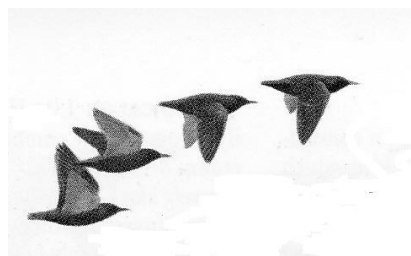


Starlings

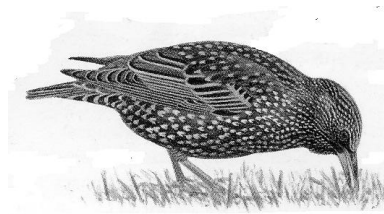
“Starlings” – always the plural. Somehow a single Starling seems a very strange idea. For the most impressive thing about Starlings is the way that they congregate in huge flocks in the winter. During the day they feed in grassy fields in smaller gatherings. but as the day wears on they gather into huge swirling masses, which darken the sky like plumes of smoke. And then they gradually disappear into their chosen roost site, which could be a city centre, a wood, a belt of trees or a reedbed. Many people regard a Starling roost as one of the most impressive wildlife sights in Britain, and there was recently some footage shown on TV which gave a good idea of how spectacular it can be.



It is likely that most of our local starlings are currently roosting in the reedbed downstream from Blackpool Mill which can be seen from the viewpoint in Minwear Woods. It is well worth a visit on a fine evening – the first flocks arrive about an hour before dusk - and it provides us with a chance to see this spectacle at first hand. Last year It was estimated that several hundred thousand birds used this roost, until eventually all the reeds were flattened and they moved off to a new site.

Starlings are a winter pleasure for us – there are very few breeding birds in this area, though it is not really obvious why this should be. In any case, although still very numerous, they are decreasing rapidly as a breeding bird in the UK, and as far as I know the cause is just not known. Other birds which feed on grasslands, such as Rooks, are doing well. Other birds which nest in similar sized holes, such as Greater Spotted Woodpecker, are doing well. So why not Starlings?

Most of our winter birds are probably from Scandinavia, and will be sporting their speckled winter coat. Earlier in the year, the juvenile birds, which are a pale uniform brown, and the juveniles moulting into adult plumage, which are a bizarre mixture of pale brown and spotty black, can easily confuse the unwary birdwatcher - they look very exotic! But the characteristic Starling gait – a striding waddle - always gives them away.



Rosemary Royle