

Thorndon Birdlife November 2021

Most of our summer migrants that breed in the UK are enroute to their wintering grounds in Africa. Garden warblers are already passing through the Gambia on the west coast of Africa. Birds mainly take three routes from the North and Central Europe, the Western route via Gibraltar is the best known. This route is taken by most birds flying from breeding grounds in the UK and from the mud flats of the Dutch and German Wattenmeer and Scandinavia. The Eastern route leads across Eastern Europe (the Baltic, Belorussia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria) into Turkey, over the Bosphorus and on over the Middle East to reach Africa. The third route, known as the Central European migration route or the Adriatic Flyway. This route runs parallel to the Eastern route in Siberia and Northern Europe but then westward from Poland and Hungary over the Balkans and on over the Adriatic Sea, Southern Italy, Sicily and Malta to Africa. Many water birds from Central Europe, North and

East Europe and even Asia take this migration route to reach the Sahel region. The Sahel is the vast semi-arid region of Africa separating the Sahara Desert to the north and the tropical savannas to the south. Bird migration is strenuous and can only be accomplished if the birds have safe resting places along their routes to feed, drink and rest to recover their strength but with the ongoing destruction of important bird habitats, such places have become rare.

One of the stars of long-distance travellers is the Arctic Tern which travels between its breeding grounds in the Arctic to wintering places in the Antarctic. A journey of 30,000 to 40,000 kms, to take advantage of the length of polar days at both poles in its search for food and for breeding.

We've been seeing a lot of winter visitors in Suffolk recently, Redwings (*Turdus iliacus*) have been arriving in their hundreds and they are one of the few bird

species that you tend to only see at this time of the year. Most of our birds come from Iceland, Scandinavia and Russia. It is a small thrush (*Turdidae*) that visits the UK in the winter to feast on berry-laden bushes in hedgerows, orchards, parks and gardens.



It is slightly smaller than a Song Thrush with a pale stripe above the eye and another stripe less pronounced on its cheek.

It's the reddish underwing that gives this bird its name. The binomial name derives from the Latin words *Turdus*, "thrush" and *iliacus* "flank". Sexes are similar although males do have a slightly shorter tail. Even though a lot of us will see redwings in our gardens this winter, they aren't generally garden birds, they will enter gardens during hard winters in search of food. They eat invertebrates but favour berries in autumn and winter. Adults moult between June and September, which means that some start to replace their flight feathers while still feeding young.

About 65 species of medium to large thrushes are in the genus *Turdus*, characterised by rounded heads, longish pointed wings and usually melodious song. Although two European thrushes, the song thrush and the mistle thrush are early offshoots from the Eurasian lineage of *Turdus* thrushes after they spread north from Africa, the redwing is descended from ancestors that had colonised the Caribbean islands from Africa and subsequently reached Europe from there.

The redwing has two subspecies;

Turdus iliacus, The nominate subspecies which breeds in mainland Eurasia.

Turdus coburni, which breeds in Iceland and the Faroe Islands and winters from western Scotland and Ireland south to northern Spain. It is darker overall and marginally larger than the nominate race.

The ground during winter is too hard for birds to dig for worms, caterpillars, aphids, beetles and grubs stay well hidden. These factors combined with the limited hours of light in which birds can actively search for food can cause them to be very vulnerable during winter. But with a little help from us, many more birds can survive the cold. So please let's keep those feeders full!

Your local sightings would be appreciated

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