



Latin Name *Sitta europaea*

What do they look like?

The Nuthatch has blue slate upper parts and buff coloured under parts. The eye stripe is black and it has a white throat, grey bill and yellowish-brown legs. On the underside of the bend of the wing there are black flight markings.

Both sexes look alike except the male has dark chestnut flanks, whereas the female is a much paler, biscuity colour. The juveniles are very similar, but with less chestnut on the flanks.

Where do they live and nest in Healey Dell?

Nuthatches seldom move very far from the woods in which they hatch. They are also the only British bird which regularly climbs down trees head first, so that the best place to look for them is on the trunks and branches of trees especially those like the Beech and the Oak which bear nuts. Their feet are 'scansorial' which means that they are adapted for climbing. Interesting though, Nuthatches have soft tail feathers, unlike Treecreepers and Woodpeckers who have stiff ones.

Nuthatches nest in holes in trees when ever possible, and will take over the abandoned nests of woodpeckers. In this case the hole may be reduced in size by plastering it with mud making it exactly the right size for the birds to be able to enter and too tight a fit for bigger birds like starlings. The nest lining is made from bark chips and dead leaves.

What do they eat?

In the breeding season they eat insects and spiders. But as summer wanes their name Nuthatch comes into play. They have very strong, chisel-shaped beaks that they use to break into large seeds and nuts. These are taken to crevices in tree bark into which they are very firmly hammered, before being either cracked open immediately or saved for use over the winter. This behaviour is very important for the survival of the birds as they are able to take advantage of their larder stocks. It also means that the defence of the territory throughout the year is vital because both food and space are at risk if they loose it.

What do they sound like?

The Nuthatch is very vocal in the breeding season with a loud, rapidly-repeated, ringing call note. It can also produce a series of whistles as well as musical trills and churrs. Their song is a loud repetitive 'twee, twee'.



Photograph © Mike Weedon

Vital Statistics

Eggs: April/May 6-9
Incubation: 23-25 days
Maximum lifespan: 11 years
Length: 14cm
Wingspan: 22.5-27cm
Weight: 20-25 g
UK breeding: 130,000 territories

To hear the sound they make follow the link from the button or copy <http://www.rspb.org.uk/birds/guide/n/nuthatch/gallery.asp>





What are their eggs like?

The Breeding season starts from late April, when the female starts to build the nest. In this she lays up to thirteen eggs. These are white speckled with reddish-brown spots. The female incubates the eggs on her own for a period of about fourteen or fifteen days, though it can sometimes take as long as eighteen. The young are completely naked when they hatch, and are tended by both parents before they fledge at twenty-two to twenty-five days old.

Conservation

Nuthatches seem to be doing quite well in the warming climate and in 1989 bred for the first time in Scotland there are now at least 20 known pairs. There are no Nuthatches in Ireland.

Sources

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/>

<http://www.garden-birds.co.uk/>

<http://www.bto.org/birdtrends2004/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/wildfacts/>

<http://www.plantpress.com/wildlife/>

<http://www.noahsarkgardens.co.uk/>