

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)



General Info

The Common Chaffinch, known simply as the chaffinch, is widespread throughout Scotland, except in the largely treeless areas of some of the Hebridean and northern isles. It lives in bushes, scrub, woodland, gardens, hedgerows and town parks. It is the most common bird in the Caledonian Forest, living in Scots pine, birch and conifer woodland. The chaffinch is resident all year-round and breeds in Scotland. There are estimated to be around 6 million pairs but in winter this is boosted by migration patterns; predominantly by females which have migrated south from Scandinavia.

The chaffinch's specific name 'coelebs' means 'bachelor' so named because it was observed, in Sweden, that the males stayed there, while the females moved south for the winter. It is probably the most spotted bird at TreeZone, take a look near one of our birdfeeders and you will probably catch a glimpse.



Vital statistics

Average length: 14.5 cm

Average wing span: 26 cm

Average lifespan: 3 years

Box of Knowledge

They are loud and vocal birds; listen out for their distinctive 'twink twink' call. A singing cock will utter his song five or six times a minute, and up to 3,000 times a day. The Victorians used to hold singing matches between chaffinches and it was thought that sightless birds sang best, so owners used to blind them with needles. Thankfully, trapping chaffinches for the cage-bird trade was outlawed in 1896.

Appearance/Identification

The male is brightly coloured with a blue-grey cap and rust-red underparts. The female is much duller in colouring but both sexes have two contrasting white wings-bars and white sides to the tail. The male bird has a strong voice and sings from exposed perches to attract a mate.

Box of Knowledge

Chaffinches have been found to have regional accents, with slight differences in the typical song depending on where in the country the bird lives. Can you hear the difference between the birds at TreeZone and the ones at home?



Habitat

The chaffinch favours open woodland and often forages on the ground. The one essential component for chaffinches to thrive is plenty of trees, although, where available, oaks tend to be their favourites. This is arguably Britain's most adaptable bird, as it can be found from the parks of central London to the birchwoods of northern Scotland.

Food

The chaffinch eats mostly seeds but its diet also includes berries and fruits. The chicks are fed insects, such as caterpillars, and during the breeding season the adults also eat insects. They also take advantage of any food provided for them through bird-feeders and will eat breadcrumbs left on bird tables. Chaffinches some times feed in groups where a food source becomes abundant.

Breeding

The male chaffinch establishes a breeding territory in February and will usually return to the same territory every year. The male sings and performs courtship displays to attract a female, then the pair will spend about six weeks together before breeding. Reproduction takes place in April and May. The female will then build a nest usually within a deep cup in the fork of a tree. The female will lay around 4-5 eggs, which hatch in around thirteen days. The chicks are ready to leave the nest in around fourteen days but are fed by both adults for several weeks after. The Chaffinch is a partial migrant; birds breeding in warmer regions are sedentary while those breeding in the colder northern areas of its range will winter further south.

References

RSPB (2014) *Chaffinch*. Available at:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/c/chaffinch/> (Accessed: 18 April 2014)

Trees for Life (2014) *Chaffinch*. Available at: <http://www.treesforlife.org.uk/forest/species/chaffinch.html> (Accessed: 18 April 2014)