



Different names

The scientific name of the Blackbird, *Turdus merula* is derived from two Latin words: *turdus* (meaning thrush) and *merula* (meaning solitary). No wonder, since the Blackbird, unlike other thrushes, is often seen on its own looking for food and singing! Still, it can be quite friendly around people.

The male's striking all black colour has inspired its English, Swedish, Spanish and Maltese names. Blackbird in English, Koltrast in Swedish (meaning coal thrush), Mirlo in Spanish (from the French, Merle, meaning blackbird) and Malvizz Iswed in Maltese (meaning Black Thrush).



Funders and partner organisations

Green Recovery Challenge Fund



The National Lottery Heritage Fund



In popular culture

The spontaneity of the blackbird's song was once proverbial!

'To whistle like a blackbird' meant to do something with ease.

Ornithologist William Henry Hudson believed that the 'careless beauty' of the blackbird's song 'comes nearer to human music than any other bird songs,' while the tone was 'even suggestive of the human voice.'

It features in the Spanish proverb 'Amigo leal y franco, mirlo blanco' (Loyal and frank friend, white blackbird), which shows that true and loyal friends are extremely rare to find.

The Blackbird also feature in a popular English nursery rhyme:

Sing a song of sixpence,
A pocket full of rye;
Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie!
When the pie was opened the birds began to sing,
Oh, wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the king.

As this nursery rhyme suggests, Blackbirds were considered as a source of food. There is lots of historical evidence that Ancient Greeks and Romans consumed skewers of this type of bird, generally roasted. The gastronomic extravagance of some Romans even led them to allocate birds as charming as the nightingale to the grill. Formulas for little birds appear in medieval and Renaissance cookbooks.

In Sweden, it used to be said that if a Blackbird is seen in winter, it means the weather will be changing.

In Malta, the Blackbird is seen only as a migrant and winter resident, and unlike the rest of Europe, tends to keep in hiding in overgrown areas and woodlands. However, its relative the Common Thrush is very popular with hunters and trappers. A local proverb says 'Il-malvizz izekzek billejl, rih nofsinhar', meaning that when the thrush is heard calling, a southerly wind will be on the way.



Why are birds important?

Urban birds like the Blackbird have the ability to improve our quality of life. Just watching them fly around from one tree to another, or hopping through the grass can offer us an entertaining break from work or study. Observing birds boosts our mood, and opens a window into understanding animal behaviour. Watching birds helps us connect to nature, and reminds us that we coexist with wildlife.

But there is much more birds do for us, and for the entire planet:

- birds spread seeds, thus helping plants to regenerate;
- birds are voracious predators of pests;
- birds spread nutrients through their droppings;
- birds protect important habitats such as wetlands, by feeding on grazing species such as snails, thus preventing overgrazing.

How can we attract birds to urban gardens?

- Set up some bird feeders, when needed. Blackbirds like fruits, suet pellets, mealworms.
- Provide fresh water so that birds can drink and bath.
- Give birds somewhere to nest by installing a nest box or by planting a tree.
- Plant some bird-friendly plants from which birds can find seeds, fruits and insects to feed on.

