Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

READING MUSEUM SERVICE

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER Z59
(Muscicapa striata)

Description
The spotted flycatcher is about the size of a house sparrow. The male and female are alike - a grey-brown colour, with an off-white breast, streaked with darker grey and a streaked forehead. The bill and legs are black. Juveniles are similar to the adults but have pale spots on the upper parts.

Spotted flycatchers spend the winter in Africa. They seldom arrive in the UK until the second week in May and once here they lose no time in rearing a family. The first brood has usually flown before the end of June and in warm summers a second brood has been produced by early August. In August the tiny birds head south-west through western France and Portugal before crossing the Mediterranean and making for West Africa and then Zaire.

As the name suggests, these birds survive by catching insects. They sit upright on an exposed branch, flicking the tail and watching for insects flying past. They can often be seen flying out from a tree and back again in a circular path. When parents are fledging chicks, several small insects may be caught successively and retained in the bill. In rainy periods, when few insects are flying, the birds switch to ground feeding. They are less successful in catching prey on the ground and tend to suffer in prolonged bad weather.



Did you know ...

Most European birds cannot discriminate between their own eggs and those of other species. The exception to this are birds which are victims of the cuckoo, which have had to evolve this skill as a protection against that nest parasite. Spotted flycatchers show excellent egg recognition, and it is thought by some that the species was once a host of the cuckoo, but became so good at recognising the intruder's eggs that it ceased to be victimised.

Provided there is space for catching insects, spotted flycatchers readily adapt to parks, cemeteries, gardens and orchards. However, between 1980 and 2005 their number declined by almost 80% - a decline thought to be caused largely by intense pesticide use.

Reading Borough Council

Heritage Lottery Fund

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Vital Statistics
Eggs: 4-6
Incubation: 12-14 days
Fledging: 12-16 days
Maximum recorded lifespan: 9 years
Length: 14.5cm
Wingspan: 23-25.5cm
Weight: 14-20g
UK breeding population: 130,000 territories



UK Distribution



What does it eat?
Spotted flycatchers feed on flying insects, such as bees and butterflies, but also eat berries in the autumn. They have been observed feeding after dark on insects attracted to street lamps and to lighted windows.

Breeding
Both the male and the female build the nest, which is usually against a tree trunk. The nest is a cup made of grass, thin twigs, lichen, and spiders' webs, and lined with feathers and hair. The smooth, glossy eggs are white with reddish blotches, and about 19mm by 14mm. Incubation is by the female only. The young are fed by both parents. Newly-fledged young usually roost together on a branch. In one study a first brood lingered in the vicinity of the nest until the second brood fledged. Individual spotted flycatchers can be bold in defending nests, even pursuing birds as large as jays.