

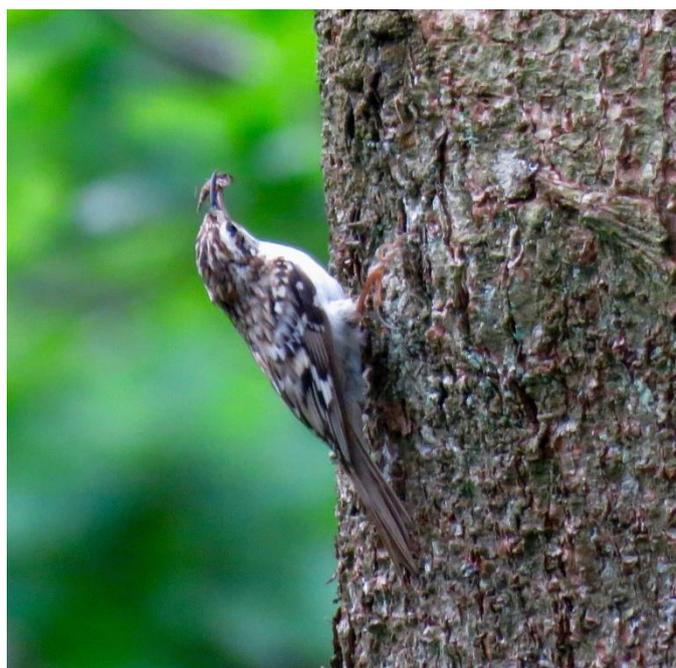
# The Journal

## Nature Notes

“It seems to me that the natural world is the greatest source of excitement; the greatest source of visual beauty; the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living” - Sir David Attenborough. I couldn't agree more and although the weather may not be ideal, there is no time like the present to resolve to spend a little more time with nature. A spell out in the fresh air can enhance your mood and improve your fitness, which is why the British public made over 3 billion excursions into the great outdoors in 2016. Amongst the most reliable habitats for birdlife in winter are waterways, including lakes, rivers, canals and ponds. Here you can see swans, geese, ducks and other water-birds including Common Gulls.



Woodlands will also offer a variety of birdlife, although far fewer than will be seen after the arrival of the summer migrants. The antics of Long-tailed Tits and their commoner relatives are always entertaining as they acrobatically search the branches for tasty morsels. Perhaps less commonly seen are Treecreeper (shown here) and Nuthatch, although they are probably present in most broad-leafed woods throughout the county. Both species may be seen climbing along tree trunks and branches, probing for insects in the bark, but whereas the Nuthatch can happily move up and down a trunk the Treecreeper only feeds whilst climbing upwards. They generally start near the bottom of a tree, spiral upwards around the trunk and then repeat the process. You may see a



Nuthatch at your bird feeder as they readily take seeds and nuts, but the Treecreeper is almost exclusively an insect feeder so you will need to search in suitable woodlands to find it.



Of course you don't need to go far to see birds at this time of year - a simple bird table or feeder will attract a succession of garden birds to within sight of your kitchen window. From where I sit now I can clearly see the bird table being visited by a family of House Sparrows feasting on a handful of seed. Suddenly the resident Blackbird arrives to clear them off and reclaim his territory, scattering more seed on the floor than he manages to eat. As soon as he leaves the Robin arrives and he aggressively defends the table against all other small birds, but he is unable to withstand the clumsy arrival of a pair of Collared Doves. And, in the background, the Dunnock shown here sits waiting to clean up after the others.

On the subject of your back garden birdlife, it is now time for the Big Garden Birdwatch that has been run by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds for the last 40 years. With over half a million people contributing sightings, this provides an invaluable snapshot into how the various garden bird species are doing. You can help by going to <https://www.rspb.org.uk/> and signing up to record the birds in your garden for just one hour between January 26th and 28th.