



### **Ways of Learning Bird Sounds**

There's no one way to learn bird sounds, and it's often a combination that works best for different birds, different situations and different people.

### **Familiarity and Repetition**

Perhaps the most important is familiarity through repetition and being exposed to birdsong, with some knowledge of what you're listening to.

There's nothing intrinsic about the exposure to sound that allows you to identify it of course. It's about focusing your attention and knowledge.

Of course there are different ways to get this regular exposure. For birds that are common, simply being outside during the spring, especially first thing in the day, is the best route, and absolutely the place to start. This would ideally be a place in nature that is easy to get to and return to on a regular basis. It could be as a part of a sit spot practice or a regular walk.

Not only does regular practice get our 'ears tuned' and enjoy what's around us, it helps us build up a core library of familiar sounds. Having these available to us makes it possible to filter them out in different places too. For example, most of our common garden songbirds are originally woodland birds, and we can expect to hear plenty of blackbirds, thrushes, dunnocks, robins, wrens and tits when we walk in the woods. That core library gives us the ability to filter and focus.

For those birds that we don't come across so often, that repetition can come through technology. There are all kinds of ways that technology can bring these sounds into our lives.

One way is through these videos. You can check in on the bird sounds here however often you'd like to help you get familiar with the sounds.

There are other nice tricks we can play on ourselves:

You could use your phone. If there's a bird sound you particularly want to get more familiar with, set it as the ringtone or notification sound. You can even set the sound as your alarm noise when you wake up in the morning.

There is the Collins Birds Guide which you can get as an app for your phone, which has all the common birdsongs and calls, as well as visual guides to each species. Having this accessible to you when you're out and about hearing bird sounds is incredibly useful.

*Disclaimer: The advice in this guide is considered to be correct at the time of writing, but Red Squirrel Resources accept no liability for actions inspired by these resources.*

## Sound Associations

But all of this is even more powerful when you can find some kind of similarity in the sounds. And we are going to focus on this with each species we focus on in this series. Is there something about the sound, maybe a moment within the song, that reminds you of something else.

This is an area which is quite individual . We all have a different library of sounds in our heads, and we will all hear sounds slightly differently too. So this is about what works for each of us.

For example, to my ear a kingfisher sounds like a dog whistle. As soon as I made that connection I was able to find lots more kingfishers than I had before.

## Imitation

Imitation is also a great way to engage with bird sounds - everyone can try the 'dweep dweep' of the nuthatch, or the 'chick!' of the great spotted woodpecker.

As you familiarise yourself with a particular species, consider what the bird sounds like to you and make a note of it, in whatever way makes sense to you. This is a great question to ask a group of children, you will probably get answers that you would never have thought of before.

This also applies to the way a bird sounds to you. Again, this is very individual, but to my ear, a robin song sounds wistful; a chaffinch song sounds cheery. These anchors can be a really helpful shortcut to remembering what kind of bird you might be hearing. There are also really helpful mnemonics and memory tricks that can help us remember the rhythm of a song. So for a collared dove we can think of the rhythm as: "I don't know, I don't know," (3 notes); a woodpigeon says "I really don't know, I really don't know" (5 notes). The Yellowhammer famously sings: "a little bit of bread and no cheese."

Some people even find it useful to draw bird sounds as scribbles, which can be another way in. You could gather and arrange natural materials that answer the same question.

Again, some of these will be personal to you, the way you hear it and the way you learn.

In the videos of our core species I will offer some of the popular ways that people have interpreted the sounds, and some of my own, but what's most important is to notice how they sound to you and use that as your guide.

## Links

- Bird Sounds
- Bird Families
- Bird Species Profiles

## Tags

- Bird voices, bird songs, bird calls, birds, learning, id, identification, how to

*Disclaimer: The advice in this guide is considered to be correct at the time of writing, but Red Squirrel Resources accept no liability for actions inspired by these resources.*

