

# FIVE TO FIND *in October*

**F**OR MANY OF us, October is the very best birding month. The last of summer's birds are leaving, the winterers are arriving and there is a wealth of migrating birds passing through, including scarcities and rarities in profusion. These five are not the rarest birds, but all have potential to be seen in October. Enjoy!

## RARITY RATINGS

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

TELL US WHAT YOU'VE SEEN!



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## ROCK PIPIT

Rock Pipits are widely distributed birds, mainly found around the rocky coasts of England. In September and October birds turn up inland. Most, if not all, of these are of the Scandinavian subspecies *littoralis*, rather than local British birds from the coast. Rock Pipits are larger and darker than Meadow Pipits, with stronger darker bills and usually dark legs. The breast streaks are much heavier than Meadow Pipits' and smudge together to form dark lines, giving the bird an almost 'dirty' look.

Inland passage birds can be found near water bodies, often on rocky or concrete shores. Unlike the closely related Water Pipit, Rock Pipits are relatively bold birds, often allowing reasonably close approach.



Calum Dickson / Alamy

## LESSER REDPOLL

The British breeding Lesser Redpoll is aptly named as the smallest of the redpoll complex. October sees birds move away from the breeding grounds, and they are frequently encountered during 'visible migration' watches as fly-overs. They are tiny, tit-like finches with black on the bib, through the eye and just above the bill, before the red splash on the forehead which gives the bird its name. Adult males are flushed pink on the breast, otherwise they are brown- and buff-streaked birds. Through the winter they will feed on the seeds from Birch and Alder catkins.



David Tipling / Alamy

## BEARDED TIT

Surely up there in the top 10 of every birdwatcher's favourite bird, the Bearded Tit is a real charmer. Even the 'ping ping' calls are cute. Small, long-tailed and with stupidly short, rounded wings, they are not the sort of bird which you would expect to fly far. However, in the early autumn, Bearded Tits can rise up vertically in family groups and flocks and head off for reedbeds new. October is one of the best times for finding a Bearded Tit turning up at an 'unexpected' place (usually a reedbed or reedmace bed), where you may never have seen one before, at least not this year.



blickwinkel / Alamy

# MARVELS OF MIGRATION



## Wood Lark

A tricky one to pick out on a visible migration watch, but look for the very short tail and broad, rounded wings, and the undulating flight using closed wing glides. In

October, some of our breeders will be heading south for the Continent, or to the warmer south and west of Britain, as will flocks of the commoner Sky Lark.

Buiten-Beeld / Alamy



## Rock Pipit

Found on rocky shorelines around the UK, with birds arriving from Norway to spend the winter here to boost numbers further. Larger and stockier than a Meadow Pipit, with a dark-streaked, dirty white underside and streaked, olive-brown upperparts.

Calum Dickson / Alamy



## Wheatear

Their long drawn-out migration continues into late autumn; look for them on short-cropped grass such as sheep pastures, especially on coastal headlands and prominent, isolated hills, where they often perch on stumps. Less well marked than in spring, but the bright white rump is unmistakable.

FLPA / Alamy



## Stonechat

Although most of Britain's Stonechats breed in the south and west, they disperse widely in winter. Frequently seen in low bushes, flicking their wings regularly and uttering a sharp, loud call. Robin-sized, but can be told apart from their fellow red-breasts by their white collars and darker backs.

David Chapman / Alamy



## Blackcap

At least 3,000 winter in the UK, but in October they can be everywhere, as most of our breeders head south, while others arrive here from central Europe. The male's black cap is, unsurprisingly, the main distinguishing feature, while the female has a brown cap. Found in woodland, parks and gardens.

Juanma Hernandez / Alamy

## Bar-tailed Godwit

Although many continue on their journey south to Africa, good numbers remain in the UK after their journey from as far away as Siberia. They congregate in large numbers in estuaries, spreading out across the mudflats to feed at low tide and collecting in huge roosts with other species at high tide. They often form part of the spectacular inspirations of waders witnessed over our estuaries every winter.

David Tipling Photo Library / Alamy



## Purple Sandpiper

Purple Sandpipers seldom migrate much further south than the UK and they spurn muddy feeding areas for rocky shores, piers and seaweed-covered groynes. They are easiest to find in the north around Scottish coasts and islands and on both western and eastern coasts in northern England. Purple Sandpipers can also be found along southern Cornish coasts.

GmbH / Alamy



Robert Matton AB / Alamy

## Jack Snipe

Secretive and small, two characteristics that make birders shudder, but these tiny snipe are well worth looking for. Found in a variety of freshwater habitats inland, especially those fringed with reeds, and brackish water near the coast. They will also frequent lagoons, boggy ground and flooded meadows. In freezing conditions they resort to river edges, muddy ditches with flowing water, and soft mud.

steve young / Alamy



## Spotted Redshank

Another predominantly passage migrant, with only small numbers remaining to over-winter in mainly southern parts of the UK. If encountered on the coast they prefer rather quiet secluded backwaters or coastal lagoons with either brackish or fresh water. However, they can often be encountered far inland on freshwater bodies which have suitable habitat.

## White-rumped Sandpiper

These small American visitors turn up just about anywhere in the country. Any water with a beach can attract them, so look out! Like Pectoral Sandpipers, they are regular here because they fly out over the Atlantic on their way south. Ironically, British birds refer to them as 'Yank' waders, but they regularly occur here more often than on the coast of California.



Phillip Thomas / Alamy