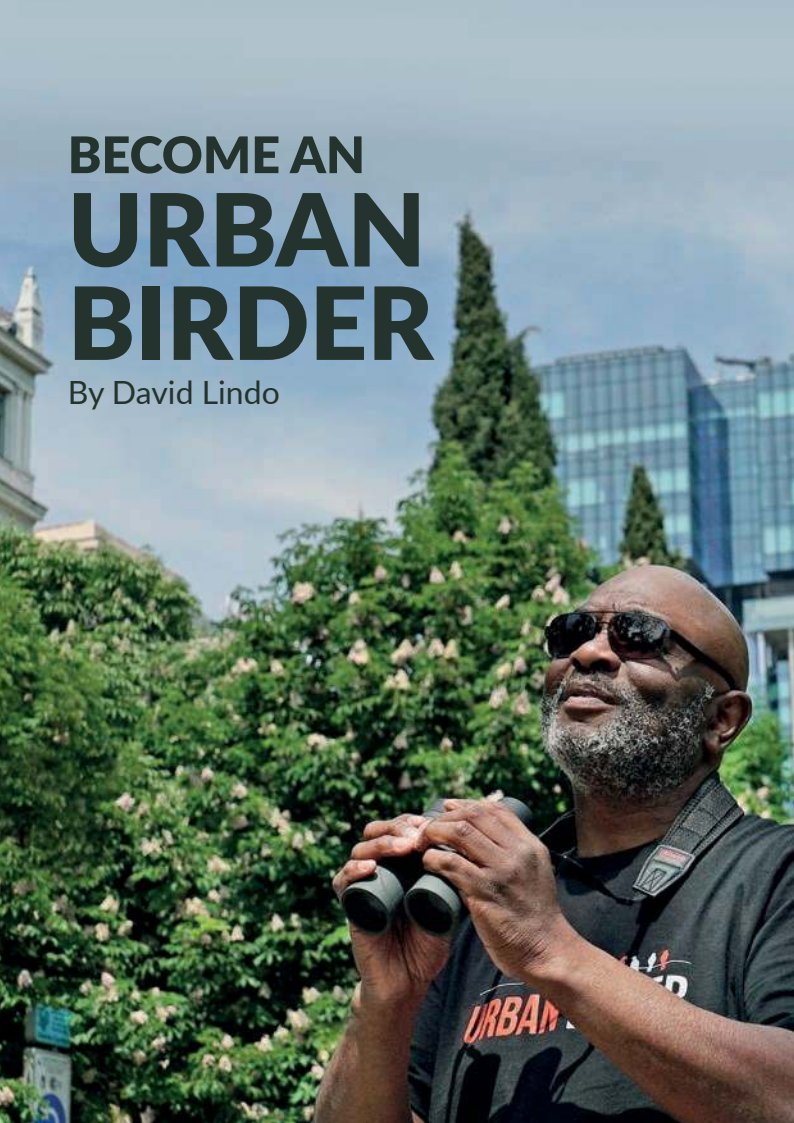
BECOME AN URBAN BIRDER

By David Lindo







BIRDS ARE EVERYWHERE

no matter what city or urban area you may find yourself in.

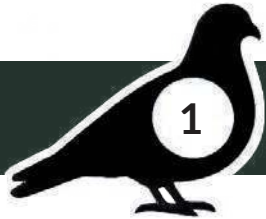
In six easy steps I'll have you clambering for your binoculars (or bins, as we like to call them in our game) whenever you see a bird. You will get urges that may initially leave you feeling surprised with yourself, especially if you find yourself grappling for your bins in the middle of a busy shopping centre or on a crowded commuter train.



David Lindo



THE URBAN BIRDER



LOOK UP!

Look up and enjoy, is what I say. Whilst noticing the previously unseen architectural delights and monstrous carbuncles of your urban neighbourhood, you will see birds flying around. Of course, there will be the obligatory pigeons but there will also be other birds for you to ponder. Big ones possibly gulls, geese and ducks, flappy ones like crows and birds of prey and small bouncy ones.

Check the goings on in your garden and start staring out of the office window watching for any avian action, although with the latter, try not to make it appear that you are gazing aimlessly out into space in a full-blown daydream, as it could get you into trouble!





2 FEED THE BIRDS

Gardens are great training grounds for the apprentice Urban Birder. Feeding birds is a great way to get in close contact with them especially if you have a garden. However, the latest advice is to limit feeding birds to the winter months to prevent the spread of avian diseases. If you have a garden, no matter the size, try to encourage wild native seeding flora to provide natural food for your birdy visitors.

Eventually, the birds may allow close approach, and you will be able to blearily stare at them in the mornings from the kitchen window whilst munching on your cornflakes. You may be surprised at some of the unexpected visitations you may get. Woodpeckers, parakeets and maybe a marauding Sparrowhawk could add a bit a spice to your garden birding.

In these early days don't worry too much about identifying what species you are looking at - just enjoy them.







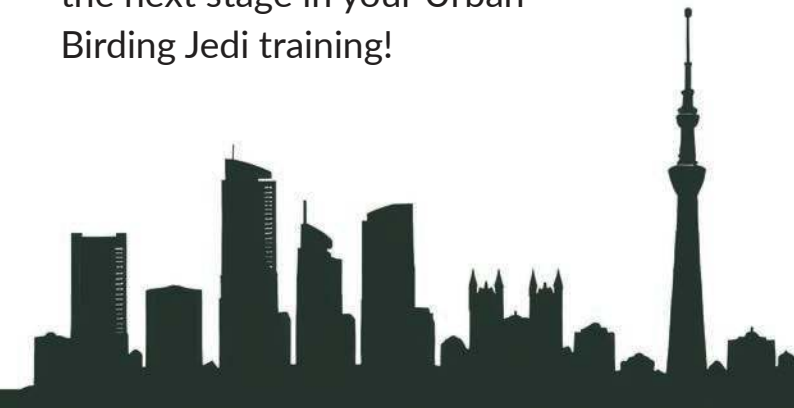
GET A BIRD BOOK

Now that you have your eye in it's time to start trying to decipher the different species. You will find that calling them 'small brown bird', 'that blue one' and 'thrush' will not be enough.

So, get yourself down to your local bookshop and snap up a small book on birds. A Garden Birds guide should be quite sufficient, as we are not talking about high-browed ornithology here.

Keep it by your kitchen window and refer to it when you start seeing anything. You will be an expert before you know it.

Congratulations, you have reached the next stage in your Urban Birding Jedi training!



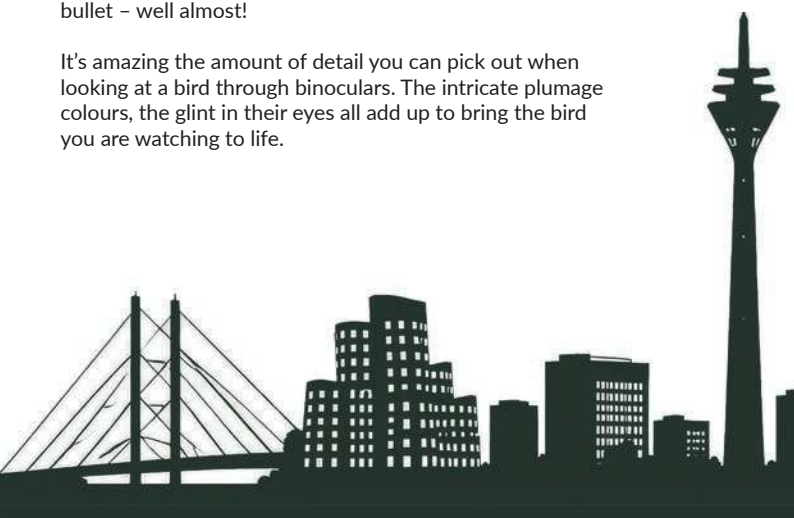

STARLINGS Sturnus vulgaris
VOICE
BREEDING
FOOD

4 USE YOUR NEW SV III BINOCULARS!

Not all the birds that you may see in your garden will conveniently pose in front of your nose, some can be exceptionally shy and only offer only the briefest of fleeting views. You now need binoculars. This is the point in your development where you cross the line to being a proper birder.

Practise your hand to eye co-ordination in your backyard or local park. Look at a slow-moving object with your naked eye like a passing plane, then raise your binoculars to see if you can connect. Picking up and following anything through binoculars is much more difficult than it first appears. Soon, you will be able follow the flight of a speeding bullet – well almost!

It's amazing the amount of detail you can pick out when looking at a bird through binoculars. The intricate plumage colours, the glint in their eyes all add up to bring the bird you are watching to life.




BIRD R



FIND A LOCAL PATCH

Your transition to Urban Birder extraordinaire is nearly complete, but no birder is a proper birder without a local patch. Find an area close to your home or place of work and start watching it. Visit it several times a week and follow the same route each time. Get to know the local resident birds and over the course of a year you will notice changes in the populations with the different seasonal visitors making appearances. This is also the time that love might enter your life. You will look forward to walking your patch in the mornings and vehemently resist any attempts by anyone to threaten the peace in your haven.

When you start having these feelings you have truly become an Urban Birder.







HOOK UP WITH OTHER BIRDERS

At this stage you may want to hang out with other more experienced birders.

So, join a local bird club or visit a local nature reserve and don't be shy to ask questions.

Experienced birders are only too pleased to share their knowledge with you.








URBAN BIRDER

YOU ARE AN URBAN BIRDER!

You now can recognise most of the birds that you encounter, your friends are asking you questions about the birds that they have seen, you are the proud owner of several bird books.

The day will come when you will even be able to nonchalantly identify some of the small 'bouncy' birds flying over that I spoke of earlier.

You may even uncover a rarity on your local patch and be the talk of the birding world. When that happens, you truly are baptised!

5 EASY BIRDS

TO SEE AROUND TOWN





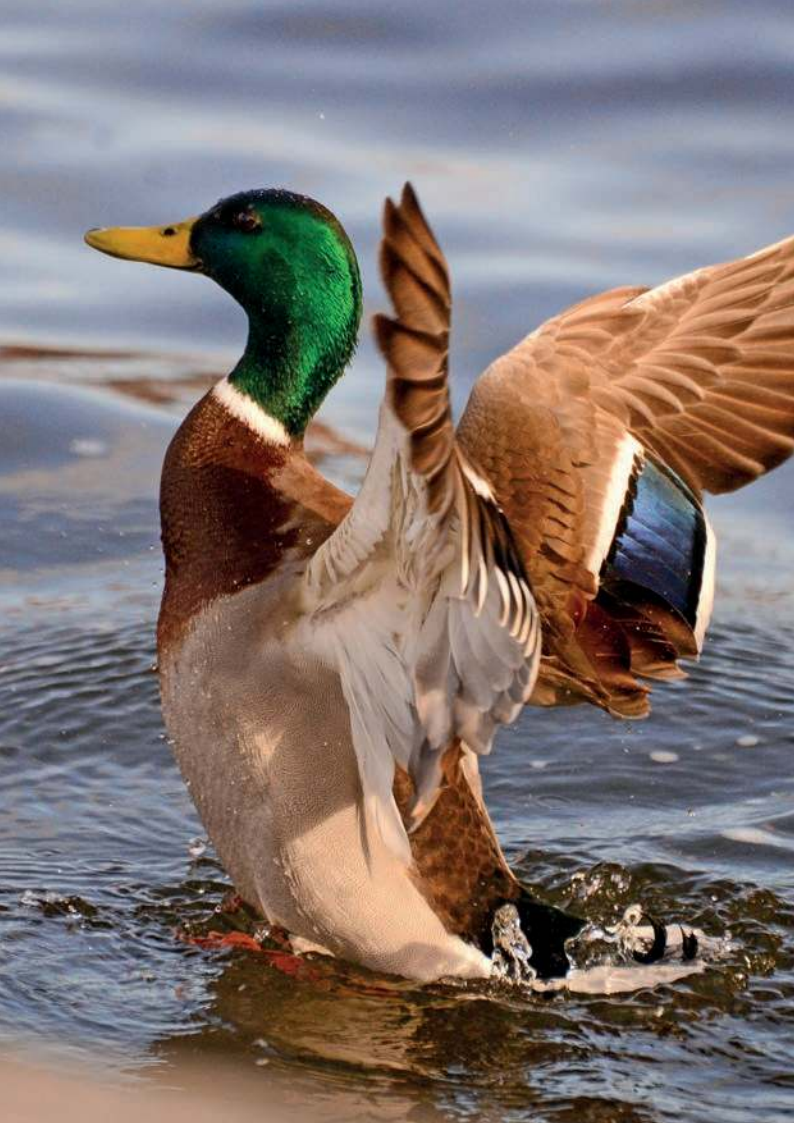
MALLARD

This is the duck that you are most likely so see on almost any stretch of urban water. They have been noted nesting in the strangest of places often well away from water high up on a balcony of a block of flats.

They are usually the first on the scene whenever there are breadcrumbs to be had and often become very tame in the presence of people. This duck really has urban living off to a tee.

The females are a typical brown 'duck' whilst most of the time the males have that beautiful sheeny bottle green head and dark mauve chest. The male is brightly plumed for a reason: to attract a mate. During late summer until the early winter, he will lose his gaudy feathers to be replaced by a dowdier female-like plumage.

During this moult, which is also known as the eclipse plumage, the males become more secretive especially since for part of the time they become flightless.





WOOD PIGEON

It may be surprising to you, but the humble, waddling Wood Pigeon is the UK's most abundant pigeon. It is also our largest pigeon and is clearly bigger and more thickset than the accompanying street pigeons. In some city centres they are as likely to be seen scratching around the streets looking for crumbs as their feral congeners. Wood Pigeons have a diagnostic white mark on their necks and a white crescent on each wing, visible in flight.

UK born Wood Pigeons do not tend to move very far from where they were born. Whereas Scandinavian birds are migratory. In late autumn, they move southwest, sometimes in huge flocks, to enjoy the milder climates of the UK and Iberia. Look up on clear sunny November mornings and you may witness flocks of them silently flying over, often at a great height.



BLACKBIRD

This gorgeous and familiar member of the thrush family is a very common bird possessing one of the most melodious and fluty songs in Britain.

The males are black with a yellow bill and eye ring whilst the females and young birds are brown with a duller bill. Fairly obvious in our gardens and parks, Blackbirds were originally woodland birds before the rise of urbanity.







MAGPIE

One for sorrow, two for joy..... The Magpie is a bird tainted by myth and folklore. Unfortunately, most of them are fairly negative and, in truth, pretty unfair. They, along with Sparrowhawks, have been blamed for the general demise of our songbirds (when the main real reason is the lack of habitat and insects) and singularly; they are labelled as sneaky thieves. Have you truthfully ever seen a Magpie steal something shiny?

But take another look at them. Firstly, they are stunning with their piebald plumage that shimmers iridescent blue and green in the sunlight. Secondly, they are highly intelligent and fascinating birds to watch. Okay, they are opportunistic predators, but they take the weak and unwary thus keeping the general health of our urban birds at a high standard. Salute the Magpie!



HOUSE SPARROW

This is the universal little brown job, well, at least the females are. The male's black bib, grey crown and russet brown wings make him quite a distinctive bird. Once, sparrows were so common that no one even gave them a second glance. Unfortunately, things are very different these days as they have declined phenomenally and are now absent from many of their past city centre haunts. Part of the reason for their decline is the lack of nesting habitat. Many gardens have had their hedges and weedy areas stripped out in place for more nature unfriendly sterile wooden fencing, patios, astra-turf and ornamental flora. All of this results in a lack of insects and nesting sites.

So, if you have a garden try to keep part of it wild for the birds. The next time you come across a boisterous flock spare sparrows the time of day to enjoy them.






BE KIND.
LOOK
UP!
URBAN BIRDER

GO FORTH & OBSERVE!



David Lindo



SV III

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