves the stage. The early efforts can be a bit tentative – more village hall than Wembley – but week by week the songs get slicker, louder and far more confident. By mid-March the resident birds are in full voice, and by mid-April the festival really explodes as millions of migrants return from Africa, fresh for the summer season and eager to grab a microphone. Early May is peak performance – a proper wall of sound – before things wind down into the gentle unplugged sessions of early summer.

So next time you’re up early, step outside and enjoy the show. No tickets, no queue for the bar, and the performers don’t mind if you turn up in your slippers. Just remember – in the world of the dawn chorus, the early bird really does get the girlfriend.



The louder and stronger the song, the greater the chance of success.

This month's two-month guide covers April and May, when most garden birds are actively nesting and laying eggs.

Nesting & Egg Laying – April & May (Garden Birds)

April and May are the peak months for nesting and egg laying in the garden. Food availability increases, days are longer, and many species raise first and second broods during this period.



April

The breeding season is in full swing:

- Blue Tit & Great Tit – egg laying begins, especially in nest boxes
- Robin – eggs and early chicks present
- Blackbird – first broods well underway
- Wren – nests completed and eggs laid
- Dunnock – early broods started
- Chaffinch & Greenfinch – nesting and egg laying

May

The busiest month of all for gardens:

- House Sparrow – multiple broods begin
- Starling – eggs laid and chicks growing fast
- Goldfinch – nesting begins, often later than other finches
- Pied Wagtail – nesting around buildings and gardens
- Swallow – eggs laid where suitable outbuildings exist
- Second broods of Blackbird, Robin and Dunnock begin

Important Garden Reminder

Avoid hedge cutting and major garden work from March to August. Disturbance during April and May can easily cause nest failure.

What to Watch For

- Adults carrying food to hidden nests
- Frequent visits to nest boxes
- Chicks calling from boxes or dense cover
- Increased feeder activity as adults collect food

Coming Next

Late nesters and second broods

June & July

Bird Of The Month

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Never shy about announcing its presence, the Great Spotted Woodpecker comes fully equipped for life in the trees. Its powerful chisel-like bill and specially adapted, shock-absorbing skull allow it to hammer into timber with ease, whether searching for food or excavating a nesting hole.

What do great spotted woodpeckers look like?



Great spotted woodpeckers have white cheeks with black lines underneath and a black cap. Males can be identified by a red patch on the back of the neck. The beak is thick and powerful.

They have a pale breast with black upper parts, and a bright red rump. Their wings are black with white spots. Great spotted woodpeckers are not as large as many people imagine, being slightly smaller than a blackbird on average.

What do great spotted woodpeckers eat?

Insects are the great spotted woodpecker's main prey. It uses its powerful beak to hammer holes in tree bark and then extracts beetle larvae with its long, flexible tongue. Caterpillars, adult beetles and spiders are also taken. In spring, the chicks and eggs of smaller birds are often eaten. Species that nest in tree cavities are targeted as woodpeckers can use their beaks to access these spaces. Nuts and seeds are also an important food source, particularly in winter.

How do great spotted woodpeckers breed?

The Great Spotted Woodpecker's bill is central to its breeding behaviour. In spring, males use it to drum rapidly on dead timber, the sound carrying through the woodland to advertise territory and deter rivals. Repeated hammering at this force would injure most birds, but woodpeckers are protected by a specially adapted, shock-absorbing skull.

The same powerful bill is used to carve out a nesting cavity in a tree. When the chamber is complete, the female lays four to six eggs, usually in April, sometimes late March. These hatch after about a fortnight, and the young remain in the nest for just over three weeks before fledging.

Threats and conservation

The Great Spotted Woodpecker is a real conservation success story, with numbers rising by more than 300% since the 1970s. This increase is thought to be linked to a greater supply of dead wood following Dutch elm disease, along with the reliable food sources now available in gardens. As a species that depends on mature trees and well-established woodland, protecting these habitats remains vital to ensure the Great Spotted Woodpecker continues to thrive.

Shock Absorbers and Super Tongues

People often wonder how a woodpecker can hammer away on trees without suffering from concussion. The Great Spotted Woodpecker can drill about 10-40 strikes per second. The anatomy of the skull is most interesting and to withstand the constant hammering, the base of the skull is made up of shock absorbent tissue. Another interesting feature is that, as with many other members of the woodpecker family, they have very long sticky tongues which enable them to reach out for hidden grubs. The Great Spotted Woodpecker's tongue can extend to 40mm beyond the tip of the bill. So how do they store their tongues when not in use? This is done by coiling their tongue round the back of the skull.

Did You Know?

Scientists have studied the woodpecker's skull in a bid to develop better protective headgear for humans.



Bird Quiz – How Well Do You Know Your Birds?

Round 1 – Identification

1. Which common finch has white wing bars and a pink breast in the male?
2. Which thrush has a grey head, spotted breast, and a harsh rattling call?
3. What is the largest member of the tit family in the UK?
4. Which black-and-white bird with a very long tail is often seen in noisy family groups?

Round 2 – Habitats

5. Which warbler is most closely associated with reedbeds?
6. Which wader is commonly seen bobbing along riverbanks?
7. Which farmland bird is famous for its winter flocks and tinkling call?
8. Which seabird is well known for nesting on coastal cliffs and has a colourful bill in summer?

Round 3 – Behaviour

9. Which bird is famous for hammering snail shells on a “thrush's anvil”?
10. Which corvid caches food and can remember hundreds of hiding places?
11. Which raptor is most likely to be seen hovering over roadside verges?

Round 4 – Calls & General Knowledge

12. Which bird gives the familiar evening song often described as 🍞 “little bit of bread and no cheese”?
13. What is the collective noun for a group of Starlings in flight?
14. Which bird is known as the “butcher bird” because it impales prey on thorns?
15. Which migrant arrives in spring and has a song that sounds like a descending cascade of notes, often from woodland canopy?

ANSWERS ON LAST PAGE

March Birding Highlights

What to look and listen for on our March walks

March is a wonderful transition month. Winter visitors are still with us, resident birds are in full song, and the first spring migrants begin to arrive. Dawn chorus is building rapidly, so our walks will be as much about listening as looking.

Listen for...

Our resident birds are now establishing territories:

- Robin
- Wren
- Song Thrush (repeated phrases)
- Great Tit “teacher-teacher”
- Dunnock (fast trilling song)
- Chiffchaff – often the first spring migrant to return

Wildfowl (early March)

Many winter ducks are still present, particularly on larger waters:

- Wigeon
- Teal
- Tufted Duck
- Goldeneye
- Goosander
- Shoveler

Pink-footed Geese and Whooper Swans may still be seen early in the month before departing north.

Waders & Farmland Birds

Lapwings will be displaying over fields, and Curlews are becoming more vocal:

- Lapwing (display flights)
- Curlew (bubbling call)
- Oystercatcher
- Redshank
- Snipe (listen for drumming)
- Black-tailed Godwit (at wetland sites)

Reedbed Specialities

At Leighton Moss and similar habitats:

- Bearded Tit (often feeding on reed tops in calm weather)
- Marsh Harrier (display flights)
- Reed Bunting
- Cetti's Warbler (explosive song)
- Bittern – listen for booming later in March

Raptors

March is an excellent month for raptor activity:

- Buzzard displaying and calling
- Kestrel hovering
- Sparrowhawk display flights
- Peregrine courtship behaviour
- Red Kite (in suitable areas)

✈️ Early Migrants to Watch For

Weather dependent, but we may see:

- Chiffchaff
- Sand Martin (over water mid-late March)
- Wheatear (coastal and moss edges)
- Swallow (late March if we are lucky)
- Black Redstart on passage

🐾 Bonus Wildlife

March is also a great time for:

- Brown Hare (very active in fields)
- Roe Deer
- Otter (early morning or late afternoon)

💡 Top Tip for March Walks

Stop regularly and listen. Many of our best sightings will start with a call or song before the bird is seen.

Bird Food & Raffle

Bird food sales are continuing to go very well, and we would like to say a big thank you to everyone who supports the club by making purchases. Your support, together with the raffle and other fundraising activities, helps to boost our funds and has helped subsidise the cost of our first coach trip, enabling us to offer it to members at a reduced price.

Another big thank you to all members who continue to support the raffle by kindly donating prizes. It really does make a difference to the club's funds, so please keep supporting it whenever you can — it is very much appreciated.

Bird Quiz Answers

1. Chaffinch
2. Fieldfare
3. Great Tit
4. Long-tailed Tit
5. Reed Warbler
6. Common Sandpiper
7. Linnet
8. Puffin
9. Song Thrush
10. Jay
11. Kestrel
12. Yellowhammer
13. A murmuration
14. Great Grey Shrike (also applies to other shrikes, but this is the UK classic)
15. Willow Warbler

We look forward to seeing you at the next meeting.

GROUP

