

## Starling

*Sturnus vulgaris*



Such is the strength of association between the Starling and Man, that this species is unmistakable. While the head and body size of this species is close to that of a Blackbird, the overall appearance is of a more rakish, bustling bird, often noisy and flighty. At a distance, the adults appear black, but on closer viewing, the iridescent nature of the plumage becomes evident. Adults in breeding plumage have a yellow bill. This is dark in the winter, a time when the plumage is less iridescent but marked with white spots. Young Starlings are dull brown in colour, often with a pale throat.

It is possible to tell the sex of two adults of a breeding pair of Starlings. The male does have much more glossy plumage but an even more obvious feature is that from mid-February onwards, British and Irish breeding male Starlings will have a blue blush at the base of their bill and in females this is pink. These differences are not obvious on continental birds before they migrate but the colour comes to their bills when they arrive on the breeding grounds.

The Starlings that visit your garden during the winter are not just your local birds. Their numbers are supplemented by millions from further east in Europe where the winters get too hard for them to remain. These birds start to reach us in late September and keep coming through the whole of October and into November. The return to the Continent starts at the beginning of March and continues through to mid-April, by which time our own birds may already be sitting on eggs.

