

Woodpeckers in Colwall

There are three species of woodpecker in Herefordshire, which is a stronghold for their favoured habitats - orchards and woodlands.

- The [Lesser Spotted Woodpecker](#) is the smallest and rarest of the woodpeckers, and has the strongest association with orchards. It has suffered an alarming decline in the UK over recent years and is now an RSPB 'Red list' species, requiring urgent conservation action.
- [Great Spotted Woodpeckers](#) live in orchards and woodlands and their populations are stable.
- The [Green Woodpecker](#), a bird of orchards, woodland edges and grasslands, is also in decline and is an 'Amber list' species.

See hyperlinks, or summary at end, for a woodpecker identification guide



[Herefordshire Woodpeckers project](#): Herefordshire Biodiversity Partnership and Herefordshire Ornithological Club have set up this project to find out more about the three species of woodpeckers in the county (assessing their numbers, distribution, behaviour and favoured habitat) and to engage the public and orchard owners in woodpecker conservation.

Colwall is a particularly good area for woodpeckers, particularly for Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, because many of the orchards are neglected and the deadwood has not been cut out of the trees or 'tidied away'. This deadwood in the trees is vital for woodpeckers, both for nesting and feeding.

Green Woodpeckers eat ants all year round. Lesser Spotted and Great Spotted Woodpeckers live on greenflies and other insects on leaves during the summer months, but in the winter they rely heavily on insect grubs, which they dig out from the wood and from under the bark of the orchard trees. So you can confirm the presence of woodpeckers (and deadwood bug and beasts) by looking for feeding signs on the trees.



Lots of deadwood in our orchards

Feeding evidence in deadwood, up in the tree and on tree trunks

All three woodpeckers excavate nest holes in trees. Green Woodpeckers and Great Spotted Woodpeckers can excavate holes in living wood, but Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, being smaller and more delicate, can only excavate their nests in softer deadwood.

The Woodpecker survey

Surveyors are searching for woodpeckers across the county and recording all the details of their nest sites and nesting success. It is relatively easy to spot Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers as they are large colourful birds and regularly fly out in the open. Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers are very secretive, spending most of their time up in the tree tops, so the best way to find them is to listen for their distinctive drumming when they are setting up breeding territories in the spring and by looking for their nest holes. The 3 woodpeckers are different sizes (Green Woodpeckers are the size of the pigeon, Great Spotted are thrush sized, and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers are the size of a sparrow), so you can identify woodpecker nests from the size of the entrance holes:



Lesser Spotted Woodpecker nest hole

Green Woodpecker nest hole (much larger!)

The project is also experimenting with designs for nest boxes for woodpeckers, filling them with different types of insulation materials to substitute for deadwood. Tim has put up 4 of these boxes in Colwall, in areas where he has heard Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers. Some have been investigated, but so far, none of them have been used for nesting.

Telling the 3 woodpeckers apart

Green Woodpeckers are easy to identify as they are large birds (about the same size as a pigeon) with vivid green and yellow colouring and red heads. They are often seen on the ground in orchards and in pasture, feeding on ants.

Great Spotted Woodpeckers are about the same size as a thrush and often come to bird feeders. They have the distinctive black and white spotting over the wings and back, with a prominent white bar along the wings and a red patch under their tail.

Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers are only the size of a sparrow, and are very unobtrusive, spending most of their time in the tops of the trees. They are well camouflaged, with their black wings and back are spotted with white and their pale undersides are streaked with grey. The male has a red cap and the young woodpeckers and females have buff caps.