

# Bird of the Month

## Blackbird

Turdus Merula

By Suzy Sharpe

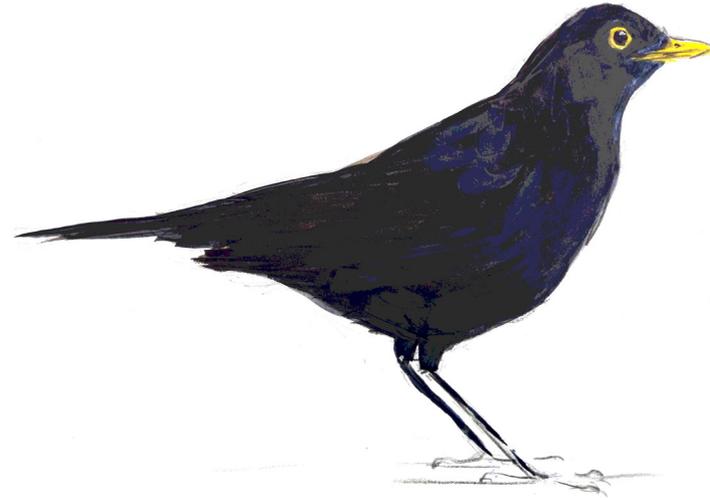


August

## Facts



A Blackbird will lay 3 - 6 eggs which take 13 days to incubate they may have 2 - 3 broods with only a 30 - 40% success rate chicks will fly after 13 days and will be fed for a further 2 - 3 weeks



The Male is Black with a yellow beak  
The female is Brown as are young birds



They are 23.5 - 29cm with a Wingspan of 34 - 38.5 cm and Weight of 80 - 100g . The oldest recorded bird was 21 years old

## Feeding

Natural Food sources include Earth Worms, Fruits, Berries, Insects and Catapillars

Blackbirds like to feed from a bird table or ground feeding station they enjoy suet pellets wildbird seed they love sultanas, raisins mealworms, waxworms, flaked maize, uncooked oats, fat balls & fat-based food bars.

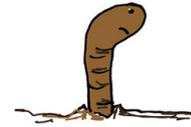
## Planting

Encourage insects, with plants, wildflowers, perennials, trees, shrubs and bushes choose those which support insects and produce berries. Cut the grass less to stop ground drying out especially when the ground is dry, this helps worms and prevents stravation in chicks common in dry weather.

Avoid all garden chemicals, leave the leaves, twigs and log piles in corners. Create homes for insects

## Habitat

As a woodland edge bird they have adapted very well to urban environments they like fairly dense shrubs and climbers. They will nest behind a log pile in bushes or in trellis as well as higher up between 3ft - 30ft



## Tweet of the Day

We have 5,100,000 pairs of Blackbirds resident in the UK, but in winter we may have up to 15 million. On Radio 4's Tweet of the Day:

Chris Packham explained that in Autumn large numbers of Blackbirds migrate to England making resident birds a little restless. You may hear them alarm calling as they establish their territories.

12% of the winter population are Migrants.

In another episode Bill Oddie describes their song eloquently as Melfluous.

The Blackbird's song is also described as clear and fluty, melodic and mellow often on a sliding scale with short verses repeated at 3-5 second intervals.

They sometimes sing at night where there are street lights. Their large eyes enable them to be regularly 1st to the feeding stations.

They noticeably raise their tail when they land.



# Poetry

You can find these poems which are still in copyright online by following the links

The first is particularly wonderful as you can see and hear the poet reading it

[St Kevin & the Blackbird](#)

[Seamus Heaney](#)

[13 Ways of looking at a Blackbird.](#)

[Wallace Stevens](#)

[A Blackbird Singing & Thirteen Blackbirds looking at a Man.](#)

R S Thomas

There is also a well known song about Blackbirds again you can follow the link to hear it online

[Blackbird by The Beatles](#)



# The Blackbird

by John Clare

1

The blackbird is a bonny bird  
That singeth in the wood  
His song is in the evening heard  
When the red cow chews her cud  
His song is heard in morning loud  
Upon the bright white thorn  
While the blythe milkmaid sings as proud  
And holds the world in scorn.

2

O bonny is the blackbird still  
On top of yon fir tree  
On which he wipes his golden bill  
And blithely whistles he  
He sings upon the sapling oak  
In notes all rich and mellow  
Off' have I quit towns noise, and folk  
In springs sweet summers weather.

3

The blackbird is a bonny bird  
I love his mourning suit  
And song in the spring mornings heard  
As mellow as the flute  
How sweet his song in April showers  
Pipes from his golden bill  
As yellow as the kingcup flowers  
The sweetest ditty still



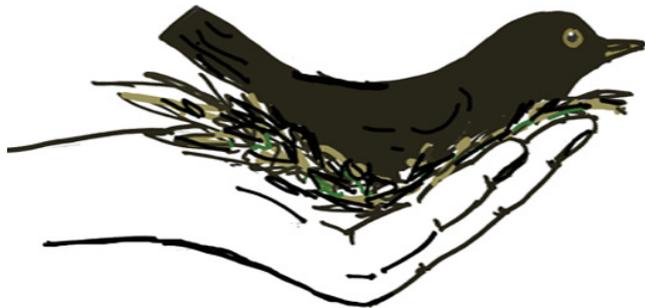
## Stories

### St Kevin

St Kevin was the first Abbott of Glenalough in County Wicklow. Born in 498AD a pupil of St Petroc of Cornwall. He lived as a hermit close to nature, with animal and bird companions for 7 years. Later if he wanted solitued he would retire to a cell so small he would have to leave an arm out of the window, one day a blackbird built a nest in his hand, so he remained still with his are outstretched until the young had fledged.

He apparently died on the 3rd June 618 at 120!

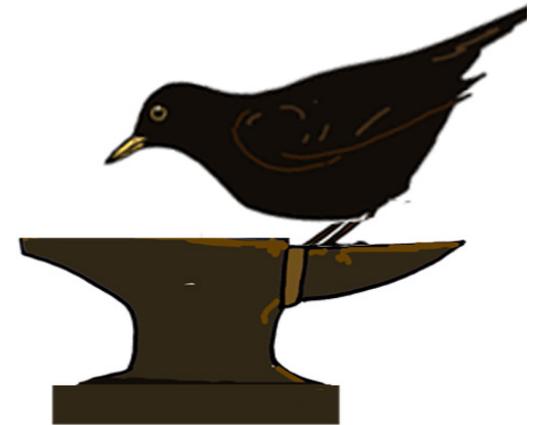
The beautiful poem entitled St Kevin and the Blackbird written Seamus Heaney can be heard by folowing the link above.



### Culhwch and Olwen

Druid Dhubh or the Black Druid is one of the Gaelic names for the Blackbird. This may come from the Story of Culhwch and Olwen in which the Blackbird is considered one of the oldest creatures on the earth, alongside the Stag, Owl, Salmon and Eagle. All are teachers of understanding and attunement with the natural world.

When the Blackbird was found it has pecked at a the smiths anvil for so long it has worn it completely away.



## The Greedy Blackbird



Tells of a White bird who takes the advice of a magpie and goes to find gold in a cave guarded by a Dragon. He is to sing to Pluto the king of riches before he touches anything, but unfortunately he forgets. The floor of the cave is covered in gold dust. As he plunged his beak into it the Dragon immediately appeared breathing fire, he left the cave but the smoke and fire had charred his white feathers and left his beak coated with gold.



## Mythology



Some say that the birds of Rhiannon from the Welsh Medieval Mabinogion are three blackbirds, with their song “they wake the dead and lull the living asleep.”

Considered harbingers of the Otherworld and sitting between two worlds their singing at Harlech in the story of Branwen is said to have suspended earthly time.

## A Medieval View

According to the Aberdeen Bestiary The Blackbird represents those tainted by Sin.

It says that St Benedict encountered a flying blackbird so close he could have touched it. After which he was “tempted with the Fire of Lust” but seeing a thick bush of nettles and brambles he stripped off and threw himself into them.

The scratches discharged the wound to his soul, because he had transformed desire into pain. Therefore the flying blackbird represents those who are tempted by the suggestion of carnal pleasures. It is also said that it moves and charms itself by the sweetness of its own voice.



The aim of this project which started in August 2019 with this blackbird edition was to research a different bird each month, gathering poetry, songs, facts, stories and information to further understand, discover and share ways in which we can help them in the wild. In later months it has also been to document the passing of time at Hillside Farm.

More of my work can be found on my [website](#) including back copies of the Bird of the Month greetings cards, prints, printmaking and original drawings and paintings.

All of your support is very welcome if you enjoy my work please do share it with friends

#### Other things to do

1. Join conservation groups
2. Support Charities who protect habitat and wildlife
3. Encourage good practice in gardening, farming and land management
5. Sign petitions to protect Birds
6. Share your love of wildlife with friends and family
7. Sign petitions to end persecution and improve understanding

Some links for further information:-

[British Trust for Ornithology](#)  
[RSPB](#)  
[Birdlife](#)  
[The Wildlife Trusts](#)  
[The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust](#)  
[West Cornwall Wildlife Volunteers](#)

# See you in 2021



If you would like to see some more of my work including original paintings, drawings, printmaking, past ebooks and greetings cards please visit my website [www.suzysharpe.co.uk](http://www.suzysharpe.co.uk)