Talking Tees Valley Activity Pack

Birds of the Tees Valley

Tees Valley Museums

Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

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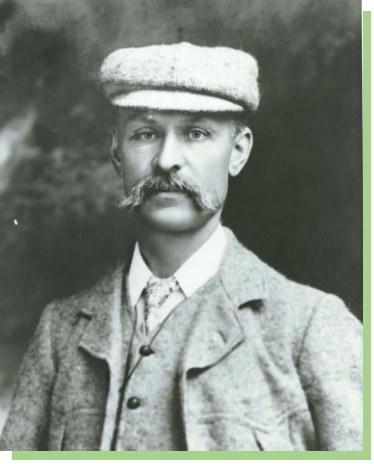
Tees Valley Museums

Welcome to another edition of the Talking Tees Valley Activity Pack

Each month we use objects and photos from our museums in the Tees Valley to take a closer look at the lives and stories from people in our area.

This month we are looking at the birds that live in the Tees Valley. We will look into one of the area's most well-known bird collectors, the kinds of birds you can see in your garden or on the riverside, and if you want to do a spot of birdwatching, we have put together a checklist for you.

Some of the photos you will see in this pack were taken from Sir William Gray House in Hartlepool. Once it was the town's museum - it is now storage for the museum services' large collection.



Thomas Hudson Nelson

Thomas Hudson Nelson lived in Redcar in the 1870s and became a local ornithologist, or studier of birds. He would watch birds, any that were local or had stopped in the area during migration, and he would study their behaviour.

At this time there were no nature programs and no small cameras which could be taken outside, so Nelson and others like him would shoot and stuff these birds. He donated his birds and collection of eggs to Dorman Museum.

Here are some of the birds he collected -

Coot

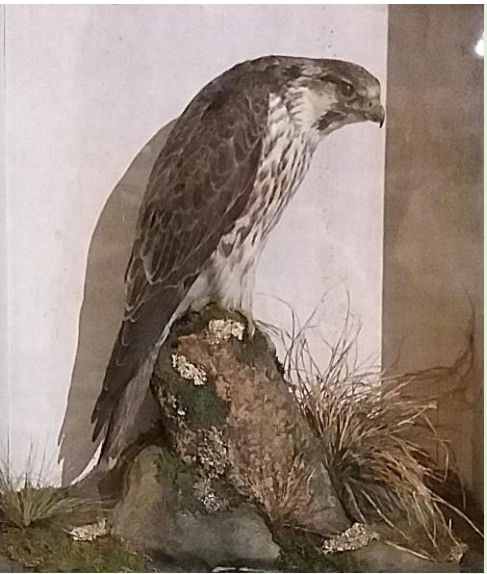
Coots are usually seen on park lakes, ponds and rivers. They can dive and feed on invertebrates that live on river beds, including molluscs, water boatmen and beetles. They build large nests on the water's edge and lay around eight eggs every year.

Fun fact

The phrase, "bald as a coot" refers to the coot's patch of white above its beak. The patch is made of white feathers and is not bald at all!

Curlew

Curlews are England's largest wading birds. They live across the country, preferring the Yorkshire Coast during winter migration and the moors during summer. With their long, curved beaks they scoop up worms and shellfish hiding deep in wet sand.



Peregrine Falcon

Peregrine falcons are resident to the UK, one of the places they choose to migrate to is the North East coast of England. They have a carnivorous (meat-eating) diet and hunt other birds like the coots and curlews above. They like to nest high up, using cliff faces and tall buildings like cathedrals to build their nests.

Garden Birds

You can see all kinds of birds just by looking out your window. What will you see?

Here are some birds that you can easily see in your garden or local park.

Blackbird

Blackbirds are a common sight in our gardens. Males have all-black plumage while the females have brown, speckled feathers. Their song can be heard throughout the year, especially on an evening.

Robin

Known for its distinctive red breast, the Robin is another regular garden visitor. Robins can be seen all year round and can be quite used to us, watching us as we garden and waiting for a worm.

Long-tailed Tit

One of many birds from the Tit family, Long-tailed Tits fly together in flocks of 10 – 20. In winter they will snuggle together on a branch to keep each other warm.

Fun fact

Marsh Tits and Willow Tits both look very similar to each other. So much so that before 1897 they were believed to be the same type of bird!

Starling

On clear evenings, sometimes high above the Bowesfield and Portrack Marshes, thousands of starlings fly together in huge flocks called murmurations.

Have you seen a starling murmuration?

How would you describe the shapes they make in the sky?

River Birds

If you are up for a walk, then you can see more birds by our rivers and along our coast. Look out for the following.

Dipper

A Dipper gets its name from the way it bobs up-and-down on the water's edge while it looks for food. Sometimes, in order to eat freshwater shrimp, it will go underwater.

Sandpiper

Sandpipers are wading birds that live around lakes and rivers. Like the Dipper they also bob up and down while hunting, walking along the river's edge with their stilt-like legs.

Kingfisher

Kingfishers can be easily spotted from their bright blue and orange plumage. They live on river banks, hunting fish and water-dwelling insects.

These birds all have longer beaks than garden birds. This is so they can eat molluscs and burrowing insects that live in the bottom of rivers.

Woodcock

Woodcocks are noticeable for their long, slim beaks and bulky body. They are usually nocturnal, meaning that they hunt at night.

Sensory Activity

The next time you sit outside watching the birds, try this activity and find out what you can hear, feel and smell.

What kinds of bird song can you hear?

Can you feel the wind blowing, and the sun beating down?

What sort of plants and flowers can you smell?

Birdwatching

Why not try some bird watching in your garden, or in a park like Preston Park or Stewart Park? You may see some birds featured in this pack!

We have put together a checklist that you can use to tally up how many birds you can see.

Blackbird		**Starling**	
Blue Tit		**Goldfinch**	
Great Tit		**Greenfinch**	
Long-tailed Tit		**Woodpigeon**	
Sparrow		**Magpie**	
Robin		**Crow**	

Saw a bird that we didn't include? Draw it here.

All images used in this pack are courtesy of Kirkleatham Museum and Grounds, Dorman Museum, Hartlepool Museum, and Preston Park Museum.

You can find all our Talking Tees Valley packs through the Tees Valley Museums website under 'Latest News' or here: https://teesvalleymuseums.org/news/

If you would like to share your stories or contact us about the packs please e-mail teesvalleymuseums@stockton.gov.uk