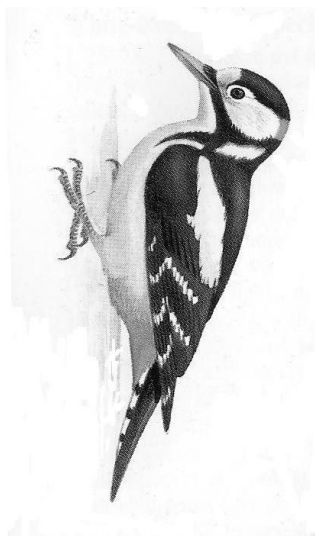


Woodpeckers

As I write this in early March the sound of Great Spotted Woodpeckers drumming is echoing across the Dale Valley and can be heard at many other suitable tree-clad spots in the Peninsula such as Monkhaven. The male birds choose their song post depending on its ability to magnify the sound and a good hollow trunk is ideal. They will also drum on metal items – our local bird drums on the metal plate at the top of the electricity pole which makes rather a thin tinny rattle; apparently satellite dishes and television aerials are also sometimes targeted!



Male Great Spotted Wood peckers differ from females in having a small red patch on the back of the head, while both sexes have a bright red area underneath the tail. Later in the season the juvenile birds have a red cap – this leads some people to think they are seeing Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, which do indeed have a red cap. However, Lesser Spotted are much smaller – only the size of a Chaffinch – and tend to keep to the upper parts of trees where they feed on the smaller branches. They have almost never been known to come to garden feeders and are becoming very rare in Pembrokeshire – there are only a couple of spots in the county now where they can be reliably found. The reasons for this are unclear, especially (or maybe because of??) their larger relative, the Great Spotted, is doing very well indeed.

Another woodpecker in trouble is the Green Woodpecker. Although they breed in holes in trees, they feed mostly on the ground where their main source of food is ants. They used to breed widely in Pembrokeshire but can now only be found in a few places. The reasons for this are unclear – the Green Woodpecker is doing well in many parts of the UK but not in west Wales. If you ever hear or see a Green Woodpecker please let me know as it would be an important record.

Meanwhile let us just enjoy our “Great Spots” as they drum out their territorial message and make such a dashing sight on our peanut feeders.

Rosemary Royle