

FIVE TO FIND *in May*

MAY IS HERE. Arguably, the best month for birdwatching brings opportunities aplenty, with migrants still flooding in, while the last winterers are leaving and another range of species comes through on passage. Birds will be on the move everywhere, not just at coastal hotspots, but just about wherever you live in the UK. This is the time when working a local patch can really deliver the goods. Here are five rather special birds to kick off any May.

RARITY RATINGS

Common, widely distributed 
Localised – always a treat 
Very scarce or rare 

TELL US WHAT YOU'VE SEEN!



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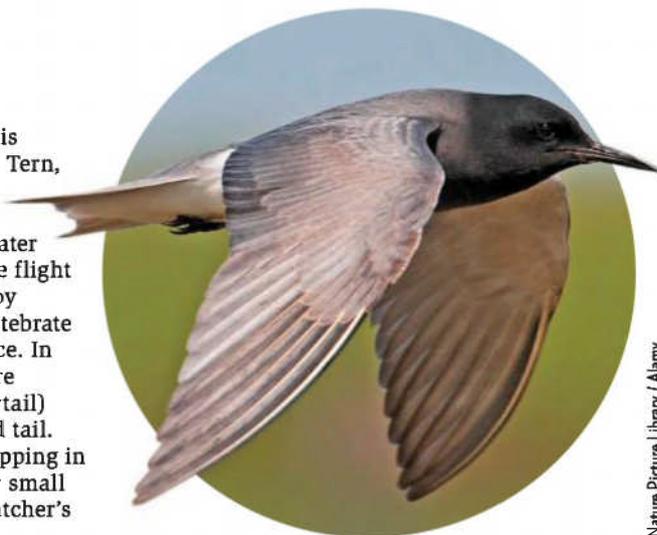
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GEORGE RESZETER / Alamy

BLACK TERN

Many birds are looking particularly good now. This applies to the lovely Black Tern, a passage bird in the UK. They are 'marsh terns', at home feeding over freshwater (or seen on the coast). The flight is buoyant and they feed by graceful dips to pick invertebrate food from the water surface. In breeding plumage, they are black-bodied (white undertail) with grey wings, back and tail. A flock of Black Terns dropping in to feed over a gravel pit or small lake is an inland patch-watcher's small slice of May heaven.



RED-RUMPED SWALLOW

The beautiful Red-rumped Swallow is quite a rare (but regular) visitor to the UK in spring. For instance, there were about 20 seen in the country in April and May last year. They are similar in size and shape to Swallows, also sharing the long tail streamers. But these southern European visitors have a paler (rusty) nape and buff and rufous rump, a pale throat and black undertail coverts. Red-rumped Swallows also have a subtly different flight style, with sweeping graceful glides between bouts of flapping. Like our other hirundines, Red-rumped Swallows are often found feeding on emerging insects above water.

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CUCKOO

Cuckoos start to arrive in good numbers in April and in May are at their peak of singing and so at their most noticeable. They are shy birds, much more often heard than seen. It is not that they sing from deep within vegetation, often preferring to use exposed perches on the top of trees or on telegraph poles and lines and along fence lines. It is just that they are very wary of humans. Also, they are, by nature, rather individual birds, usually seen singly, which helps make seeing a Cuckoo a far from everyday occurrence. Many people, even birdwatchers, are not always aware that they have seen a Cuckoo, when one flies by. They look like something between a Kestrel and a skinny dove, whizzing along on flapping wings which don't appear to rise above the horizontal. Sexes are similar, but there is an uncommon red-morph of the female; like a speckled juvenile but in a glorious rufous colour.



Did you know?

Some adult Cuckoos depart from the UK as early as June, once mating and egg-laying is done

Calum Dickson / Alamy