

Crows, rooks and ravens are all part of the crow family, known as the corvids. The family also includes jackdaws, jays, magpies and choughs. I have a corvid roost of mainly rooks, crows and jackdaws at the bottom of my garden and numbers would vary between 400 – 600 birds nightly. A lot of the Poplar trees have been recently cut down along the river Dove that have had a detrimental impact on the size of the roost. These birds are intelligent, adaptable and able to exploit a wide range of food sources. But while the smaller members have distinctive features, crows, rooks and ravens can be trickier to identify. Here are some tips on how to tell them apart.

Crow (*corvus corone*) is fully black, with black feathers covering the face all the way up to a black bill, they have bare legs and are fairly large with a wing span of 93-104cm. Usually, quite solitary but this corvid you are most likely to see visiting your garden. They are resident all year-round primarily in England and Wales, but are absent from the north of Scotland and Northern Ireland. A group of crows together is known as a murder.

Rook (*corvus frugilegus*) similar in size to crows, but their defining feature is the bare greyish skin at the base of the slender grey bill, it also has feathered legs. It is common year-round in the UK, often seen feeding in flocks on fields. It is a very sociable species so you're unlikely to see a rook on its own. They build their nests right at the tops of trees, in noisy groups known as rookeries. You are unlikely to miss them. A group of rooks together is known as a parliament. Don't forget the old saying; **“A rook on its own is a crow. A crow in a crowd is a rook”**



Rook



Crow

Raven (*corvus corax*) has black plumage with purple iridescent feathers. The males are slightly larger than females and have longer, scruffy feathers on their throats. They have long pointed wings and the tail is slightly fan-shaped. The bills are heavier than crows and are long, black and slightly curved. There are bristles at the base of the upper mandible. Ravens have dark brown eyes and black feet and legs. Juveniles look similar to adults but their feathers are not glossy and their flight feathers are brown. It is the largest of the perching birds reaching a length of up to 66 cm (26 inches) and has a wingspan of more than 1.3 ms (4 feet)

Ravens are one of the decade's real success stories. Once reduced to around a thousand pairs due to persecution, they have spread right back across Britain. In the last fifteen years numbers have increased by a whopping 134%. There are now over 12,000 breeding pairs.

I have recently seen a Little egret (*Egretta garzetta*) by the river Dove at the bottom of my garden. It is a small white heron with attractive white plumes on the crest, back and chest, black legs and bill and yellow feet. It first appeared in the UK in significant numbers in 1989

and first bred in Dorset in 1996. Its colonization followed naturally from a range expansion into western and northern France in previous decades. It is now at home on numerous south coast sites, both as a breeding species and as a winter visitor. There is a few breeding in a heronry on a farm close to Earsham.

A couple of days ago, many 1000s of Redwings and Fieldfares in the Waveney and Blyth valleys were grounded by rain and the Saharan dust, and 100s of Blackbirds are now migrating back to the Baltics to breed.

News on the Sibton kites, they are back nest building.

BTO updates on Cuckoos; New signals received from AJ's tag over the last couple of days show that he has flown 949 km north of Angola where he has been for the past month, to an area of dense rainforest in Gabon. This represents the first leg of AJ's spring migration which will hopefully bring him back to Sherwood Forest by the end of March/early April.

Other Cuckoos on the move; Calypso has flown to the Mpem and Djim National Park.

Victor to East Ghana, Ellis to Guinea, JAC to Nigeria. PJ to Ivory Coast.

I wish them a safe and speedy return to the UK.

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