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Introduction

This complete photographic identification guide to the wild birds of Europe can be used and enjoyed by anyone who is enthusiastic about birds. It has been created for anyone who is keen to learn more about them and wishes to identify all the fascinating species that Europe has to offer. It also offers an insight into the variety of Europe's birds, their status and movements, their habitats and their behaviour: birdwatching, after all, goes far beyond simple identification. With thousands of informative pictures, it is also a joy to browse its pages.

An identification handbook, rather than a pocket-sized field guide, it describes and illustrates 928 species. Following the best-selling Princeton **WILD** Guides title *Britain's Birds*, this book continues that book's hugely successful format and rationale. It has been put together by the same team of authors, editors, designer and photographers, who are all also experienced and well-travelled birdwatchers, who understand what is required.

In this book, 'Europe' is bounded to the south by the Mediterranean Sea (but encompasses its islands) and to the east by the Caspian Sea and the Ural Mountains. The isolated Atlantic island groups of the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands are also included.

The book covers all birds native to Europe and every species known to have wandered 'accidentally' from other parts of the world up to the end of March 2021. It also deals more briefly with those that have established self-sustaining populations following escapes from captivity or human introduction. Two species recorded historically (the globally extinct Canarian Oystercatcher *Haematopus meadewaldoi* and Eskimo Curlew *Numenius borealis*, probably now extinct) are not covered (Great Auk *Pinguinus impennis* became extinct much earlier). Sadly, Slender-billed Curlew, which is included in the book, may also now be globally extinct, and Common Buttonquail has probably now been lost as a European species.

Many people made invaluable contributions to the production of the book and in helping to ensure its accuracy (these are all gratefully acknowledged on *page 624*). However, special mention should be made here of **Chris Batty**, who checked many thousands of photographs to verify the identification, age and sex of the birds shown, and helped immeasurably in many other ways. The photographs and the way they have been presented undoubtedly distinguish this book. Although many were taken by the authors, no fewer than 349 bird photographers worldwide generously and enthusiastically contributed to filling the inevitable gaps. There is, however, no doubt that the production of the book would not have been possible without an especially close association with the **Agami Photo Agency** in the Netherlands (www.agami.nl), facilitating access to an unsurpassed array of high-quality images taken by many of Europe's top bird photographers. Viewing their images and selecting which to use became an informative, rewarding and hugely enjoyable task. This also enabled the vast majority of the images featured, including those of extreme rarities, to show individual birds that were actually photographed in Europe. All the contributing photographers are credited in the acknowledgements section on *pages 624–627*.

Each species found regularly in Europe has a map, adapted from distribution maps kindly supplied by **BirdLife International**, the global authority on the conservation status of wild birds (see *page 622*).

The treatment of species and subspecies in this book, and the scientific names used follows BirdLife International, as does the classification of the species' conservation status.

Recent environmental changes and pressures, finally reaching the public consciousness after decades of research and campaigning, reinforce the need to act to conserve birds and habitats worldwide. This book will help people identify what they see, but if that is just a first step towards more people appreciating birds to the full, and to understand the need to ensure their survival in a fast-changing world, it will have been worth the effort.

Map of the area covered by the book showing countries, key regions and key features.

In the table **BOLD CAPITALS** are used for regions (countries within those regions are colour coded); **bold text** is used for countries; light text is used for other locations, with areas in capitals.

AL	Albania
AD	Andorra
AM	Armenia
ASM	ASIA MINOR
AT	Austria
AZ	Azerbaijan
AZO	AZORES (PT)
BA	Bosnia & Herzegovina
BAI	BALEARIC ISLANDS
BAL	BALKANS
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
BY	Belarus
CAN	CANARY ISLANDS (ES)
CH	Switzerland
COR	Corsica (FR)

CRI	Crimea
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FAR	Faroe Islands
FI	Finland
FR	France
GE	Georgia
GRL	Greenland
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
IBE	IBERIA

IE	Ireland
IS	Iceland
IT	Italy
JMA	Jan Mayen (NO)
LV	Latvia
LI	Liechtenstein
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
MAC	MACARONESIA
MAD	Madeira
MC	Monaco
MD	Moldova
MK	North Macedonia
MT	Malta
ME	Montenegro
NL	Netherlands

NO	Norway
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
RS	Serbia
RU	Russia (European)
SAR	Sardinia (IT)
SCA	SCANDINAVIA
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
SM	San Marino
TR	Turkey
UA	Ukraine
UK	United Kingdom
XK	Kosovo



How to use this book

This book adopts a simple step-by-step approach combined with detailed descriptions, comparisons and an unparalleled set of photographs to help you identify any bird you see. This does, however, require adequate views and careful observation and depends on the species. Some remain extremely difficult. Identification requires care and objectivity, coupled with a degree of realism.

The identification process

- 1** If you see an unfamiliar bird, look carefully and try to note all points that may prove to be relevant to an identification: including shapes and structures, colours, patterns, behavioural features and voice.
- 2** Search the gallery of thumbnail images (*pages 14–19*) to find the kind of bird you are looking at – perhaps a duck, a gull, a woodpecker, a thrush or a finch. The birds in the book are arranged in logical groupings, reflecting their classification (taxonomic order) but deviating where necessary for better comparison (e.g. putting swifts close to swallows and falcons with birds of prey, rather than separating them according to strict evolutionary relationships).
- 3** Turn to the relevant section, where a short introduction will help to narrow down the possibilities. In some cases there may still be many options and where helpful these are further divided into sub-groups. This will help you to focus on the right kind of bird and highlight any others that might need to be considered, reducing the options to a handful of possibilities. The details given in the individual species accounts should then enable you to put a name to the bird.
- 4** *If something is not right*, then look at the introductory section's information on commonly confused groups/species, or consider the possibility of an exotic 'escape' or a rare migrant or vagrant.
- 5** With increasing experience, you will be able to flick through the book to the most likely group, or the best fit, but leaping to conclusions often leads to mistakes.

Similar species to check are highlighted in a purple 'lookalike' box (with a page reference, unless on the same or facing page). Remember that rare birds are exactly that: they are rare! In the vast majority of cases, what you see will be a commoner alternative.

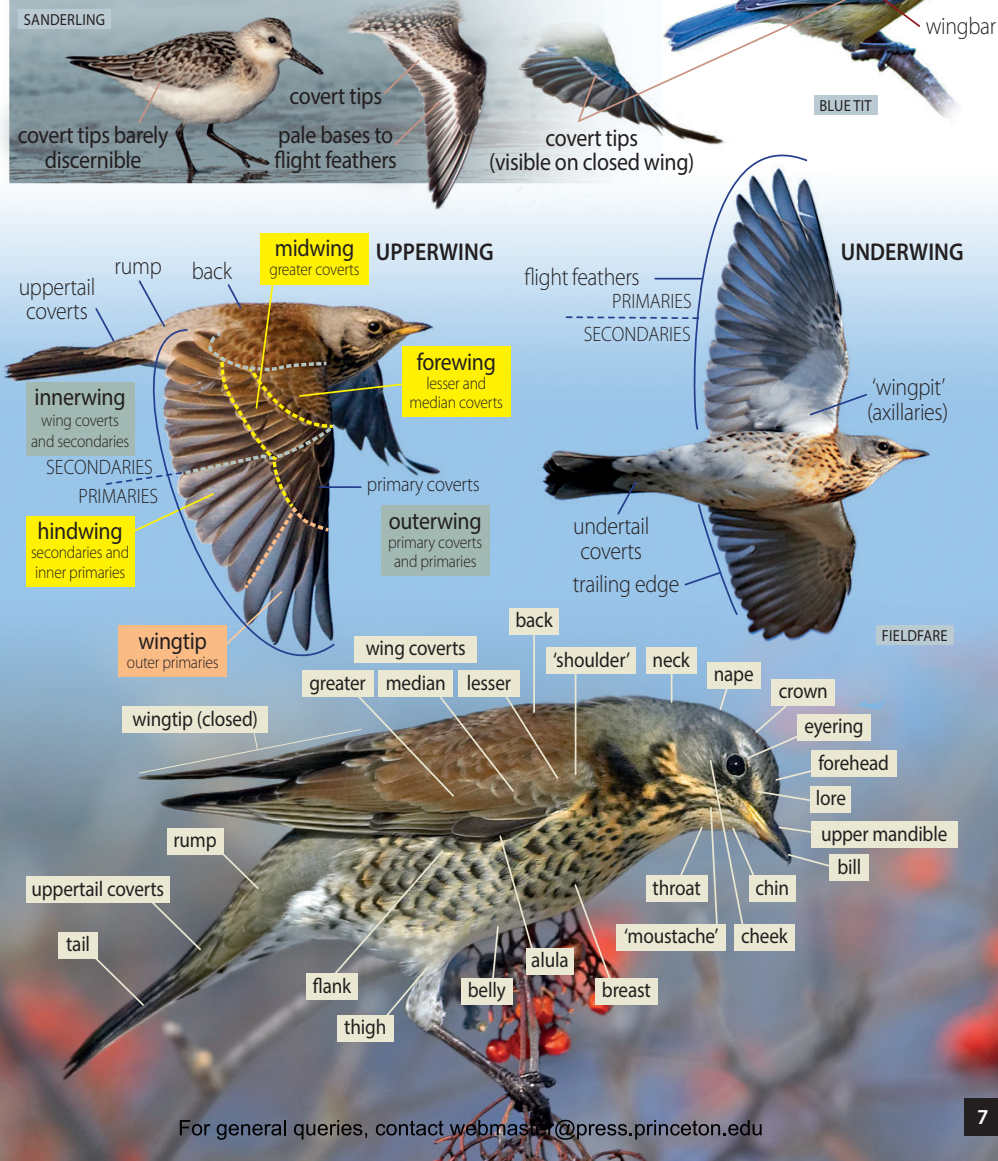
The photographs show birds in similar poses and lighting for ease of comparison – but it is all too easy to go wrong. In reality, colours are affected by factors such as bright or dull conditions and reflections from water or foliage. Close-up pictures show all the plumage details, but it is important to bear in mind that a more distant view might show a simpler, broader tonal 'pattern' and much less detail or colour. Becoming 'expert' is often about being able to identify birds at a greater distance, or with a poorer view. A Siskin on a garden feeder, or a Song Thrush on the lawn, will be easy: but identifying either seen as a distant 'dot' in the sky or on a treetop will need more experience.

Many characteristics of particular species become clear with experience and are difficult to illustrate in a book – but remain vitally important for identification. Each species has its own character (sometimes referred to as 'jizz'), and some even have a particular 'expression'. Behaviour often helps: a large flock of black birds flying closely together may be Starlings, but will not be Blackbirds. Over an estuary, a flock might be of Dunlins or Knots, but not Common Sandpipers; a flock of 100 larger waders could be Redshanks or godwits, but not Greenshanks. A large diving bird that settles on a post or buoy could be a Cormorant, but will not be a diver. A warbler that repeatedly dips its tail might be a Chiffchaff rather than a Willow Warbler. Happily, a keen observer never stops learning such important nuances of identification.

The parts of a bird

These annotated images show the basic, essential terms used throughout this book (other terms specific to a particular group are covered in the relevant introductory section).

Wingbars: The term 'wingbar' is used to describe any obvious 'bar' along the spread wing. This is typically formed of contrasting tips to the wing coverts and/or pale bases to the flight feathers. On some species such as **Blue Tit** (right) this bar is obvious on the closed wing, in others, such as **Sanderling** (below), it is barely discernible or not visible – particularly any pale bases to the flight feathers. Note that the term 'bar' usually refers to a 'crosswise' pattern or line, whereas 'streak' means a 'lengthwise' mark along the wing.



Ageing, sexing and moult

Individuals of any one species may differ according to age, sex and season, the effects of wear and bleaching (fading) on feather colours and patterns, and the state of moult (replacement of old feathers with new ones). In some, separate geographical populations with consistent differences may be classed as 'subspecies'. It is not possible to show every 'plumage', but all significant ones are described or illustrated.

With species such as Wren and Tawny Owl, male (σ^7) and female (♀) look alike all year round and juveniles are very similar. At the other extreme, male and female look very different, some have distinct breeding and non-breeding (or summer and winter) plumages, and juveniles can be told from other immature birds. Larger species may mature over several years, progressing towards adulthood at differing rates.

Throughout this book the pictures are labelled to indicate the months in which the plumage shown is likely to be seen, but it is important to be aware that *changes from one plumage to another proceed gradually* over a period of weeks, even months.

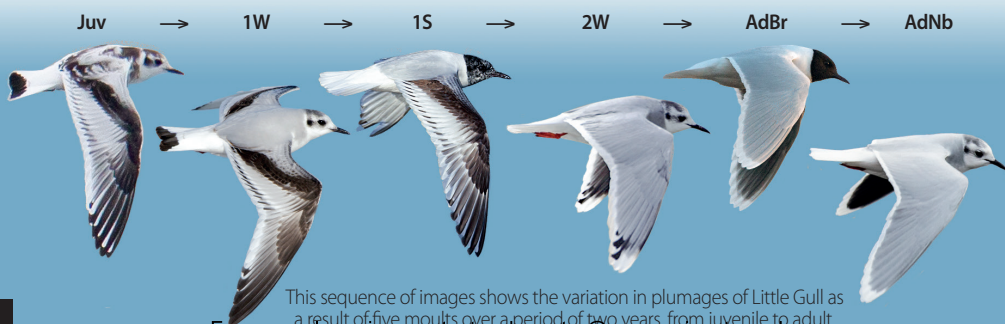
A photographic guide forces a different approach from most field guides. All must be accurate, but close-up, high-resolution photographs (which birdwatchers increasingly take for themselves) reveal details that might previously only have been properly appreciated when a bird was captured for ringing purposes, or on a museum specimen. A photograph cannot be labelled 'Adult' if, for example, some pale wing covert tips reveal that the bird is one year old. This adds a degree of complexity, but also enables a more detailed discussion on ageing.

In general, adult males in breeding or courtship plumage are the most brightly coloured, non-breeding and immature males more like females, and juveniles the least distinctive. With a very few species (phalaropes and Dotterel), male and female roles and plumages are reversed, with females being the brightest. The males of most species are generally larger than females, but in birds of prey the reverse is the case and the size difference can be particularly marked.

Plumage categories

In this book, simple terms are used to describe plumage categories; these are coded as follows:

Juvenile (Juv)	1st-winter (1W)	1st-summer (1S)	2nd-winter (2W)	2nd-summer (2W)	Adult (Ad)
the first plumage of a young bird able to fly	usually following a partial moult of head/body feathers only in the autumn	following further change through moult and/or bleaching, by the following spring	usually an entirely new set of feathers after a complete moult in late-summer/autumn	and so on until maturity when the bird becomes...	which may have breeding (Br) and non-breeding (Nb) plumages



Birds in juvenile, 1st-winter and 1st-summer plumage – i.e. up to one year old – may be termed ‘1st-year’ (1Y). Some species become adult at one year old, with no discernible ‘1st-summer’ plumage. Birds not old enough to breed are collectively ‘immature’ (Imm). ‘Breeding plumage’ is usually brightest in spring and summer (i.e. ‘summer plumage’). Exceptions include most male ducks, brightest in winter (‘breeding’ or ‘courtship plumage’): in summer, they moult into a duller ‘eclipse’ plumage – see *page 21*. Large gulls with a white head in breeding plumage acquire a streaked ‘winter’ head from midsummer but may become white-headed again by January.

Examples of plumage sequences are included in the relevant introductory sections throughout the book: see Mallard (*page 21*), Great Crested Grebe, Red-throated Diver and Cormorant (*page 72*), Black-headed Gull (*pages 106 and 109*), Herring Gull (*pages 108–109*), Pomarine Skua (*page 146*), Sanderling (*page 154*), Siskin (*page 480*) and Reed Bunting (*page 508*), and as well as in some of the individual species accounts, such as Common Gull (*page 116*), Red-footed Falcon (*page 313*) and Blackbird (*page 385*).

A brief explanation of moult

Feathers are tough but require replacement, can become very worn and can change colour with exposure to sun and saltwater. They are replaced in a process called ‘moult’. This has a strict sequence in most species but the timing may vary and a complete moult involving replacement of all the feathers may take weeks or months, so the change from one plumage to another is a gradual one. On large or strongly patterned species moult can be seen quite easily with good views, but on most birds it is less easy to judge (except perhaps on photographs or in the hand).

Colours are remarkably consistent within species, but fade when exposed to sunlight (bleaching) or affected by wear (abrasion). Certain feathers (such as the pale grey of gulls and terns, or the grey of a Woodpigeon) become darker with wear as the surface ‘bloom’ is rubbed away. Black, grey or green can become browner over time. Even a relatively ‘plain’ or uniform bird may vary in appearance with these processes and observed patterns may not match basic descriptions. Pigments such as melanin produce dark markings that are stronger than unpigmented light-coloured fringes, which easily wear off. As a consequence, feathers can become surprisingly ragged, and patterns may change.

On a Curlew, for example, pale spots on the feather edge literally wear off, changing a ‘spotted’ pattern to a plainer one, without any replacement of feathers. Many gulls lose white spots from black wingtips, which fade browner. Some species, such as certain finches, buntings and chats, have a rapid loss of pale fringes in spring, revealing brighter colours beneath and producing a breeding plumage without any replacement of feathers. An adult Golden Eagle will have blackish body feathers (new) mixed almost randomly with browner ones (older) and pale buff, bleached ones (about a year old).

Moult itself can have a huge effect on shape and pattern, as feathers are shed or part-grown, creating obvious gaps. Consider the wings of gulls with distinctive grey, black and white patterns, which can be disrupted as some feathers are bright and new, others missing entirely or still part-grown, and others old and faded. During moult, shed or growing feathers will create gaps in wings and tail, or apparent breaks in patterns such as wingbars, until all new feathers are grown and normal patterns are restored. Also be aware that feathers, such as tail streamers, may break off.

Moult is either ‘complete’ (replacing all the feathers on the head, body, wings and tail) or ‘partial’ (usually involving the head and body and some wing coverts, but not the larger wing or tail feathers). A complete moult usually begins with the innermost primary, the other feathers being renewed during the time it takes to shed and regrow all the primaries. Most species complete their moult in a single unbroken sequence. A complete moult takes several weeks even for small species: Goldfinch, for example, takes an average of 77 days. Others have a ‘suspended moult’ (paused midway, usually during migration, to be completed later).

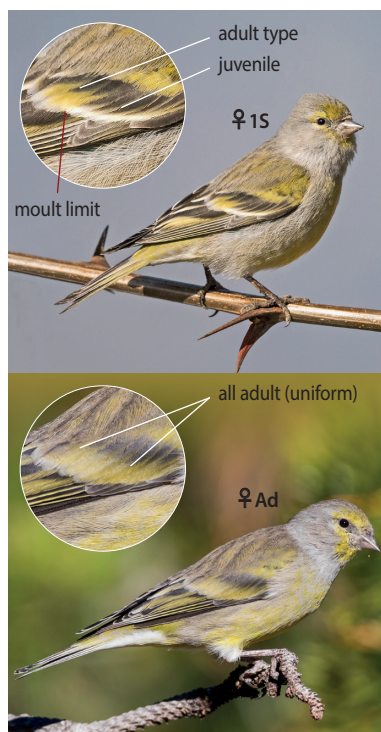


These adult **Black Terns** show how a bird's appearance may change according to wear (which may darken feathers by wearing off the paler surface), bleaching (which makes them paler) and the gradual progression of moult (which takes several weeks), so complex intermediate stages are commonly seen. Moult must always be considered if a bird does not look quite as expected. **MAY**: black head/underparts; immaculate tail; dark (worn) inner secondaries and outer primaries (grown during previous JUL–AUG); newer, paler outer secondaries/inner primaries (grown JAN–FEB). **JUL**: black head/underparts replaced by white from MAY/EARLY JUN, from face rearwards. Old tail feathers (grown OCT) worn to a point, new ones (grown MAR/APR) rounded. Dark inner secondaries, outer primaries and their coverts, but paler feathers also now wearing darker. **AUG**: body mostly white; wing feathers of different ages, blackish, brown and pale grey.

Most **non-passerines** have two moults per year when adult: **complete** in autumn/winter (August–December) and **partial** in spring (March–May). Northern waders may suspend moult during migration and complete it in their winter quarters. Large birds of prey moult almost continuously, but small birds of prey have a more defined, single annual moult (such as buzzards, May–September). In many wildfowl and a few other species (e.g. cranes) all flight feathers are shed together, rendering the bird flightless for 20 to 40 days.

Adult Black Tern (*above*) has a **complete moult**, starting with the head in late May/June, tail and wings from July/August, but paused during migration and completed by January/February. Before the return migration in spring a **partial moult** includes head, body, tail, inner primaries and some wing coverts, but the inner primaries are moulted again from as early as November, more usually February, but stopped during spring migration.

Passerines (or songbirds: in this book, from swallows/martins and larks to finches and buntings) mostly have a post-juvenile moult to first-winter, soon after fledging. Adults have a post-breeding moult in late summer. In late winter or spring, both age groups have a pre-breeding moult. Within this pattern are **four main moult strategies**, but with variations in detail. Typical date ranges given may differ between species. Age may be determined by features such as a difference between old (juvenile) and newly moulted (adult type) wing coverts on 1st-year birds. The contrast where the two types meet is referred to as a 'moult limit' (see Citril Finch, *right*).



These female **Citril Finches** illustrate the difference between the greater coverts of a 1st-summer bird (some juvenile feathers, others newly-moulted adult type) compared with an adult (coverts uniform age).

Actively moulting birds may, for a short time, show features (such as mixed old and new wing coverts) associated with other age groups. The four strategies are summarized below and a symbol (1, 2, 3 or 4) is included for each of the regularly occurring species to indicate which strategy it adopts.

1 Type 1 involves just **one complete moult per year** [June–September] for both adults and juveniles. Juveniles are easily distinguished but ageing is not possible after the moult (*i.e.* 1st-winter is identical to adult).

2 Type 2 involves a **partial moult** [July–September] for juveniles, and a **complete moult** [June–September] for adults. Juveniles may moult primaries but not their primary coverts, unlike adults: new primaries with old (juvenile) coverts after the moult will distinguish 1st-winter from adult birds. Adults have one generation of feathers, while 1st-year birds have two until the following summer.

3 Type 3 involves a **partial moult** [July–September] and a second **partial moult** [January–April] for juveniles, and a **complete moult** [June–October] and a **partial moult** [January–April] for adults. If their partial moult does not include any wing feathers, adults' wing feathers are all of one age, while 1st-year birds' wing coverts are of two different ages. The contrast (or 'moult limit') enables age to be determined in some circumstances. If the adults' winter moult includes some wing coverts, both one-year-old and adult birds show a difference in age within their coverts; ageing may or may not be possible. Some individuals can have three different ages of wing coverts. The winter moult may include some flight feathers, because of a suspended moult, and ageing is unreliable.

4 Type 4 involves a **partial moult** [July–September] and a **complete moult** [December–March] for both juveniles and adults.

Pied Flycatcher is an example of a passerine with a '**Type 3**' (3) moult strategy: the progression from juvenile to adult is illustrated by these photos.

1 Juvenile

(sexes indistinguishable)
JUN–JUL

Head and upperparts spotted.

PARTIAL MOULT

in **JUL–AUG** becoming

2 1st-winter

(sexes often indistinguishable)
SEP–MAR

Juvenile wing/tail but new, unspotted head and body feathers.

PARTIAL MOULT

in **MAR–APR** becoming

3 1st-summer [♂]
MAR–AUG

Black-and-white, with original brown (juvenile) wing and tail (breeds in this plumage).

COMPLETE MOULT
in **JUN–AUG** becoming

4 Non-breeding [♂]
AUG–MAR

Resembles 1st-winter (or female) but has black wings and tail.

PARTIAL MOULT

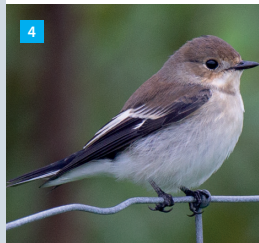
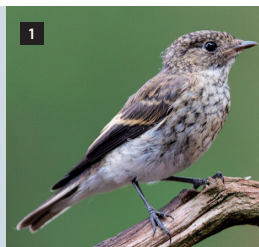
in **MAR–APR** becoming

5 Adult breeding [♂]
MAR–AUG

Black-and-white with blackish wing and tail feathers (can be faded).

COMPLETE MOULT
in **JUN–AUG** becoming

4 Non-breeding [♂]
AUG–MAR



All the photographs in the book are labelled according to the **plumage type** shown (and, where transitional, with the actual date it was taken in square brackets). Where the sex or age is known, this is given, together with the **date range** during which this plumage might be seen (in some cases, the species concerned might not normally be present in Europe for part of this period). For some species, individuals may not be identifiable to a particular plumage type, so the captions indicate either/or categories – such as ♀/Juv, 1W/Ad or 1Y/Ad where the adult female and juvenile look alike, or individuals in their 1st-winter or 1st-year of life are inseparable from adults, or where the photograph does not clearly show crucial differences. Although some differences between plumages are slight, such as 1st-summer birds differing from adults by the presence of pale tips to a few wing coverts, recognizing such subtleties is informative and can be helpful in the identification of certain species.

Names, species and subspecies

Each species has a common **English name** and **scientific name** (in *italics*). Different text sizes distinguish between regular and rare migrants, vagrants and escaped/introduced species. The *scientific name* has two words: the first, the *Genus*, groups closely related species; the second creates a unique combination for every *species*. Variations in appearance and voice across a species' range may be sufficient to separate *subspecies*, identified by a third word. **The treatment of species and subspecies, and the scientific names used in this book follows BirdLife International. Common names are those most frequently used by English-speaking birdwatchers** (with commonly used qualifiers added in brackets).

Average differences between **subspecies** are best appreciated in a sample of museum specimens; it may not be possible to assign individual birds to a subspecies except by location. With the exception of a few species that have a large number of subspecies which are similar and/or intergrade, those occurring in Europe are named. As far as possible, the geographical range of each is summarized and a brief description provided for those that differ sufficiently to be *visibly* different. **In a few cases, birds treated as subspecies in this book are recognized as full species by other taxonomic authorities.** Nevertheless, the means of identifying them remain the same.

Measurements

Length (**L**) (bill-tip to tail-tip) and wingspan (**W**) are given as a range (male and female separately if appropriate). Interpretation is important, though: a very long bill or elongated tail feathers can give a misleading indication of size and a slim bird that is the same length as a rounded one may look much 'smaller' in reality. More subjective impressions of size may be given for species *within* groups, but these do not apply *between* groups (e.g. Blackbird is a 'large' thrush; Teal, much bigger, a 'small' duck).

Conservation status

The conservation status for each species is indicated with an icon next to the English name. This is based on the 2020 global Red List, which is coordinated by BirdLife International, the international authority on the status of wild birds. Information on the categories used is provided on page 622 (and summarized on the front flap). For those species that occur naturally and regularly in Europe, a second icon is included that shows the European Red List status.

Overview and description

Descriptions begin with a summary of the general appearance and behaviour of the species, with an overview of features common to both sexes

and all ages. This is followed by a description of 'adult' plumages, beginning, where relevant, with the male and where appropriate qualified with breeding (summer) or non-breeding, then female and in turn juvenile and other immature plumages. The term 'adult' on its own may be taken to mean that the sexes look alike; similarly, breeding/non-breeding plumages will be the same unless specified. Words in **bold** describe particularly important characters for identifying the species.

The codes used are: **Ad** = adult (qualified as necessary with **Br** = breeding or **Nb** = non-breeding); **♂** = male; **♀** = female; **Juv** = juvenile; **1W** = 1st-winter; **1S** = 1st-summer; **2W** = 2nd-winter (and so on); **1Y** = 1st year (and so on); **Imm** = immature. Combinations such as **♀/1W** (female or 1st-winter) indicate that sex or age look much alike.

A **3** symbol shows the age at which a bird becomes fully mature. It may be difficult to determine the age of immatures (as in many gulls) which progress at differing rates.

V introduces 'voice', the songs and/or calls of the species. Vocalizations can be essential clues to identification and although expressing them in words is often difficult, an attempt has been made to do so in order to serve as a useful *aide mémoire* if you have heard the bird already, or to give an indication of what to expect.

FL● (black dot indicates strictly a nocturnal migrant) describes flight actions and often plumage patterns (or shapes, such as a forked tail) that are visible in flight but may not be obvious on a perched or swimming bird. Typical flock size/behaviour is mentioned where appropriate.

Distribution map, status and habitat

A **map** is included for each regularly occurring species, showing breeding, wintering and passage distributions based on the latest information held by BirdLife international.

The **status** box indicates how common (or otherwise) the species is in Europe and shows the time of year it is generally seen. Birds referred to as 'migrants' travel to and from Europe on an annual cycle; those referred to as 'migratory' undertake movements at least partially within Europe. The term 'vagrant' is used to describe a species that is off its usual migration route; for such species their likely area of origin is given.

The **habitats** box indicates the type(s) of habitat(s) in which the species is most likely to be found. For rare migrants and vagrants this information is included in their status box.

Area modifiers are used throughout the text are: **C** = Central, **E** = East, **N** = North, **S** = South, **W** = West, or combinations (e.g. **SW** = South-west).

The types of bird

This gallery of thumbnail images of typical birds from each group should allow you to go quickly to the relevant **INTRODUCTION** or main sub-section/specific page(s) when trying to identify a bird.

WILDFOWL (page 20)

Swans pages 26–27



Geese pages 28–37



Shelducks

pages 36–37



Ducks (dabbling)

pages 38–47



Ducks (diving)

pages 48–66



GREBES, DIVERS and CORMORANTS (page 72)

Cormorants pages 84–86



Divers pages 80–83



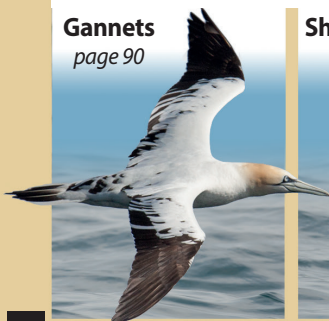
Grebes pages 75–79



SEABIRDS (pages 87–89)

Gannets

page 90



Shearwaters/Petrels


pages 91–97



Storm-petrels

pages 97–99



 RARE SEABIRDS

Auks pages 101–105



See pages 539–544 for other (rare) seabirds that are different in form from those shown here.

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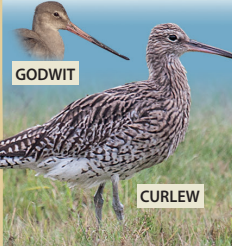
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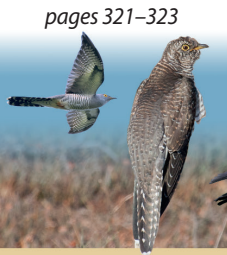
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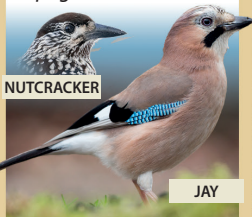
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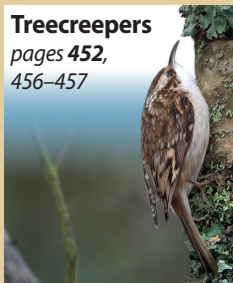
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