

IN THE FIELD

What to look for in a winter woodland

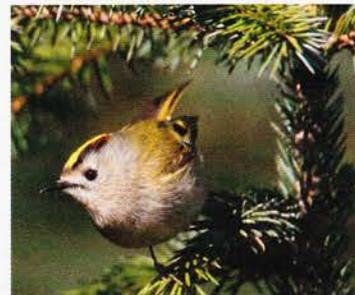
Woodlands can be richly rewarding places to visit, perhaps counter-intuitively, winter is one of the best times to visit, especially for deciduous broad-leaved forests, where the lack of foliage makes the birds easier to find. Here are some tips to make the most of winter woods.

Use the sun to your benefit, approaching with the light behind you is usually best for remaining 'unseen'. Also choose the right time of day. Feeding activity is greater in the early morning or afternoon, rather than the dead part of the middle of the day. Remember, birds also vary with the seasons.

Listen. Calls and songs are often the best clue to the presence of birds in this busy, complicated environment.

Bird activity is often busiest around natural breaks such as glades, pathways and woodland edge.

Different tree types hold different birds. So, don't expect Crossbills, for instance, away from conifers.



In general, there are fewer conifer-loving birds than broad-leaved. Some birds, such as Goldcrest (above) and Coal Tit, however, like to look for tiny invertebrates among the needles.

Look out for foraging groups of birds, often including tits and usually comprising a mix of species.

Sitting (or standing) still and quietly and letting the birds come to you or past you, can be a great technique in woodland.

Some birds feed secretively on the leaf litter, including the wonderfully cryptic Woodcock (more often flushed than seen on the deck).



Freshwater pools, streams, ditches, or even puddles of clean water can be great places to 'stake out'. All birds need to drink and bathe at some stage, and you may be surprised at how many different birds (both species and individuals) will come to a favoured pool in or next to a wood. Here, a Great Spotted Woodpecker has come to a drinking pool, perhaps to bathe, perhaps to drink.

