

# Wild watching

A nature-based  
activity pack



giving  
nature  
a home

# Welcome

**This pack is our little way to try to help you through the strange situation we find ourselves in.**

While we can't remove the difficulties and uncertainty that we're all living with at the moment, we can help you to connect with nature, and all the proven benefits that brings. These activities are designed to last approximately 30 minutes, but you can spend as little or as long as you like on them. Looking at birds and other wildlife can be a good start to your day. We've designed the activities to be suitable for a range of ages, so hopefully there should be something for everyone.

This booklet can give you:

- A daily routine.
- A regular experience of nature.
- Something to do for half an hour.
- A good start to the day!



Writing down your nature sightings means you can:

- Keep track of the first time you see something new.
- Draw the animals or plants that you see.
- Look back and see the changes in visitors to your garden, balcony or just outside your window.

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These are just suggested activities and you can pick and choose what you do. You can also find other activities online at [rspb.org.uk](https://www.rspb.org.uk) or for more family-focused fun visit [rspb.org.uk/wildchallengeideas](https://www.rspb.org.uk/wildchallengeideas)

# Starting to birdwatch

1. You may already have lots of birds visiting your garden, but on your first watch you may also like to set up a bird feeder to encourage more birds to visit in future, see page 8.
2. Use a notebook to write down all the birds you saw. What else did you see when looking at the birds? Where there other animals around? What colours could you see in nature?
3. **When you have had a few sessions watching the birds look at what you have written down in a notebook.** Are there days when you see more birds? Is there a time of day when you see more birds? What is the weather like when you see more birds?



# What birds can you see?

Use our handy guide to begin to get to know the birds you can see.

It's a natural progression to go from enjoying watching a bird going about its business to asking yourself "what kind of bird is it?" On the following pages, we have provided a list of some of the most common birds you might see in your garden. Tick off each different bird when you spot it.

There are many different bird species across Britain, so you may see a bird that isn't listed below. If so, you can use our bird identifier at: [rspb.org.uk/birds](https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds).

Seen it!



**Starling**

Bigger than a sparrow, but smaller than a blackbird and with a green and violet sheen.

Seen it!



**Dunnock**

A small, dark-looking bird found in gardens and woods.

Seen it!



**Greenfinch**

Chunky finch with yellow wing flashes.

Seen it!



**Great tit**

Smaller than a sparrow but bright, bold, with a black vertical stripe down the front.

Seen it!



### Pied wagtail

This little black, white and grey bird bobs its very long tail up and down as it walks.

Seen it!



### Woodpigeon

Common, big, grey pigeon with a white band on the wing and white neck patches.

Seen it!



### Blue tit

Tiny, dumpy, green and yellow bird with blue wings, tail and cap.

Seen it!



### Wren

A tiny, almost rounded, brown bird. For such a small bird it has a remarkably loud voice.

Seen it!



### Song thrush

A neat, spotty thrush, smaller and browner than a mistle thrush.

Seen it!



Female Male

### Blackbird

Common in gardens and woods, between sparrow and pigeon in size.

Seen it!



### Black-headed gull

Very common, noisy, squabbling gull, with red beak and legs. Its head is white in winter.

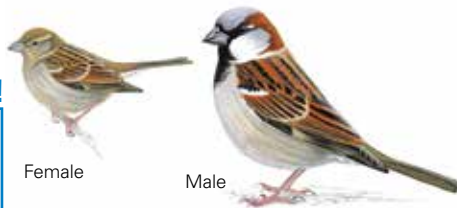
Seen it!



### Herring gull

A big, silvery-grey and white gull, with black wingtips, red on the beak and pink legs.

Seen it!



Female

Male

### House sparrow

Look in hedges, parks and gardens for small, chirpy, streaky brown birds.

Seen it!



### Coal tit

One of our tiniest birds, found mostly in trees and tall bushes. A plainer looking tit, with grey-blue back.

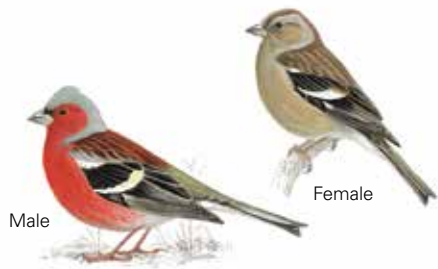
Seen it!



### Robin

A small, perky garden and woodland bird, with drooping wingtips, thin legs, a short beak and a red breast.

Seen it!



Male

Female

### Chaffinch

A sparrow-sized bird of gardens, fields and woods.

Seen it!



### Goldfinch

These dainty little birds are brightly coloured with a vivid red face and yellow wing patches.

Seen it!



### Long tailed tit

Easily recognisable with a tail that is bigger than its body, and undulating flight.

Seen it!



### Collared dove

A small, slim, pale dove, sandy-grey on top, dull pinkish underneath.

Seen it!



### Magpie

A big, long-tailed black and white bird like nothing else. Makes a loud chattering noise.

# Feeding the birds in your garden

## Top tips

1. Spacing the food out reduces competition between birds and allows more of them to feed at any one time.
2. Change the area where you scatter the food every few days, and never put out more than is eaten the same day, to avoid attracting unwanted visitors.
3. Sprinkle grated peanuts, suet nibbles and sprinkles, or grated cheese in the borders to encourage shy species.
4. Never put peanuts or suet balls out in nylon mesh bags. These can trap birds' feet and cause injuries. Feed whole peanuts in proper peanut feeders. Loose whole peanuts can be a choking hazard to chicks.
5. Most bird feeders can be enclosed in a feeder guardian, which will help to protect the birds from predators while feeding, and may help deter larger birds and squirrels from accessing the food.
6. Find the best place for your feeder. Ensure the birds have an all-round view so they can see predators. Make the feeder isn't too close to fences or other objects, which predators can use as a platform.

## Hygiene is important!

Whatever you feed birds with, good hygiene around feeders and bird baths is important all year round, but particularly so during the summer months. The warm weather can make bird food go off more quickly, and can provide ideal conditions for harmful bacteria to grow.

It's important to clean feeders regularly, and to always practise sensible hygiene for yourself as well: clean the feeders outdoors, keep separate brushes for the purpose, wear gloves and wash your hands after finishing the job.

We sell a great range of food and feeders in our online shop.

Visit [rspb.org.uk/shoponline](https://www.rspb.org.uk/shoponline)



# Make an apple bird feeder

**Approximate time: 10–30 minutes**

You will need:

- an apple
- a corer
- sunflower seeds
- three sticks
- string

1. Core the apple or make a hole through the middle of it.
2. Thread some string or thin rope through the hole in the apple.
3. Tie one end of the string to the middle of a stick.
4. Push sunflower seeds into the top half of the apple.
5. Poke the other two sticks into the bottom of the apple. Birds can then sit on these.
6. Tie the apple to a tree by the piece of string.

## **Birds can now use your bird feeder.**

Keep an out to see which birds seem to like it the most and which prefer the pine cone feeder (see page 10).



# Make pine cone feeders

**Approximate time: 20–40 minutes**

You will need:

- pine or fir cones (dried out so they are open)
- bird seed
- raisins (do not use if you have a dog or cat as they are harmful to these animals)
- chopped peanuts (be aware of any allergies in your household)
- grated cheese
- suet or lard
- a mixing bowl
- scissors
- string

1. Let your lard warm up to room temperature.
2. Cut the lard into small pieces. Put it in a bowl.
3. Put the bird seed, raisins, peanuts and grated cheese into the bowl. Mix with the lard. This is now your bird feed mix.
4. Tie string to the top of the pine cone.
5. Cover the pine cones with your bird feed mix.
6. Put your pine cones in the fridge for one hour to set.
7. Hang the pine cones in a tree using the string.



*Note: Home-made fat balls can go soft and rancid in warm summer weather.*

# Make a bird bath



## Approximate time: 10–30 minutes

Birds love a place to bathe and drink. You can buy pre-made bird baths but making your own is more enjoyable.

You will need:

- a shallow bowl (make sure it does not leak!)
- a stone or some pebbles
- some water

1. Pick a good place where the ground is flat.
2. Place the bowl on the ground.
3. Pour some water into the bowl.
4. Place a stone or some pebbles in the bowl for birds to perch on.
5. Watch the birds have a bath!

How long do the birds stay at your bird bath?  
Where else do you think birds bathe?



# Nature's colours

**You could try doing this activity for 30 minutes but you can do it for however long you like!**

When watching the birds or spending time outdoors you will see lots of different colours. Use this chart to look for different colours. What colours do you see?



The colours you see tell you what time of year it is. In summer there are lots of bright colours. Hang on to this booklet and come back to this exercise later in the year.

Male birds are often more colourful, so see if you can tell the difference between the sexes. You could use the chart for other animals or flowers, or as a bingo card – see how long it takes you to tick off all the colours in a row, or even get a full house!



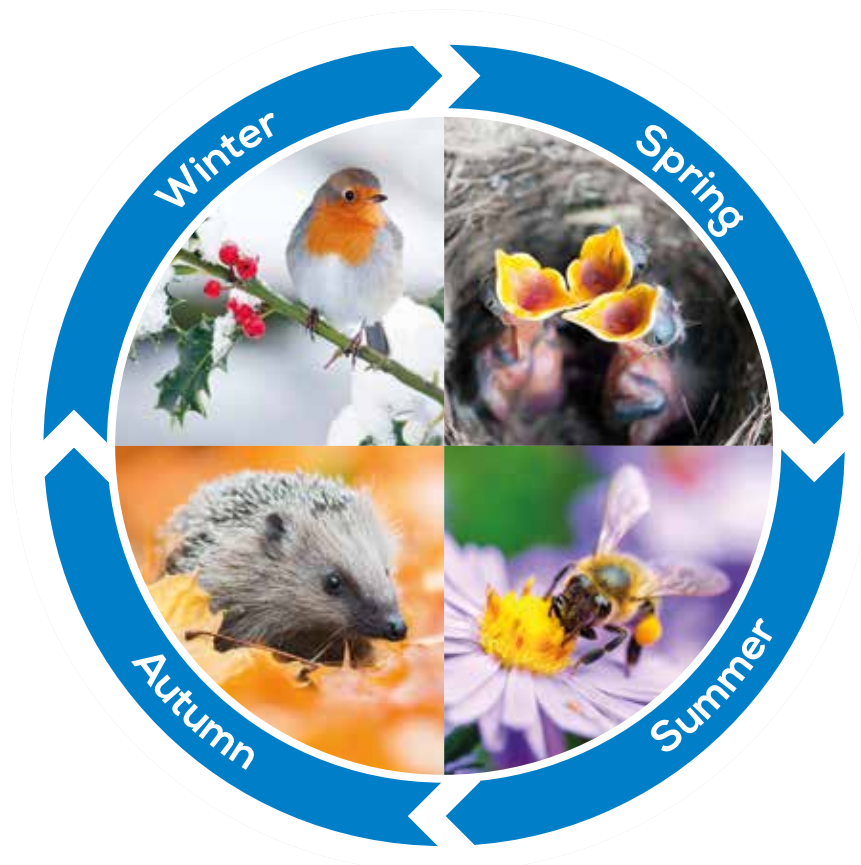
# The seasons



**You could try doing this activity for 30 minutes but you can do it for however as long as you wish.**

Sometimes you may not see much when looking outside. You can take this time to think about the seasons.

- What is your favourite season? Why do you like that season?
- What colours do you see in your favourite season?
- What animals do you see in your favourite season?
- What about the other three seasons? What changes do you see outdoors in other seasons?



# How many animals can you find?

You can do this activity for as long as you wish, but we would suggest 30 minutes to ensure you see something. Tick off the animals in the relevant box when you spot them.

Seen it!



## Hedgehog

Look out for hedgehogs during evenings from April to November.

Seen it!



## Red fox

The size of a medium-sized dog, foxes eat berries, nuts, insects and mammals.

Seen it!



## Grey squirrel

Originally from North America, grey squirrels are now widespread in the UK.

Seen it!



## Rabbit

Rabbits can be found everywhere! They are grey-brown with a fluffy white tail.

Seen it!



## Common frog

Common frogs come to ponds to breed and feed on a range of insects.

Seen it!



## Common toad

Common toads breed near ponds, but spend much of the year on dry land.

Seen it!



## Mole

Moles tunnel deep underground and leave tell-tale hills of soil behind them.

Seen it!



## Common newt

Common newts are nocturnal and eat insects, tadpoles and water snails.

# How many minibeasts can you find?

You can do this activity for however long you like, but we would suggest 30 minutes to ensure you see something. Tick off the animals in the relevant box when you spot them.

Seen it!



## Slug

Slugs can be found everywhere and feed on plant leaves, stems and roots.

Seen it!



## Snail

Snails come out at night to feed, resting during the day in dark places.

Seen it!



## Earwig

Earwigs are generally nocturnal and seek out dark crevices during the day.

Seen it!



## Centipede

Centipedes live under rocks in the soil and in compost heaps.

Seen it!



## Woodlouse

Woodlice feed on decaying matter and hide in damp places during the day.

Seen it!



## Garden spider

Garden spiders are common in the UK and feed on flying insects.

Seen it!



## Ant

Ants are common in many habitats and are a food source for many birds.

Seen it!



## Ladybird

The seven-spot ladybird is easy to recognise, with seven black spots and red wings.

# How many leaves can you find?

You could try doing this activity for 30 minutes, but you can do it for as long as you wish. You could write about what you spot, or draw them in a notebook.

Seen it!



**Oak**

The oak is the most common tree in the UK and has very distinctive leaves.

Seen it!



**Beech**

Beech trees can be important homes for wildlife for hundreds of years.

Seen it!



**Ivy**

This woody, evergreen plant climbs up trees and is a vital source of berries.

Seen it!



**Silver birch**

This tree provides a home for over 300 insect species throughout the UK.

Seen it!



**Hawthorn**

Often found with blackthorn, birds love to nest among its dense branches.

Seen it!



**Hazel**

Hazel branches can be so incredibly flexible they can be tied in knots.

Seen it!



**Sweet chestnut**

The chestnuts of this tree are popular ingredients for many recipes.

Seen it!



**Horse chestnut**

Children love the shiny conkers produced by this tree in autumn.



# Make a bee house



**Approximate time: 20–40 minutes**

You will need:

- plastic drinks bottle
- plasticine
- scissors
- short bamboo canes all the same size
- string

1. Cut the top off the bottle so the remainder is about a centimetre longer than your bamboo canes.
2. Push the plasticine into the bottom of the bottle.
3. Stick the canes (open ends out) hard into the plasticine and keep putting them in until the bottle is full.
4. Use string to hang the bottle up in a sunny spot on a tree, shed or wall. Make sure it tilts downwards slightly to keep rain out.

**Bees do a very important job as they are pollinators. You have now given them a home.** Keep an eye on your bee home and see if any move in – or maybe other insects will make it their home.



# Make a mini meadow



## Approximate time: over one hour

You will need:

- packet of wild flower seeds
- packet of "fine grass seed" (not rye-grass, it grows too strong and fast)
- rake
- four sticks
- string
- scissors

1. Pick a place for your meadow.
2. Remove any grass or weeds. Rake it over.
3. Mix the seeds together. Sprinkle them on the ground.
4. Walk over the seeds to push them into the ground. Water the seeds.
5. Put sticks in the ground at each corner of the meadow. Tie string around them. This will stop people walking on it.
6. Watch your meadow grow!

## It will take a while for your mini meadow to grow, so be patient!

When it starts to grow, look at the colours you can see and what insects it attracts.



# Create your own hedgehog café



**Approximate time: 20–40 minutes**

What you will need:

- shallow dishes
- water
- plastic or wooden box
- some bricks
- some food – try wet dog and cat food and dried cat biscuits.

1. Check the hedgehogs can get into your garden. This could be through a hedge or a hole in the fence.
2. Put your hedgehog food in your shallow bowls.
3. Fill one of the bowls with water.
4. Find a quiet, sheltered spot for your café.
5. Place the bowls of food and water on the floor. Check the bowls will fit under your box.
6. Put the box over the food. Check there is a 13cm square gap for hedgehogs to get in. Use the bricks to hold one side of the box up.
7. The next day lift up the box. Take away any old food. Put out fresh food in the dishes.
8. Put your box back over the food. Remember to check there is small gap for the hedgehogs to get in.

**Your garden is now a lovely café for hedgehogs. Try to see if you can hear them rustling in the garden.** In a notebook, you could keep a hedgehog diary, making a note of when you see them and how many there are.

# Make a bug hotel

**Approximate time: 40 minutes–1 hour**

You will need:

- bricks
- pallets or strips of wood
- roofing tiles or roofing felt

For the filling (any of the following):

- straw, hay, dead leaves and moss
- cardboard tubes and corrugated card
- plastic and ceramic pipes of various sizes and widths
- stones and sand
- hollow bamboo canes
- dead hollow plant stems
- pine cones
- logs drilled with various-sized holes



1. Find a level place in sunlight or light shade for your hotel.
2. Set out the bricks on the ground in a H shape. Fill the spaces between them with a mixture from the following – straw, hay, dead leaves, moss, sand.
3. Lay a pallet or strips of wood over the bricks and fill the gaps with any of the “filling”.
4. Add another layer of wood strips/pallet and put in more filling.
5. Carry on until you have made your hotel as high as you want, then cover with roofing tiles or felt to give your hotel a waterproof roof. Put bricks on top to keep your roof in place.



# Make a beetle bucket

**Approximate time: 40 minutes–1 hour**

You will need:

- plastic bucket
- craft knife
- stones and bark chippings
- spade
- logs

1. Using a craft knife, make 3cm holes in the side and bottom of the bucket. These will let in beetles.
2. Dig a bucket-sized hole in the ground and put your bucket in it.
3. Place big stones at the bottom of the bucket.
4. Stand logs on top of the big stones.
5. Fill bucket with bark chippings. Leave 10cm space at the top of the bucket.
6. Put soil on top of it. Fully bury the bucket.
7. Put more logs on top of it.

**Because you can't see what's going on in your bucket, you'll have to use your imagination.** You could do some online research about British beetles, or if you have children, ask them to create imaginary beetles and draw them.



# Plant a tree



**Approximate time: 40 minutes–1 hour**

You will need:

- a tree
- a spade
- a watering can

1. Look at the roots of your tree. Decide how big to dig your hole. The roots should not get crushed. The soil should be 5cm above the roots.
2. Dig the hole. Leave the soil at the side.
3. Put the tree into the hole. Hold it straight. Put soil back into the hole.
4. Gently press the soil down.
5. Water your tree.
6. Watch it grow.



**This will be a good home for nature, and will give you a wonderful changing view throughout the year.**

In your notebook, you could keep a diary of the tree's height and growth, and when it's bigger, what it looks like across the seasons and what insects and birds it attracts.





<p><b>Day 1</b></p>	<p>Find a cosy spot to sit near a window. Perhaps grab a drink and a biscuit and spend some time noticing and appreciating anything that you see.</p>	<p><b>Day 2</b></p> <p>Find a notebook or some paper you can use for any of your nature reflections over the next few weeks. You could start with a title, front page design or border.</p>	<p><b>Day 3</b></p> <p>Appreciate the sky. What colours do you see? Are there any clouds today? Notice their changing shapes and watch as they come and go.</p>	<p><b>Day 4</b></p> <p>Sit by a window for a while and enjoy the sunshine. If the sun doesn't reach you, imagine breathing in warm rays of sunshine through your whole body.</p>	<p><b>Day 5</b></p> <p>Notice the first star appearing in the night sky.</p> 	<p><b>Day 6</b></p> <p>Look for a natural object in your home – for example a plant, stone, shell or pine cone. Look closely at your object and notice any details you haven't seen before.</p>
<p><b>Day 7</b></p>	<p>Bake something special and shape or decorate it with a nature theme. Bird-shaped bread rolls? Ladybird cupcakes? <b>#bakeformature</b></p> 	<p><b>Day 8</b></p> <p>Start a Wild Window! Use any art materials that you have and create a picture of a woodland creature and pop it in the window <b>#wildwindows</b></p>	<p><b>Day 9</b></p> <p>Start your day with the dawn chorus, or tune into Birdsong radio. Notice the varieties of rhythm and pitch. How does your body respond as you listen?</p>	<p><b>Day 10</b></p> <p>Notice any signs outside that signal the time of the day eg the activity of birds, quality of light, or sounds from inside or outside your home.</p>	<p><b>Day 11</b></p> <p>Note three good things in nature and write them down. Perhaps look at some photographs for inspiration!</p> 	<p><b>Day 12</b></p> <p>Open a window and feel the fresh air on your face, skin and hair. Take a slow deep breath.</p>
<p><b>Day 13</b></p>	<p>Find a film or a book exploring nature and settle in for the night.</p>	<p><b>Day 14</b></p> <p>Read a poem about nature. (You could explore poems by Mary Oliver, Robert Frost, or Wendell Berry or even write your own nature poem.)</p> 	<p><b>Day 15</b></p> <p>Notice three more good things in nature – perhaps share your thoughts with someone.</p>	<p><b>Day 16</b></p> <p>Continuing with your Wild Window, draw or make some pollinator plants to put on the windowsill. Find out which plants are great for pollinators online.</p>	<p><b>Day 17</b></p> <p>List all the different things you enjoy most about springtime eg things you see, hear, smell and touch.</p>	<p><b>Day 18</b></p> <p>Bring to mind a time when you felt peaceful or cheerful in nature. Can you tune into that feeling now?</p>
<p><b>Day 19</b></p>	<p>Find a natural soundscape online (perhaps the sound of rain, the sea or woodlands). Take a seat, close your eyes and go on an imaginary nature journey.</p> 	<p><b>Day 20</b></p> <p>Look for some fascinating animal facts online and get lost in the wonders of nature.</p>	<p><b>Day 21</b></p> <p>Be still for three minutes and listen out for any sounds of nature through your window.</p>	<p><b>Day 22</b></p> <p>From your comfy window spot watch the weather. Can you hear wind or rain? Maybe you can see the shadows cast by the sunshine.</p>	<p><b>Day 23</b></p> <p>Write down three more good things in nature and reflect on your list.</p>	<p><b>Day 24</b></p> <p>Draw or make some pollinators for your plants! Create a “buzz” around your Wild Window.</p> 
<p><b>Day 25</b></p>	<p>Listen out for a bird call or find one online and try to copy it. Can you “talk” to a bird?</p>	<p><b>Day 26</b></p> <p>Notice the changing light of a sunrise at the start of the day, or the soft dimming of light at sunset.</p>	<p><b>Day 27</b></p> <p>Bring to mind your favourite season. What do you like most about it? Can you capture that now in pictures or words?</p>	<p><b>Day 28</b></p> <p>Reflect on your connection to nature over the month, what have you enjoyed the most? Perhaps create a reminder of it somewhere in your home.</p>	<p><b>Connecting to nature</b></p> <p><b>Some of these ideas have been inspired by our Nature Prescriptions project in Shetland, and our pilot project in Edinburgh, which is currently paused. You can find out more about RSPB's Nature Prescriptions at <a href="https://www.rspb.org.uk/naturesremedy">rspb.org.uk/naturesremedy</a></b></p> <p><b>Find out more about what you can do at <a href="https://www.rspb.org.uk">www.rspb.org.uk</a></b></p>	

We hope you've found these activities useful in connecting with nature. To find more things to do, visit [rspb.org.uk/wildchallengeideas](https://www.rspb.org.uk/wildchallengeideas).

And, to get tasty treats for the birds, plus help nature while you shop, visit [rspb.org.uk/shoponline](https://www.rspb.org.uk/shoponline)

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is about more than birds – we're the country's largest wildlife conservation organisation, and we work around the UK and beyond to save wildlife and wild spaces. We're also passionate about connecting people with nature – as a deeper connection with the world around us is good for humans and nature alike. To find out more about what we do, visit [rspb.org.uk](https://www.rspb.org.uk)



If you would like Welsh versions of the content contained in this booklet, we have an array of information online at [rspb.org.uk/spotitbil](https://www.rspb.org.uk/spotitbil), [rspb.org.uk/resourcescy](https://www.rspb.org.uk/resourcescy) and [rspb.org.uk/seasonsbil](https://www.rspb.org.uk/seasonsbil)

Images: robin by Ben Andrew, bird feeder by Chris Gomersall, birdwatchers by Eleanor Bental, re-stocking bird feeder by Andy Hay, apple bird feeder images x3 and pine cone feeder images x3 by David Tipling, bee house images x3 and mini meadow images x2 and beetle bucket images x3 and planting a tree images x3 and bug hotel by Nick Cunard, field poppies by Ernie Janes, sparrow by Andrew Parkinson (rspb-images.com); bird chart and record book by RSPB; sunflower seeds by bbstudio\_aad, notebook and pen by rustemgurler, bumblebee by DieterMeyrl, small tortoiseshell butterfly by proxyminder (istockphoto.com); bird illustrations by Mike Langman and other species illustrations by Chris Shields (chris-shields.com); all other images by RSPB.

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