Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

READING MUSEUM SERVICE

WILLOW WARBLER Z66
(Phylloscopus trochilus)

Description



The willow warbler is the commonest British warbler. It has greenish-brown upper parts, buff underparts and a pale stripe above the eye. The bill is pale brown and the legs are dark brown to flesh-coloured. It is almost indistinguishable from the chiffchaff. The willow warbler is more yellow, has a longer pale stripe above each eye and often (but not always) has paler legs than the chiffchaff. They are also separated by their song. Their population, especially in southern Britain, underwent a moderate decline between 1980 and 2005.

Some have estimated that the world population is around 900 million birds. This warbler is strongly migratory and during the autumn most of these tiny birds make a journey of nearly 8000 miles from Europe to sub-Saharan Africa, where the majority of the population winters.

Breeding

Willow warblers breed at their highest densities in woodland scrub, either along the edges of woods or by clearings. They are particularly fond of birch scrub and young conifer plantations. They do not normally nest in hedgerows or gardens.

The domed nest, made from grass, rotten wood, moss and roots, is on the ground but among shrubs or grass. The nest has a side entrance and is lined with fine roots and feathers.

The smooth, glossy white eggs are speckled reddish-brown. The female incubates the eggs by herself. After the young hatch they are fed by both parents.

Reading Borough Council

Heritage Lottery Fund

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Vital Statistics

Eggs: 4-8
Incubation: 12-14 days
Fledging: 11-15 days
Maximum recorded lifespan: 6 years
Length: 10.5-11.5cm
Wingspan: 16-22cm
Weight: 7-12g
UK breeding population: 2.3 million pairs





UK Distribution

Resident
Summer
Winter
Passage

What does it eat?

A wide variety of small insects and spiders. Fruit and berries in autumn. Willow warblers are unlikely to visit bird feeders. They are often seen fluttering at the ends of leaves and branches; in fact, they are searching the undersides of the leaves for aphids because this is where the aphids feed on the tree's sap.

What does it sound like?

Its song is a rich descending warble with a flourish at the end; its call is a 'hoo-eet'. The best way of telling willow warbler and chiffchaff apart is by their song. The chiffchaff has a monotonous 'chiff-chaff' song.