

## The Willow Warbler

This very common and delightful little bird must be one of the most overlooked bird species in the UK. There can be very few people who have not seen or heard a Willow Warbler, almost always without realising it. It is true it is not much to look at – a small warbler which can be distinguished from its near relative the Chiffchaff only by its more greenish tones, longer bill and wings and paler legs. However its song is truly exquisite and could not be more different to the monotonous “chiff chaff chiff chiff chaff” of its cousin. It is a gentle descending sequence of up to 20 notes – but that description does not do it justice at all! It has a silvery ethereal quality with very sweet notes and is often likened to a “fairy waterfall” or some other such fanciful idea! The first Willow Warbler song in the spring, as the birds arrive from their winter quarters in Africa, is both delightful to hear and also a true sign that summer is on its way.



The Willow Warbler is widespread and common – there are estimated to be about 2 million breeding pairs in the UK. However they are not really a garden bird which I guess is why they don't have a high profile. As their name implies they like dampish woodlands and scrub, but can also be found in parks and other kinds of woodland. They are declining in the south and east but doing well in the north and west. There are plenty of spots in our parishes where Willow Warblers can be heard in April but many are just passing though on their way to points north. However a number stay to breed and thus their delightful song can be heard for several more weeks yet.

*Rosemary Royle*