



ID CHALLENGE

DECEMBER: WOODLAND BIRDS

A CHANGE OF TACK this month, with birds from a specific habitat (woodland) being the theme. The birds featured are all birds which readily occur in woodland (though that doesn't necessarily show in the photographs). All are regular British birds, some very common, so shouldn't present too many identification problems. It is, after all Christmas, this month, so who wants to work too hard, even if

it is at identifying birds, which should always be a pleasure...

Your task is to put a name to each of the six woodland birds. Then you can turn the page to check our 'solutions' against your answers. And, as usual, another turn of the page will reveal a few tips on general identification of woodland birds. Please let us know how you get on and which ID Challenges you would like to see in future issues.

BIRD 1



Andrew Darrington / Alamy

BIRD 2



Alamy

BIRD 1

WHAT AM I?

BIRD 2

WHAT AM I?

BIRD 3



© T.M.O.Birds / Alamy

BIRD 4



Krys Bailey / Alamy

BIRD 3

WHAT AM I?

BIRD 4

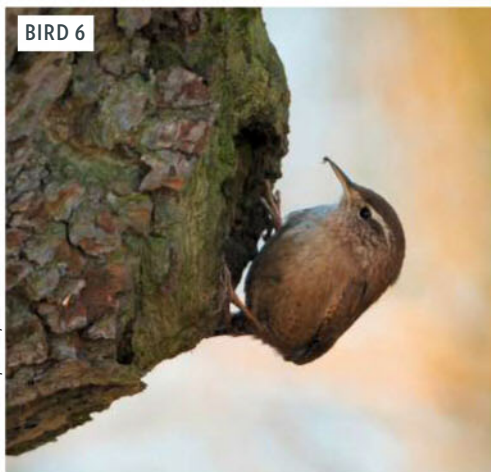
WHAT AM I?

BIRD 5



Toby Houlton / Alamy

BIRD 6



Calum Dickson / Alamy

BIRD 5

WHAT AM I?

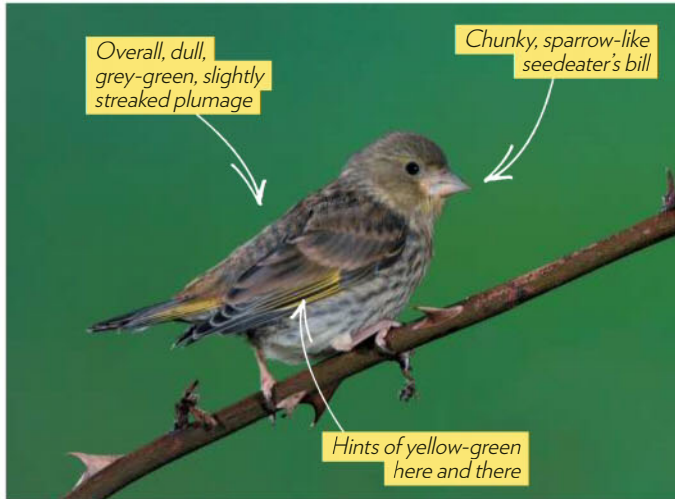
BIRD 6

WHAT AM I?



DECEMBER ID CHALLENGE WOODLAND BIRDS

How did you do?



BIRD 1

Here is a rather nondescript greyish brown bird with hints of greenish-yellow here and there. The bill is a big clue, being quite a chunky, triangular, sparrow-like seedeater type. This suggests it is either a sparrow, finch or bunting. But the cutting edge is too 'smooth' for a bunting. The colours have too much green for a sparrow. This is a finch. The green tones rule out several finches, such as Goldfinch, redpolls, Linnets and female Chaffinch, and the bird is clearly not a Bullfinch or a Hawfinch. We are left with Siskin, Greenfinch and Crossbill. The bill is too thick for Siskin and there are no transverse wing-bars. The bill is not crossed or deep enough for Crossbill. This is a **Greenfinch** and the heavy streaking suggests it is a juvenile.

KEY FEATURES

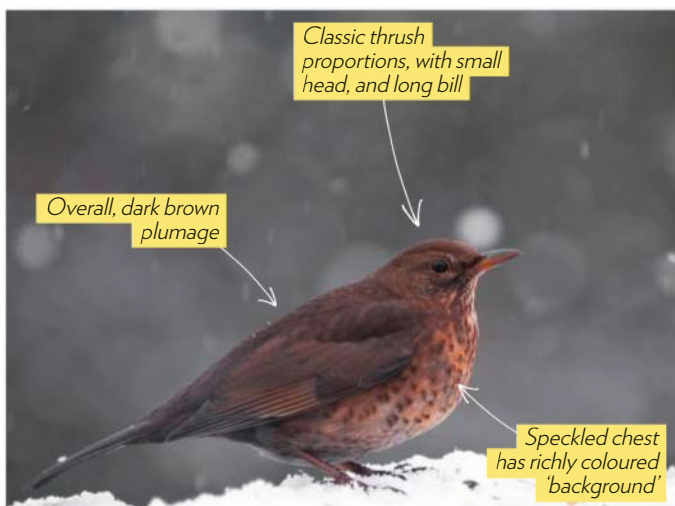
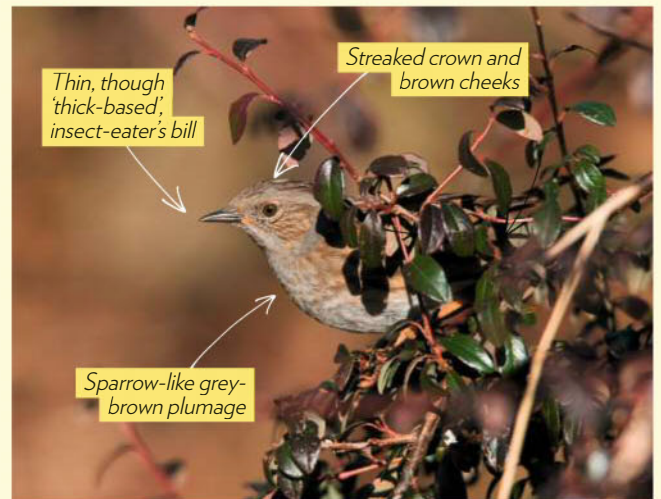
- Seed-eater's stumpy bill
- Greenish yellow tones in some parts of plumage
- Streaked belly
- Overall grey-green plumage

BIRD 2

This bird is partially hidden behind some vegetation just to increase the challenge, slightly. It looks to be a sparrow-like, dully coloured bird, just poking its head out for a quick look. But that dark bill is too thin for a sparrow, being more like that of an insect-eater, such as a Robin or one of the warblers. But the plumage is essentially sparrow-like, being grey and brown. The crown is streaked with dark lines above a broad, blue-grey supercilium. The cheeks, bordered by grey, are brown with pale streaks and the breast and belly are a similar grey, with some brown speckling, which becomes the dominant colour of the flanks. This bird is one of the very common birds about which we receive a lot of ID Q&A letters. It is the humble **Dunnock**.

KEY FEATURES

- Thin, dark, insect-eater's bill
- Grey and brown plumage, like a sparrow
- Streaked crown and brown cheeks
- Grey breast and flanks streaked with brown



BIRD 3

Even at brief look, you can easily see this is a thrush; the long tail, gentle curves, small head and strong straight bill are all pro-thrush. We have five common thrushes in the UK during winter: Song and Mistle Thrushes, Blackbird, Redwing and Fieldfare. The latter two winter visitors are striking birds: Redwings have obvious bold white supercilia and a white submoustachial stripe; Fieldfares have grey heads and rumps. So, we can rule these out. The speckled breast suggests this may be either Song or Mistle Thrush. But the tone of the bird looks too dark rufous brown and the breast and belly are just a bit too richly coloured and the face too 'plain', the legs too dark. This is a 'pale' female **Blackbird**, made paler by the snow.

KEY FEATURES

- Typical thrush shape and proportions
- Brown back and wings
- Speckled breast on orange ochre background
- Plain face pattern



MY FAVOURITE SITE...
 “We have some very decent woodland near my home city of Peterborough, including Bedford Purlieus and Castor Hanglands.”
 Mike Weedon, assistant editor



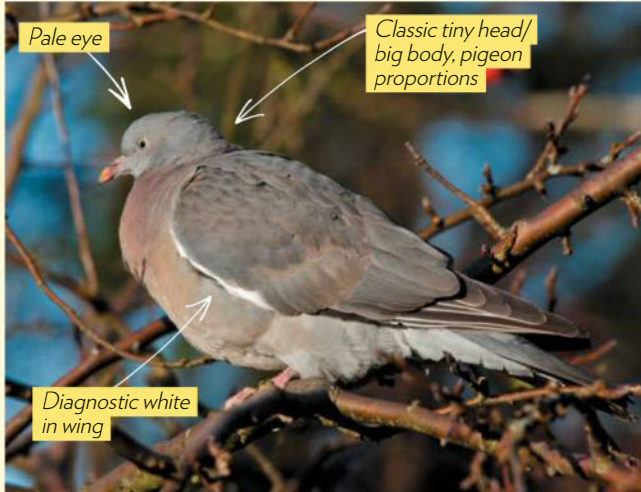
SNAP IT!
 and send it to
 birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk



NEXT MONTH
 European woodpeckers



Nigel Pye / Alamy



BIRD 4

There are no prizes for pointing out the bird perched in this tree is one of the doves or pigeons. These two words are somewhat interchangeable, but generally, the larger species are called pigeons, the smaller doves. The structure and shape is the giveaway: tiny head, steep forehead, pigeon bill, big fat body, long wings. The predominantly grey and pink plumage suggests this is one of the *Columba* pigeons (or doves): Woodpigeon, Stock Dove or Feral Pigeon (aka Rock Dove). Feral Pigeons have red eyes and dark bills (not pale and pink as here) and are usually more well marked than this bird. Stock Doves have dark eyes and pale-tipped pink bills. This bird is a **Woodpigeon** (note white in wing): a juvenile, lacking an adult's white collar.

KEY FEATURES

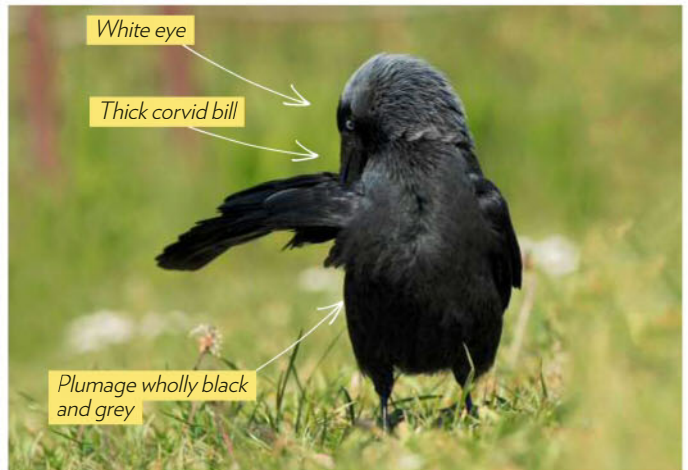
- > Typical pigeon or dove build
- > Grey and pink plumage suggests a *Columba* pigeon
- > Pale eye diagnostic
- > White in wing diagnostic

BIRD 5

This black bird can only realistically (based on its plumage) be either one of the black corvids (crows) or a Blackbird. But the shape is all wrong for a Blackbird, and the bill looks quite robust, rather than fine and thrush-like. Also, it has an obviously pale iris and Blackbirds have dark eyes. In fact this pale iris is a diagnostic feature which identifies the bird in itself. Neither Rooks, Carrion Crows or Ravens have pale eyes. Also, none of these have grey necks and heads. Indeed, neither does the grey-and-black Hooded Crow, which has a black head, tail and wings. The only British bird with this combination of plumage pattern and pale eye is the little **Jackdaw**.

KEY FEATURES

- > Largely black plumage
- > Grey on nape and upper breast
- > White eye
- > Black bill and legs



BIRD 6

This is a slightly sneaky one. It is obviously a bird clinging to a vertical bit of tree in the manner of a woodpecker, or perhaps a Nuthatch or Treecreeper. The bill is a bit fine for a woodpecker, and we don't have any brown species with a pale supercilium. Nuthatches have robust, woodpecker-like bills and black 'bandit' masks 'through' and beyond the eye. So, perhaps, this is a Treecreeper. The bill shape is about right and Treecreepers are brown with paler underparts and they use their tails as prop against trees. But, hang on, Treecreeper underparts are white, not buff-brown; their brown upperparts are not spotted and streaked with white. This cheeky impostor is a **Wren**, using its small size to cling to some bark to pick off a tiny invertebrate.

KEY FEATURES

- > Long-thin, slightly downcurved bill
- > Pale supercilium
- > Reddish brown upperparts, paler brown-buff underparts
- > Barred wing edge and flanks