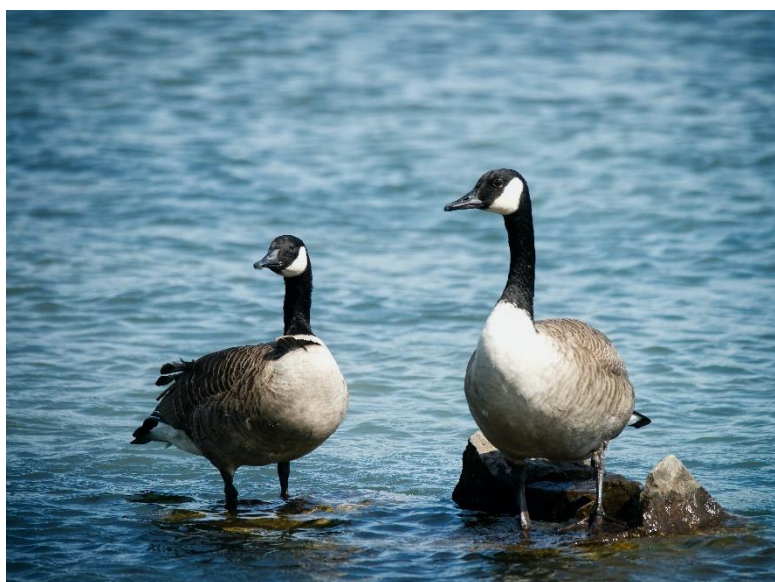


December- Winter Birds

Winter is an excellent time to investigate the birds in your area. There are several reasons why it can be easier to spot them. Once winter begins it becomes more difficult for many birds to find their usual sources of food. There are fewer flying insects and berries on trees, the ground may become cold and frozen which makes it hard for birds to hunt for worms. Because of this birds are more likely to move to places they can find food including gardens or school grounds. If you leave out bird feeders with a variety of foods you may find more types of birds visiting the feeders in the colder months.

It is also easier to see birds in winter because many trees and bushes will have lost their leaves. It can be really tricky to find a small garden bird like a blue tit in the middle of a thicket of trees or bushes in the middle of summer. This is because it can move from branch to branch hidden by leaves, flowers and berries but when trees are bare in winter the birds tend to stand out more and you can get a better view.

Lastly, winter is the only time of year we see certain birds in Ireland! While many birds live here all year long some birds are only here during summer and others are only here in winter. Animals adapt to the changes in weather and food availability in winter in several ways. One common way of adapting for birds is to migrate or move to a different country for the winter months. While Ireland may seem cold to us there are several species of birds who fly here from colder countries and spend the winter before heading home in Spring. Examples include Brent Geese, Whooper Swans and Redwings.



Brent Geese: Photo by [Edouard Garner](#) from [Pexels](#)



It is easy to spot this wren on a bare branch! A robin visiting a bird feeder!

Activity One: Learn More

Research whether there are any birds which have migrated to your local area for the winter months. If you live near the coast there may be [Brent Geese](#), if you are near an inland waterway like a river or lake there may be [Whopper Swans](#) or if you are almost anywhere besides a city there may be [Redwing](#). Click on the underlined links to learn more about each bird and see a map of Ireland showing where they are usually found. Find out how far they have travelled and what route they took to get here. Can they feed on the same foods in Ireland as they did in the country they live the rest of the year? Investigate what kind of habitat they are living in here and if this has changed over time. Hold a class/school competition to see who can spot/photograph the most winter visitors in December.

Activity two: Notice Nature

Spend time outside watching and learning to identify different species of birds. Try to start noticing key features like colour, size, shape of beak/feet etc. Then match this up with birds on a [spotter sheet](#) or [poster](#) to identify them. Start out small and focus on birds you already know like Robins, Blackbirds etc and then gradually try to learn a few new species.

Try taking part in a bird survey. You could create your own with a list of birds that may visit your school grounds or a particular bird feeder and ask different classes/groups/individuals in the school to take the survey once a week. Or take part in the [Birdwatch Garden Survey](#). This is a great opportunity to take part in a project involving people from all around the country. Fill in their form with your results which will then be added with thousands of others from people around the country to discover what the most common garden birds are! Note you can take part in this survey using your school grounds.

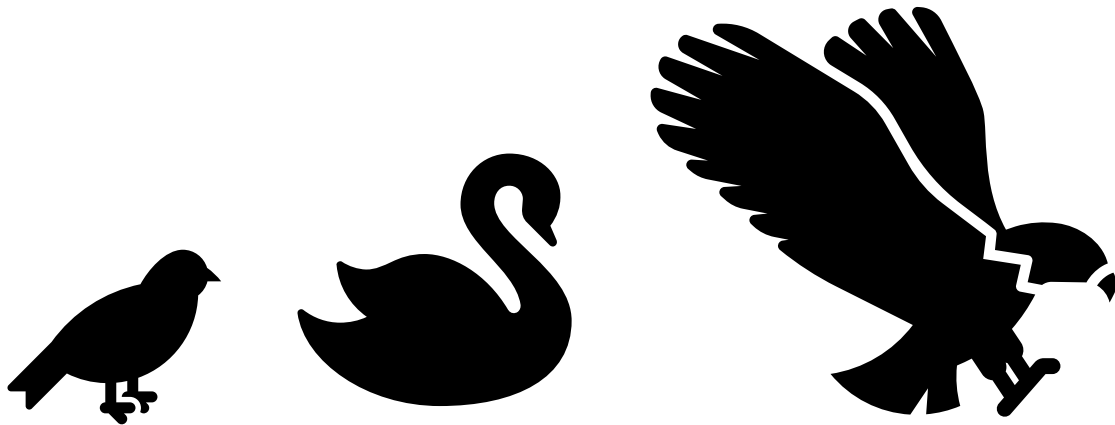
Activity Three: Take Action

Take some positive steps to help birds this winter. You can help by providing food and fresh, water for birds. This will also help you to take part in bird watching as you know where the birds will be! Different types of foods will attract different types of birds and the same is true of bird feeders. You may have seen some in shops that have mesh or wire around them, these will obviously only be suitable for birds whose beaks will fit through the gaps. You can choose to buy a feeder and fill with seeds, peanuts, fat balls etc or you can make your own. Check out the [RSPB guide to feeding birds](#) for more information about what foods will attract different birds. Here are a few examples of ones you can make yourself:

- [Necklace Feeder](#)
- [Make your own Fatballs with Birdwatch Ireland](#)
- [Apple Feeder](#)

While lots of people leave out food for birds we often forget they need water as well. This is particularly important in winter when some of their usual sources of water may have frozen. You can help by providing a simple bird bath and keeping it topped up. You can learn how to make your own below:

- [RSPB guide to making a birdbath](#)



Best of luck this month!