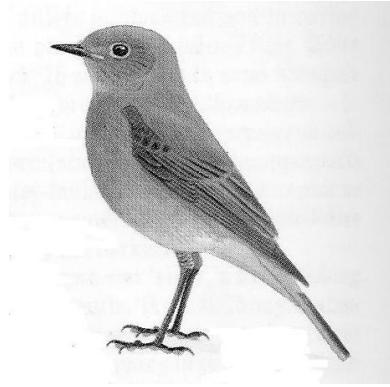


Redstarts on Roofs

Resident of Dale may have noticed birdwatchers strolling around the village taking an unusual interest in the roofs of the houses. This is because they are looking for Black Redstarts, up to 7 of which have been residing in Dale recently. A small number of these little birds pass through Pembrokeshire every autumn and some stay for the winter – key spots to see them are usually the roofs of St Brides church and St Brides Castle. But this year there has been a mini-invasion - there have been up to 60 birds at any one time scattered around numerous locations, including the centre of Haverfordwest, and presumably many more that have not been identified.



Black Redstarts look quite a lot like a Robin in outline. They are always to be seen in bare places such as roofs and beaches – never in a bush or tree. This is because they are really birds of rocky and mountainous areas and this is as close as they can get! They can be identified by their habit of continuously bobbing and tail flicking – this latter activity shows off their main identification feature which is a rusty coloured tail. Otherwise most of the birds – the females and juveniles – are a pale greyish brown. The males are much smarter – dark grey with a blackish face and little white marks in the wings – one of these has been seen regularly in Blue Anchor Way.

Only a few Black Redstarts breed in the UK each year, power stations and mill buildings being favourite locations, but they are quite common in Northern France. We have seen them nesting on the houses on the quay at St Vaast, for example. It is thought that they are scarce in the UK due to our unusually aggressive and urban robins – this seems to be supported by that fact that you can often see a Robin chase off a Black Redstart even on a Dale roof. This happened in our garden – we had a Black Redstart on our roof for only half an hour until the local Robins noticed it and immediately chased it away.

Rosemary Royle