

Bird Species Fact Sheets

The following fact sheets cover 4 different birds, Blue tit, Chaffinch, Sand martin and House martin. These 4 species are featured because they can be used to demonstrate various facts which the children will learn about as part of the programme.

Blue tits and Chaffinches are native British birds and are here all year round. They are both easily identified and are regular visitors to feeding stations. The Chaffinch makes a nest in a tree whilst the Blue tit nests in holes and will take to nest boxes.

Sand martins and House martins come to Britain only in the summer. Sand martins burrow nest holes in banks and will use artificial sites such as the nesting wall which has been built at Gouthwaite Reservoir. House martins build cup shaped nests of mud on the side of buildings. Both these species migrate to Africa for the winter.



BLUE TIT

Fact sheet

General Info

Latin name

Cyanistes caeruleus

Family

Tits (Paridae)

Size & Weight

12 cm long and 18cm wingspan

11 g - about the same as 1½ teaspoons of sugar

Identification

Easy to recognise, with a blue cap and bright yellow breast.

Where to see them

Common in woodland, hedgerows, parks and gardens.

When to see them

All the year round.

What they eat

Insects, caterpillars, seeds and nuts.

Where they nest

In holes in trees, and happily take to nest boxes.

How long they live

Usually 3 years, but the oldest recorded was almost 10



Blue tits in Nidderdale

Blue tits are common in Nidderdale, and are seen in woodland and in gardens.

Blue tits are regular visitors to bird tables and feeders throughout the year. Agile birds, they will entertain for hours by hanging upside down from feeders, branches, etc.

During the winter, Blue tits often join other birds such as Great tits, Coal tits and Goldcrests and can be seen foraging for insects as they move in flocks through the trees.

Conservation status

Blue tits are on the **Green** list because the population is stable and there is no cause for concern.

There are over 3½ million pairs of Blue tits breeding in Britain, and during winter the population grows to 15million birds as migrants arrive from countries with harsher winters.

What's special about Blue tits

Blue tits are bright and inquisitive birds, and are also opportunists and will often peck through foil milk bottle tops for the cream.

The yellowness of a male blue tit's breast is an indication of the number of yellowy-green caterpillars he has eaten and a brighter breast is more attractive to females.



CHAFFINCH

Fact sheet

General Info

Latin name

Fringilla coelebs

Family

Finches (Fringillidae)

Size & Weight

14cm long and 26cm wingspan

24 g - about the same as 3 teaspoons of sugar

Identification

Stocky bright birds, the males have rust red breast, grey head, brown back and white wing bars. The female is much duller

Where to see them

Common and widespread in woodlands, fields and gardens throughout the UK

When to see them

All the year round

What they eat

Seeds and insects

Where they nest

In nests made in the forks of tree branches

How long they live

Usually 3 years, but the oldest recorded was 12



Chaffinches in Nidderdale

Chaffinches are very common in Nidderdale and can be seen in gardens, woodlands and fields. They are regulars at feeding stations, sometimes on the feeders or picking up dropped seed from below.

Female chaffinches build a neat cup nest from moss, grass, and feathers bound with spiders' webs, lined with feathers and wool, and decorated with lichen and flakes of bark.

What's special about Chaffinches

Male chaffinches have very strong voices and a melodic song, and can be heard calling throughout spring and early summer. Singing contests between chaffinches kept as pets were common in Victorian times.

The short contact call sounds rather like "Spink" and this is a folk name for chaffinches in Northern England.

Conservation status

Chaffinches are on the **Green** list because the population is stable and there is no cause for concern. There are over 6 million pairs of Chaffinches breeding in Britain, and many more come to the UK from Europe for the Winter.



SAND MARTIN

Fact sheet

General Info

Latin name

Riparia riparia

Family

Swallows and martins (Hirundinidae)

Size & Weight

12 cm long and 28cm wingspan

14 g - about the same as 2 teaspoons of sugar

Identification

Small agile flyers with dark brown upper parts, pale under parts and a distinctive dark chest bar.

Where to see them

Along rivers & lakes throughout the UK.

When to see them

March to October when they come to the UK to breed

What they eat

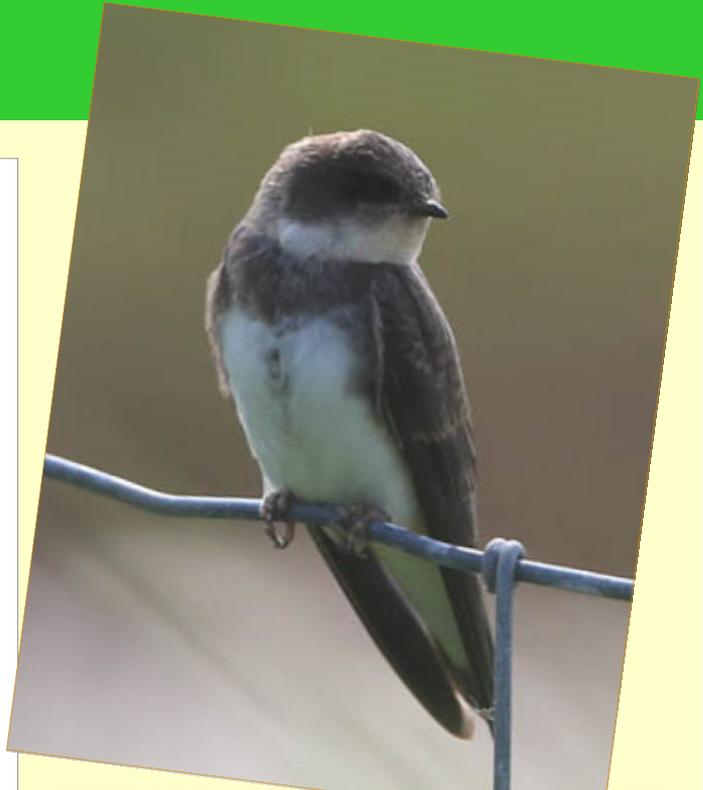
Insects which they catch in flight, particularly over water

Where they nest

In holes in sandy banks or in artificial nesting banks

How long they live

Usually 2/3 years, but the oldest recorded was 8



Sand martins in Nidderdale

Sand martins come to Nidderdale each year but few find places to breed and move on.

The river Nidd does not have sandy banks, and the reservoir sides are subject to erosion so that the traditional nesting sites have disappeared.

A nesting bank has been built at Gouthwaite Reservoir to provide nesting holes and to encourage Sand martins to return to Nidderdale to breed.

What's special about Sand martins

This is a tiny bird which flies 8500km each year across the Sahara to get to Nidderdale to build a nest and have young. They lay 4 or 5 eggs in a clutch.

Once a Sand martin gets to its nesting site, it excavates a nesting chamber which can be up to 1 m long and which is excavated at a rate of 8-10 cm a day.

Conservation status

Sand martins are a European species of concern and are listed on the **AMBER** list of birds under threat.

Populations are reducing because of dangers encountered during migration from Africa and the loss of breeding sites in the UK.



HOUSE MARTIN

Fact sheet

General Info

Latin name

Delichon urbica

Family

Swallows and martins (Hirundinidae)

Size & Weight

12 cm long and 28cm wingspan

19 g - about the same as 2½ teaspoons of sugar

Identification

Agile flyers, with glossy blue-black upper parts, white under parts, a distinctive white rump and a forked tail

Where to see them

Around towns and villages, and over agricultural land

When to see them

April to September when they come to the UK to breed

What they eat

Flying insects

Where they nest

On buildings, by attaching their mud nest under eaves, often living in colonies

How long they live

Usually 2/3 years, but the oldest recorded was 7



House martins in Nidderdale

House martins come to Nidderdale each year to breed.

Nidderdale has the 3 things needed by House martins - suitable nesting sites, the right building materials and plenty of food. You can sometimes see them near puddles picking up the mud needed to build or mend their nests.

You can buy or make artificial martin nests to affix to walls to make life a bit easier for the birds.

What's special about House martins

This is a tiny bird which flies 8500km each year across the Sahara to get to Nidderdale to build a nest and have young. They lay 4 or 5 eggs in a clutch.

House martins like to live near mankind, and nest on buildings, attaching their mud nest cup under eaves; each cup takes up to 10 days to build, and over 1000 beak sized pellets of mud.

Conservation status

House martins are a European species of concern and are listed on the **AMBER** list of birds under threat.

Populations are reducing because of dangers encountered during migration from Africa and modern house building materials like PVC which can prevent nest building.