



OUR SONGBIRDS

A SONGBIRD FOR EVERY WEEK OF THE YEAR



MATT SEWELL

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MATT SEWELL



Dedicated to the memory of Bill, Bob, Kath & Jenny

FOREWORD

If there's one type of bird I have a strong affinity with, it's definitely the singy songy fellas. They kind of wake up the world with their vocals. It's a little known fact, but that's not them getting up, you know; it's them having not been to bed yet. Often they've had a drink, too. They're feathery show offs. Who cares that an albatross has got the biggest set of wings – those dudes are bad luck. Nope, believe me, it's the songbirds that are the open-beaked frontmen of the feathered world. Long may they rock ...

Tim Burgess, The Charlatans
October 2012

INTRODUCTION

Birdsong is a part of the natural stereo soundtrack to our everyday lives. Some songs stop us in our tracks with their warmth and dexterity, but mostly the quacks, clucks, trills, tweets, kronks, peeps, zing pings, keee-orrs and crowings go ignored or unnoticed. Sadly, some of these songs aren't half as common as they used to be, whilst some songs are growing in popularity day by day. The sound of birds is all around us; we just have to stop and listen.



DAWN CHORUS

Not a music television presenter, though I did actually have a music teacher at school called Mrs Melody. An hour before the sun rises over the horizon in spring, the woodland choirs stir and warm up their vocal cords and the misty morning air with songs and sine waves of every shape and colour. Throughout the season each choir grows with newly arrived migrant visitors, building dense layer upon layer and eventually creating a cacophony of industrial proportions. A heady brew that we mainly just sleep through.

Scientists can't explain the Dawn Chorus as it doesn't seem to serve much purpose or practicality; I doubt they ever will either, as they can't logically explain that the birds are full of the joys of spring and so glad to be alive that they sing their songs to the rising sun with gusto.

Lapwing

Vanellus vanellus

Once a common voice within our aural landscape, the call of the Lapwing was heard loud and clear throughout British arable lands, meadows and marshes. So common a sound, in fact, that many people know this handsome plover, resplendent in a green and black iridescent smoking jacket, by his call alone: the 'peewit'.

It's an instantly recognisable call that matches his distinguished look and territorial acrobatic aerial displays. Due to changes in farming techniques and increased use of pesticides, Lapwing numbers have hit crisis level, dropping disastrously in the last thirty years. That is why the peewit sings the blues.



Bittern

Botaurus stellaris

Deep in the marshlands, far beyond where any Coot or Moorhen dares to tread, dwells a creature part myth and part Heron; a bird rarely seen but widely talked of in hushed tones, as if the slightest movement ten miles away will push him deeper into the fen. Every spring the male stealthily makes his way through the reeds to a clearing at the water's edge and releases his guttural sonic 'boom'. Like the sub-bass of an illegal rave, the boom can be heard through the countryside for up to a mile. The Bittern huffs in air, filling his neck like a pair of tweed bellows, and in a controlled bark gently releases the sound in the hope of arousing a lady Bittern, who is just as clandestine and shy as her beau with the boom.

