

# Highfield Farm – nature walk highlights



## October - March

Scan the berry-laden hedgerows and stubble fields for **redwing** – rather like a song thrush with a flash of crimson-red on the wing, and the larger **fieldfare** – a stout, upright thrush with a grey/blue head.

**Siskins** and **redpolls** – small striped finches, will be teasing the seeds from alders and other streamside trees, or keep a close eye on the bird feeders in harsher weather.

There's safety in numbers in winter, and tit flocks may welcome **blue tits**, **great tits**, **coal tits** and the delightful **long-tailed tit**, easily spotted even against the duller of skies. Keen-eyed visitors might even pick out the tiny **goldcrest**, pretty much our smallest bird at just a few centimetres in length.



The bare fields and wildlife margins will play host of gathering flocks of buntings and other songbirds; **tree sparrows** with their black spotted cheeks, vibrant **yellowhammers** and perhaps the odd **reed bunting**. A real treat here or in the woods may be a **bullfinch** – their black heads complimented by a subtle orangey-pink chest on the handsome male or perhaps the windswept crest of a **skylark** – don't forget to listen for their high-flying song displays in summer too.

From February onwards, birds begin to think about the coming spring and **great spotted woodpeckers** will be in search of the perfect drum kit, with their rapid beating calls easy to pick up from 100s of metres away.

As pools develop in wet weather, **snipe** with their long probing bills may scour the muddy edges while **gadwall** and **teal** ducks gather in flocks.

## April - June

The first spring arrivals to announce their place on the dawn chorus stage will be the **chiffchaffs**, and you can be in no doubt with their limited, two-note repertoire of 'chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff'. Hot on their heels are the **willow warblers**, also choosing a lofty spot to sing from but with a more distinctive and somewhat forlorn-sounding call of gradually descending notes. If the farm's **barn owl** box has residents, look out for these silent ghostly hunters and dawn and dusk, or maybe even fluffy **tawny owl** chicks in the woodland canopy.

## July - August

Mid-summer is prime time for **dragonflies** and **butterflies**. **Speckled wood butterflies** may stay around the woodland edge, while **ringlet**, **small heath**, **meadow brown** and **orange tip** earlier in the year prefer the grassy margins. Dragonflies could include the blood-red **common darter**, the acrobatic **brown hawker** or **damselflies** along the waterside, where **grey wagtails** may also be on the hunt for insects.

## September - October

The acorn crop may bring a glimpse of the normally elusive **jay** – something of a rarity in these parts, as they fly from copse to copse on black and white wings in search of the oaken bounty. Look out for stuffed throats or 'crops' packed with acorns. Post breeding season, young birds of prey start to explore, with **kestrels**, **buzzards** and of course **red kites** with their 5ft wingspans and forked tails all possible on a warm, sunny day.

