

Storm Birds

Protecting the birds of Annandale

Photographs of birds in their habitat with details of their feeding, nesting and behaviour.

To help conserve local birdlife, observe them and please keep your distance, dogs on leads (especially during the nesting season) and restore any damage to habitat. All these pictures are taken with a lens Canon 100-400 f5.6 and camera Canon 7d Mark ii. The aim of this book is for you to appreciate and conserve the ecosystem and learn how we can protect nature.

This a selection of photographs of the birds of Dumfries and Galloway. Suzanne Storm is a local wildlife photographer with the time, patience and equipment to record them without disturbance and with respect for their place in nature.

The best way to observe birds is to keep a good distance away, listen and look without disturbing. On most of the bird descriptions there is information about the Field Work involved in capturing the subject shown.

During the nesting season dogs should be kept on a lead and as much as possible out with the nesting season. Keeping still, or even staying in your car gives the best results when photographing or watching birds & wildlife, & how useful the book has been on your holiday or local walks. The author welcomes feedback about sightings & how useful the book has been on your holiday or local walks.

Any sightings of the rarer birds such as Pink Starlings, Bee Eater or a Hoopoe etc, often birds blown off course can be seen maybe once in a lifetime. These can be sent to the Recording Centre at The [Scottish Birds Records Committee](#), set up by the Club, also maintains the official *Scottish List* on behalf of the SOC. SBRC also publishes an annual update on rare and scarce birds seen in Scotland and produces papers on species/subspecies identification and changes in status in a Scottish context.

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All the Storm Birds were observed and photographed in the River Annan Catchment. Exact locations are not given for fear of too much human activity, especially in the rare and shy birds habitat. However you can work out where you might see them, the dipper lives in and by rivers.

Storm Bird Index

Bird	Page	Bird	PAGE
Brambling	5&6	Collard Dove	31&32
Dipper	7&8	Pheasant	33&34
Bullfinch	9&10	Tree Creeper	35&36
Buzzard	11&12	Willow Warbler	37&38
Oyster Catcher	13&14	Wren	39&40
Woodpecker	15&16	Tawny Owl	41&42
Kingfisher	17&18	Gold Crest	43&44
Greenfinch	19&20	Lesser Red Poll	45&46
Nuthatch	21&22	Water Rail	47&48
Little Egret	23&24	Reed Bunting	49&50
Tree Sparrow	25&26	Jay	51&52
Long Tailed Tit	27&28	Yellow Hammer	53&54
Field Fare	29&30	Osprey	55&56

BRAMBLING



BRAMBLING

A highly gregarious winter bird that can be observed in flocks of many thousands, the Brambling is often seen in farmland, fields and woodland, yet is characterised by its colourful plumage. In wintertime, the male brambling has a mottled grey-brown head, dark brown wings and the bill is a pale yellow/orange colour with a black tip.

They frequent gardens eating fruit & seeds put out for birds. Feeding on the ground.

The Brambling is a winter bird so you can expect to see them from mid- September until March/April time. I photographed mine in a park, & also in my garden in Moffat. I crept quietly to the park where I had seen them feeding earlier. Hid behind a tree and managed to get some nice shots.

Occasionally the birds will stay in the UK up to May but then it will migrate to breed in Scandinavia and West Siberia.

DIPPER



DIPPER

There are resident Dippers living along the river, at Moffat, delightful little birds that have great camouflage as you can see, he blends with not only the rocks but also the colours surrounding his habitat, the banks & fairly fast flowing rivers.

The Dipper's food consists of aquatic invertebrates, including mayfly nymphs and caddisfly larvae, and small fish such as minnows.

The Dipper likes to live near the fast-flowing rivers, where this little bird is an expert at diving to catch his prey & can swim underwater too!

Producing more oil than most birds, which may help keep them warmer when seeking food underwater.

Field Work.....finding a stone in the river, with evidence of bird droppings. Then a suitable place to lie flat/hide in the long undergrowth near to the bank & stone as possible, & wait, & wait & wait. My husband came along once with me, & was horrified to learn I was going to be there maybe 4 hours. He fled for home after 10 minutes complaining he was too cold!



Female Bullfinch



Male Bullfinch

Bullfinch

The male bullfinch is unmistakable with his bright pinkish-red breast and cheeks, grey back, black cap and tail, and bright white rump.

The flash of the rump in flight and are usually the first signs of bullfinches being present.

They feed voraciously on the buds of various trees in spring and were once a 'pest' of fruit crops.

Bullfinches can be seen in woodlands, orchard and hedgerows. Best looked for at woodland edges - usually located by its mournful call. I have to confess I am not good at listening to different bird calls. I tend to watch carefully.

Field work.....to capture my photos I hid in some yew trees in the park at Lochmaben. I saw them feeding on sycamore seeds there. Completely hidden from view, I managed to capture them feeding. People passed by walking their dogs, quite amusing that the dogs came into the buses to see me, unbeknown the their owners!

Quite exciting if you spot one in your garden, usually feeding on berries.

Buzzard



Buzzard

Buzzards can be found across the UK and can survive in most habitats, including woodland, farmland & moorland. They may even be seen in urban areas where there is sufficient green space.

A hungry buzzard is quite capable of killing a wide variety of prey, numbers are greatest where the fields are smallest, as it favours abundant hedgerows. Despite its impressive size, the buzzard is not a major predator. They eat road kill whenever they spot it.

Their diet includes voles, mice and shrews. Rabbits. Other birds (particularly members of the crow family and pigeons) Carrion & Earthworms. I have seen them on fields early in the mornings feeding on worms.

Persecution by gamekeepers & the use of pesticide meant the species had declined in numbers according to the RSPB website.

Buzzards are commonly 'mobbed' by crows and magpies which will harass the predator until it flies away. I have seen this quite often when I am out and about, but usually it happens quite fast & I miss the shot!

One of the hardest birds to photograph being so aware of humans! More likely to get a shot from your car, which I did, as I was sitting there he flew down and sat on the hedge

Oyster Catcher



Oyster Catcher

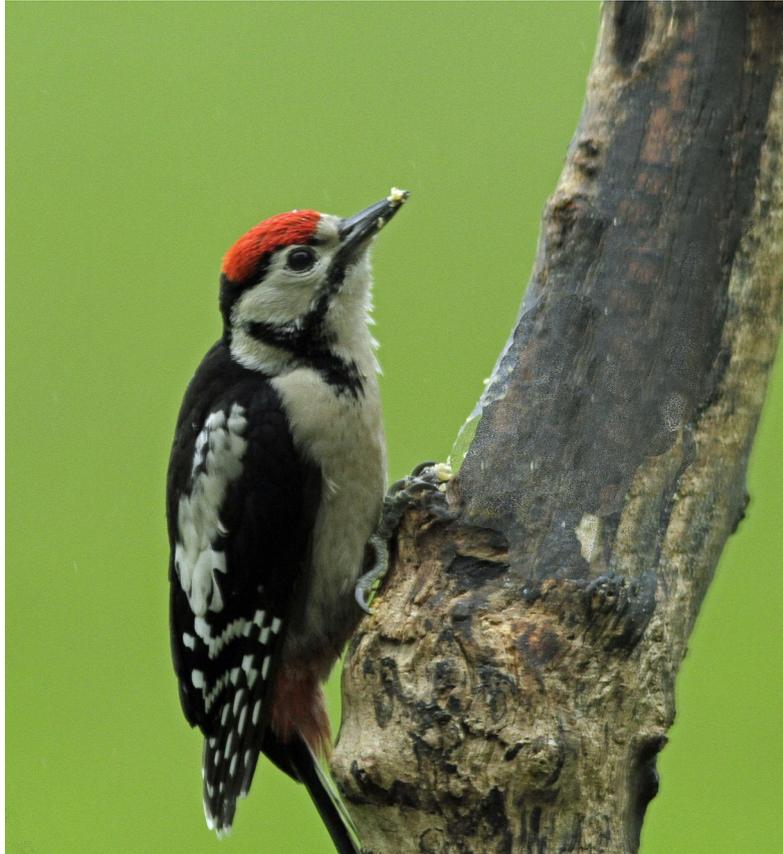
You will see the Oyster Catcher along the coast, where they specialise in eating shellfish, particularly cockles and mussels, which they either prise or hammer open with their strong, flattened bills. I have seen them doing this at Stranraer on the beach.

It seems that the Oyster Catcher does not in fact eat oysters in the UK! I read this on an RSPB site.

I seen these locally at Caerlaverock Wetlands Centre, south of Dumfries. I have also seen them along the river Nith, Stranrear, as well as Mill Loch in Lochmaben.

They are beautiful birds, which I have longed to get a photo of, I managed this one day sitting perfectly still with my back against a wall I managed to get this photo at Powfoot as it flew past me! Thrilled!

Great Spotted Woodpecker (male)



Great Spotted Woodpecker

Both males and females are able to drum the trees. I watched this once when walking across the golf course I came across a small corpse. The Woodpeckers were both hammering away making a hole in a tree high up.

Since woodpeckers do not have vocal cords, this activity also play important role in communication. Feathers that look like bristles on the nostrils of woodpecker prevent inhalation of wood particles. I got this piece of information from a RSPB website.

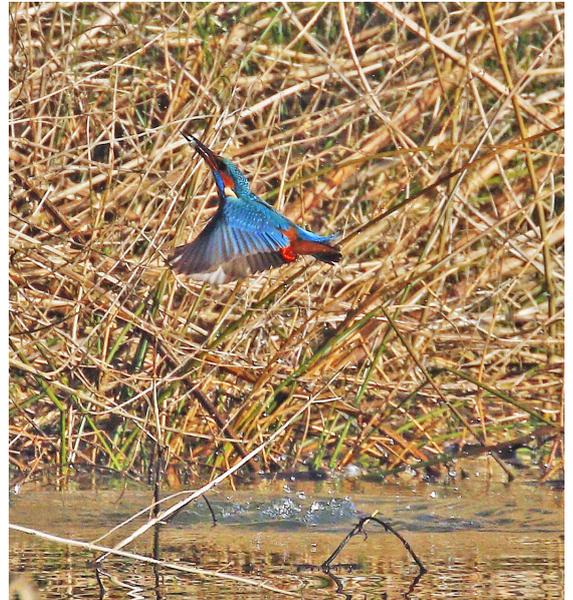
Found in woodlands, especially with mature broad-leaved trees, although mature conifers will support them. They can also be found in parks and large gardens.

They will come to peanut feeders and bird tables, as well as eating beetles & grubs.

Extremely shy & very difficult to photograph. I have seen them around Lochmaben as well as Moffat. Also at Eskrigg Nature Reserve.

Field work.....I put a tree trunk up in my garden in Moffat & spread some suet with Peanut Butter onto the trunk. I then had to hide & managed to get my photograph that way. Not easy though as I had to sit on the floor to minimise my shape, if I shifted my position slightly he was gone. Good luck with this one!

KINGFISHER



KINGFISHER

Kingfishers eat mainly fish, chiefly minnows and sticklebacks, but they also take aquatic insects, freshwater shrimps and tadpoles.

They burrow into the sandy banks of the rivers

The decline of the kingfisher is thought to be due to human intervention. People sitting too close, causing nests to be abandoned. I have seen Kingfishers in Moffat & the river Nith. I preferred to watch them from a hide at Caerlaverock to avoid disturbance to them in their natural habitat. I use the term **Hide** loosely as it has neither windows or a door & is extremely cold in the winter.

They close their eyes as they dive into the water, so they are fishing blind! They bob their heads before diving to work out how far to dive. I have watched them bobbing.

The kingfisher can hover over water by flapping its wings rapidly and can fly very swiftly. While diving for food, it folds its wings backward in a V-shape and submerges completely in the water.

I spent over 5 hours in a hide, with no door or windows. It was November & freezing. I sat there all that time, but it paid off as now and again for a few seconds, he came & perched, just long enough for a few shots. I am so pleased, he is beautiful!

Greenfinch



Greenfinch

A large finch seen in gardens, parks, woodland and farmland.

The greenfinch feeds on seeds, and will visit bird tables and feeders in gardens. They like peanuts & black sunflower seeds.

They were common but now in decline is caused by a severe outbreak of a disease called trichomoniasis

The disease is spread by waterborne parasites on bird tables. Please wash your feeders on a regular basis, once a week would be ideal. Hot soapy water rinse & dry.

I found photographing these birds much easier from my garden in Moffat. I have also seen them in large numbers at Caerlaverock Wetlands Centre, Dumfries.

Field Work.....They are shy birds, & I only get one or two on the feeders. I set up a hide in the garden, made a feeding station out of logs, & sticks, put out Sunflower hearts & waited, this was a long wait as I have never seen a flock in the garden!

Nuthatch



Nuthatch

Nuthatches are best looked for in mature woods and established parkland throughout the UK, on the sides of tree trunks and underside of branches.

They can descend head-first and hang upside down beneath twigs and branches.

Characterised by large heads, short tails, and powerful bills and feet, nuthatches advertise their territory using loud, simple songs.

Eating mostly insects, nuts, and seeds. They forage for insects hidden in or under bark by climbing along tree trunks and branches, sometimes upside-down.

Field workI found them easy to photograph in the garden & in the woods, when they are on the tree trunks. Just put out peanuts, or sunflower hearts, then hide yourself & sure enough if there is one around they will come. Again you have to be very still & quiet & hidden from view.

Little Egret



Resident breeder and winter visitor to the UK & Ireland.

Visible all year, highest numbers are seen in winter months. Prefers marshy areas, often seen on estuaries.

I saw this one at Caerlaverock Wetland Centre, Dumfries. I have seen them at other wetland centres, but although they are reported to be widespread I have not seen them in D & G apart from on the Estuary at Kingholm Quay, and by the river Nith near Lochmaben. I have seen them in England at Wetland centres.

They eat small fish, crustaceans, bugs etc.

Field Work.....You cannot get near these birds, so it's a question of how long is your lens?

I managed this one as I was in the hide at Caerlaverock Wetland Centre. I am not a fan of hides, but sometimes it's the only way to get a decent photograph.



TREE SPARROW

This is a fairly rare sparrow to see.

Distinguished from the house sparrow by the black spot on each cheek.

They build their nests in tree hollows, in fact there is one in next doors garden in Lochmaben.

I have seen them at Caerlaverock Wetlands centre, in Dumfries. A cute Capture of one bathing in my garden bird bath.

According to the RSPB website they are more likely to be found in hedgerows & over farmland.

I have never seen one on a feeder. They eat seeds & insects.

I was lucky to have one next door to photograph.



Long Tailed Tit

One of the most loved of the tiny birds.

Extremely agile, and amusing to watch as they hang upside down from the branches.

Fluffy & slightly pink on their plumage. They go around in flocks and are fast and if you are lucky you might get a photo!!

I watched these many times without managing to get a photo, this one was taken in the garden of a Pub near Newton Stewart!

Feeding on insects & spiders, that's fine by me!

A Wildlife Trust website reported that they line their nests with over 1,500 feathers!



Field Fare

A bird that arrives during the winter in great flocks from Scandinavia.

They eat berries and feed on the grassland.

I have seen them in their hundreds in the fields at Moffat. A difficult bird to photograph as the slightest movement will send the whole lot into the air. I spent many hours during the winter trying!

While they feed on berries, this is also a difficult place to get a photo as the foliage gets in the way.



Collard Dove

A frequent visitor to the gardens eating seeds & corn.

They are smaller than the wood pigeon.

The Doves lay only 2 eggs but have several clutches during the breeding season.

I found these easy to photograph in the garden, and this one sat on top of the bird table watching me. Very obliging!



Pheasant

These birds are seen everywhere all year, and the plumage of the male pheasant is particularly stunning.

Feeding on the fields eating seeds & sometimes insects.

The females are different shades of brown, unlike the males.

In full breeding plumage the males are beautiful especially in the sunshine.

I managed to tame some of them, by whistling every day and throwing seed in the garden. Slowly they accepted me, and I can now feed one of the males by hand. It takes time, but worth it if you love the birds.

I was lucky to photograph not one but three having an altercation in the field by the house in Moffat.



Tree Creeper

This tiny bird loves to run and up and down tree trunks looking for insects to feed on.

I have watched many in the woods and once at the top of the tree they will fly down to the bottom of the next one and start all over again.

Difficult to photograph if you spot one as they move fast, but at a local reserve **(Eskrigg, Lockerbie)** where they are used to people walking around, it was much easier to get a photo.

I have not seen one on a feeder!

I sat still and waited until one came along as I knew there were several to be found there, its just a matter of patience.



Willow Warbler

A tiny bird with such a sweet lovely song, seen in gardens, parks and woodlands.

Feeding on insects and much to my delight Spiders!

I haven't seen many of them, some I have spotted in the woodlands surrounding Castle Loch in Lochmaben. At the reserve in Applegarth too.

This one I was lucky enough to have singing away in my garden at Lochmaben.

I do not know much about them, and collected some facts from RSPB site.

They are around from April to September.



Wren

This tiny bird is popular & the song is so wonderful to hear.

So tiny it is very difficult to photograph, fast & difficult to spot.

Try to tempt them to make an appearance on your feeders. Peanuts and suet just might attract their interest.

I have photographed them many times, but its not easy to get a good picture.



Tawny Owl

A lovely combination of browns on the Tawny Owl.

Living in the woodlands, I managed to capture this photo at Eskrigg Reserve.

They live on rodents. When they fly they are silent as their feathers are designed in a different way to other birds

It is not easy to spot them in the day time. I did spot a chick once at Moffat Reserve sitting in a tree!

I spent a few hours trying to get a decent shot of one, and one morning there she was sitting in a tree almost in the open with the sun shining on her feathers.

This particular female did not seem to mind being photographed although I was at a distance.

Their chicks, if you are
& fluffy!



lucky enough to see one, are grey



Goldcrest

This is a tiny bird, and it is not easy to spot or photograph. They are extremely fast, and flit from branch to branch at great speed.

It likes conifers & woodland areas, where it feeds on spiders, (hurrah) flies & caterpillars.

The crest is orange in the male and yellow in the female.

I was lucky enough to spot one in Holmpark in Moffat, also at Barrhill near Kirkcudbright. I was thrilled to be able to photograph these little gems.



Lesser Red Poll

These little birds are not seen in great numbers, in fact you would be lucky to see one in your garden. They are members of the finch family.

I have only seen one or two at Moffat in the garden, but plenty at Lochmaben in the gardens there.

They feed on seeds, and insects.

I set up the photo by putting a log across the hedge in my garden, smearing suet as a base and sprinkling sunflower hearts onto the suet.

I waited weeks before one came along, and since then I have not seen any at all.

Good luck with seeing this little bird.



Water Rail

The Water Rail is very difficult to spot.

A solitary bird that likes to forage and live in the wetland areas that have plenty of vegetation.

This bird likes insects & small fish or amphibians that live in the same kind of environment.

Being so difficult to photograph I was so thrilled to see one in Lochmaben in the park one frosty morning. It was in a wet secluded area. I dashed home & got a camouflage net, grabbed some mealworms and went back to set up the net across two trees near where I had spotted the bird.

I spread the mealworms around and waitedand waited. Freezing!!!

Eventually the Water Rail turned up. I was so pleased....happily eating, & me happily taking pictures. The bird had no idea I was there. Great result.



Reed Bunting

Small bird that I have seen around the Lochs in Lochmaben.

Also seen at the Caerlaverock Wetland Centre in Dumfries.

Feeding on seeds & insects.

I was lucky to spot this one sitting on an exploding bulrush!

This one is a male, their song is distinctive & they like to sit up high when singing



Jay

This attractive bird lives in the woodland areas, I have found it very shy indeed. One of the crow family, and extremely difficult to photograph.

They like to eat acorns, fruits, insects, small rodents, bats, newts, birds' eggs and young birds.

I managed to photograph this one in the woodland at Eskrigg Nature Reserve at Lockerbie.

I set up my camera, very early in the hide there, and waited with baited breath. Even moving my head would be enough to scare these birds.

Eventually one came down to feed on acorns, & even with one click of the camera his head shot up. I managed to get very few photographs!

Every photo I took has him looking wary!!



Yellow Hammer

Such a pretty bird, the male having darker feathers along his back .

They eat a variety of insects, caterpillars etc.

Not an easy bird to find these days, many around when I was young.

To photograph one I had to go to Caerlaverock Wetland Centre, nr. Dumfries.

There is a great abundance of corn around as the Centre feeds the water birds there. The Yellow Hammers seem to have adapted to the corn.

I managed to get a photo of one perched on the yellow gorse bush.

Easy to get a photo at Caerlaverock as the birds are used to people walking around.



Osprey

This lovely bird is an expert at catching fish.

I was so lucky to see this one at Castle Loch one year. A lone male.

He was just out of reach of my lens, which was so frustrating. I sat in the hide for 3 days taking pictures but I was just not near enough.

I donned my wellingtons one early morning in the winter, tramped across sodden fields where the mud & water often came to the top of my wellies!

I got stuck in the mud a few times too. I crept up to this Osprey sitting on the top of a tree, I managed to click once, he heard me, & he flew off. It had taken me over an hour to get there, a hard long hour too. I sat down on a log, in the long grass. I was extremely tired.

I was so still & quiet that a fox actually bumped his nose on my knee before we both saw each other!!!!

Scared us both!!!!