

Warblers (Part 1)



Chiffchaff

Phylloscopus Warblers – leaf warblers – most abundant group – active, arboreal, moving mostly in upper and outer canopies of trees and bushes. Agile flight - can catch insects in air. Frequently flicks tail. Sexes alike.

Short fine bills, notched tails, thin legs. Mostly buff-green, the plumage fades to dullish browns in late summer after breeding, but moults in autumn before migrating – colour is brightest in spring, and in the autumn just prior to leaving.



Willow Warbler

CHIFFCHAFF and **WILLOW WARBLER** appear very similar – both brown above and buff below. Willow Warbler colouring tending to be more contrasted than Chiffchaff. Both common throughout UK in summer, with small numbers of Chiffchaff now over-wintering in south of UK.

Both have a creamy buff supercilium – stripe above the eye – but tends to be more diffuse in Chiffchaff, being cleaner and more distinct in Willow Warbler.

Chiffchaff has a dark bill, Willow Warbler more orangey. Chiffchaff has dark legs, and Willow Warbler a paler brown colour – although beware of individual variation.

Primary projection – relative distance the longest primary wing feather projects past the secondaries – is shorter in Chiffchaff, and wing tip barely reaches the tail. Projection longer in Willow Warbler – wing tip reaching passed rump and part way down tail feathers.

Willow Warbler can have a paler colour to ear coverts, and Chiffchaff as more obvious white crescent below the eye – but these can be hard to see.

Chiffchaff tends to “wag” tail more when feeding. Willow Warbler tends to have a stronger more direct flight.

Song: Chiffchaff - clear repeated two-note ‘chiff-chaff’ phrase.

Song: Willow Warbler - short phrase of chirpy, rich descending notes.



Wood Warbler

WOOD WARBLER – rarely seen locally. Mostly in west & north UK.

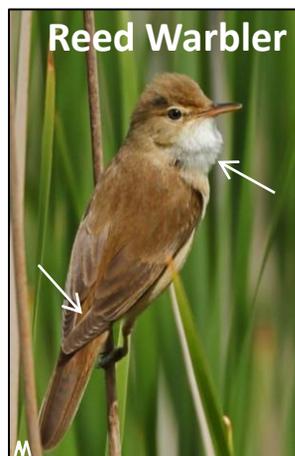
Brighter green tinge to plumage above, with obvious narrow yellow-green band to edges of darker wing feathers.

Paler underparts, whiter than Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler, with greeny-yellow throat

More pronounced, yellowy-green supercilium – with a dark green stripe through the eye. Pale legs and bill

Song: Short phrase of descending notes, like Willow Warbler, but higher pitched and more squeaky – lacking richer, lower resonance notes of Willow Warbler.

Acrocephalus Warblers – or ‘reed warblers’ – mostly found in dense reedbeds. Generally secretive, but males may sing from prominent perches in spring. Sexes similar.



Reed Warbler



Sedge Warbler

REED WARBLER seen and heard in Abington in May 2015 – when it sang for about two weeks in the tiny patch of reeds on the GP lake.

Strongly rufous upper parts, especially the rump and crown, pale buff underparts and brilliant white throat. Slight eye-ring and faint supercilium, but otherwise unmarked head.

SEDGE WARBLER seen on the ANW trip to Lakenheath last July, not reported in Abingtons. Similar to reed warbler in being brown above and pale cream below – but Sedge Warbler has less rufous and slightly streaked back, and with highly distinctive pale supercilium contrasting with darker eye-strip and crown strip - visible from some distance away.

Song: **Reed Relaxed** more regular monotonous, slower, with more repeated phrases, lacks harsh notes – reminiscent of a large motorbike ticking over, somewhat erratically.

Song: **Sedge Speed** is much more lively, varied and rapid, almost hurried – includes contrasting musical and harsh notes – seems to be rushing to get to the end (more reminiscent of a small Vespa!)

Warblers (Part 2)

Sylvia Warblers – or 'true warblers' – mostly living in woodland or shrubby gardens. These are mostly brownish-grey, preferring generally low bushes and scrub.

Blackcap



BLACKCAP - Sexes different, with distinctive black crown in male and rust-brown in female. Both have buff-grey underparts, paler grey cheeks, grey-brown back and wings, with no stripes or bars.

Principally a summer visitor to the UK, arriving late-March, leaving again for southern Med in autumn - but increasing numbers are now also seen in winter here. Overwintering birds are in fact usually different birds, which migrate from Germany and eastern Europe.

Song: a high pitched, rich warbling song with grating, scratchy elements – short bursts often louder at the end. Confusingly Blackcap can occasionally mimic Garden warblers!

Garden Warbler



GARDEN WARBLER - Relatively common, but often overlooked – very drab with few distinguishing features .

Heavier build and slightly larger than most warblers – somewhat heavy, stubby bill. Often found skulking in thick scrub.

Song: very similar to Blackcap, but is more resonant and fruity, with more deeper notes.

To help remember the differences in song - **Garden Goes on** longer, **Blackcap Briefer**

Common Whitethroat



COMMON WHITETHROAT – a summer visitor , occasionally reported in the village at migration time in April/May and Sept, but breeds in suitable scrubby hedgerows locally – around Ashton for instance. Seen at Lakenheath on ANW trip.

Male has pale grey head and back, with rusty-chestnut wing and tail. Underparts are pale pinky-buff with white throat. Female can be trickier – paler with brown head, but has the rusty back and white throat like the male

Song: from high up in bush or small tree – short, urgent, chattering song – vigorous. Notes have more variety and scratchy-sounding elements than the Lesser Whitethroat.

Lesser Whitethroat



LESSER WHITETHROAT – also a summer visitor. Similar in many respects to Common Whitethroat, having pale buff underparts, grey crown and a white throat.

Lesser Whitethroat lacks the rich-chestnut wing feathers – being more drab brown, and lacks the strong white eye-ring (**Lesser Lacks**). Appears to have slightly darker grey ear coverts, and has darker legs

Lesser Whitethroat is more shy, much more likely to be sulking in a thicket or dense bush, and singing from a hidden perch.

Song: most likely to be heard during spring, is a short repeated note - the pitch of the notes is more even and lacks the variety and scratchy sounds of the Common Whitethroat (**Lesser Lacks**).