

Kingfisher

[Can be found almost anywhere along the river and some areas of disused canal. Most abundant at eel weir, lock 3, Minnowburn and the stretch from Hilden to Island centre]



The kingfisher is not only the symbol of Lagan Valley Regional Park but also one of its shyest residents. Kingfishers are small unmistakable bright blue and orange birds, which fly rapidly low over water, and hunt fish from riverside perches, occasionally hovering above the water's surface. They are vulnerable to hard winters and loss of habitat through pollution.

Kingfishers can be seen year round and are generally found by still or slow flowing water such as lakes, canals and rivers in lowland areas, which are clean enough to support abundant small fish. Branches overhanging shallows make essential fishing perches. Kingfishers nest in riverbanks, excavating nest burrow with a chamber at the end. Kingfishers are very short-lived. Although only a quarter survive to breed the following year, this is enough to maintain a healthy population.

House sparrow

[Found throughout LVRP where the Park borders onto human settlements namely Lockview, lock 3, Edenderry, Drumbeg, and Hilden to Union Locks.]



Noisy and gregarious, these cheerful exploiters of man's waste are now struggling to survive, along with many other once common birds. Their numbers are declining in gardens and the wider countryside. House sparrows feed and breed near people and can be seen anytime of the year in towns, villages, countryside and residential areas of cities. Seeds and scraps are their regular diet.

You can spot newly independent young in large flocks where there is an abundance of seed and other suitable foods, such as areas of wasteland and hayfields rich in grass and weed seeds. Later, flocks move on to grain fields to feed on the ripening grain, where the adults who have finished nesting join them. Lack of food and nest sites, especially in the country, seems to be key factors in their decline.

Spotted flycatcher

[This rare summer visitor, which is rarely spotted, has been seen at Barnett's, Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park and McIlroy Park.]



Harder to spot due to recent dramatic population decline, but look out for a grey-brown bird with an off-white breast, streaked with darker grey and a streaked forehead. Flycatchers like to perch conspicuously and watch for passing insects, flying out to snap them up, before returning to the perch. Mainly seen along woodland edges and in parks and gardens. These seasonal visitors arrive in May, and leave again in July and August, with a few passing through in September.

Swift

[Seen throughout LVRP during the summer feeding over the river, parkland and farmland. They can be seen in concentrated numbers in Lisburn and Belfast due to the close proximity to suitable nest sites in these urban areas.]



This superb aerial acrobat eats, hunts insects and even sleeps on the wing! In flight against the sky, the medium-sized brown swift appears black. Distinctive features are the long, scythe-like wings and short, forked tail. Swifts are summer visitors from Africa, arriving in April and departing again in August.

These birds never perch, leaving the air only to nest. Swifts pair for life, meeting up each spring at the same nest site, usually located high in the roof space under the eaves of old houses and churches where the birds are able to drop into the air from the nest entrance. The modernisation of many buildings has resulted in loss of nesting sites.

Amazing facts:

- After leaving the nest, they'll keep flying non-stop for three years!
- They eat, mate and sleep in the air - they can 'snooze' with one side of their brain at once, and then switch to the other side
- Parent swifts gather insect snacks for their chicks, carrying as many as 1,000 at once.
- Swifts like to live in our houses and churches - they squeeze through tiny gaps to nest inside roofs

Tree sparrow

[Shyer than the house sparrow but can be found almost anywhere in LVRP concentrated along the hedgerows and woodland edges.]



This bird is smaller than a house sparrow and more active. It has a chestnut brown head, nape, white cheeks, and collar with a contrasting black cheek-spot. They are shyer than house sparrows and not associated with

Best spotted in hedgerows and woodland edges, all year round.

Yellowhammer

[Often found in hedgerows which run alongside fields and parkland. To get a sighting of this bird is rare but possible with a greater chance being had between Drumbeg and Union Locks.]



The males are unmistakable with a bright yellow head and underparts, brown back streaked with black and chestnut back. In flight, it shows white outer tail feathers. Often seen perched on top of a hedge or bush, singing. Its recent population decline makes it a Red List species.

Reed bunting

[As the name suggests only found where reed beds are established. They are concentrated to the reed beds at Lockview, the wet woodland at Shaw's Bridge and areas around the Blue Bridge and Moore's bridge.]



Sparrow-sized but slim and with a long, deeply notched tail, the male has a black head, white collar and a drooping moustache. Females and winter males have a streaked head. In flight, the tail looks black with broad, white edges. This farmland and wetland bird suffered a serious population decline making it a Red List species.

Typically found in wet vegetation but has recently spread into farmland and, in winter, into gardens. When singing the male is usually perched on top of a bush, or reed.

Linnet

[Found throughout LVRP concentrated near farmland, parkland and the nature reserves especially where hedgerows are still intact.]



A small, slim finch, widely distributed, and was once very popular as a cage bird because of its tuneful song. Males are attractively marked with crimson foreheads and breasts, females much browner. It can be flighty and has an undulating flight, usually twittering as it flies.

Look and listen for it year round on heathland, rough ground, farmland hedges, saltmarshes and in parks and gardens.

Skylark

[Rarely seen in LVRP but can be heard on stretches of the towpath which runs along farmland in the Drumbeg/Lisburn half of the Park.]



The skylark is a small brown bird, streaky brown with a small crest, which can be raised when the bird is excited or alarmed, and a white-sided tail. The wings also have a white rear edge, visible in flight. It is renowned for its display flight, vertically up in the air.

Skylarks like open countryside, from lowland farmland to upland moorland. Often inconspicuous on the ground, it is easy to see when in its distinctive song flight. Skylarks advertise their territories by a spectacular song-flight, during which the bird rises almost vertically with rapid wing-beats, hovering for several minutes and then parachuting down. Song flights of up to one hour have been recorded, and the birds can reach 1,000 feet before descending.

Skylarks are ground-nesting birds and will breed from April to early August in tall grass and cereal fields. Population declines seem to be due to the change in cereal planting toward autumn sown crops.

Robin

[Found everywhere in LVRP easily spotted when walking along the towpath where the hedgerows are intact.]



The UK's favourite bird - with its bright red breast, it is familiar throughout the year and especially at Christmas! Male and female adult robins look identical but young birds are without a red breast and are spotted with golden brown. Robins sing nearly all year round and despite their cute appearance, they are aggressively territorial and are quick to drive away intruders.

Robins can be found in woodland, hedgerows, parks and gardens all year round. They feed on worms, seeds, fruits and insects.

Blackbird

[Found everywhere in LVRP, they are often seen looking for food in the leaf litter under hedgerows and in wooded areas.]



The male blackbird lives up to their name but, confusingly, females are brown often with spots and streaks on their breasts. The bright orange-yellow beak and eye-ring make adult male blackbirds one of the most striking garden birds. One of the commonest UK birds, its mellow song is also a favourite.

Found everywhere in gardens and countryside and from coasts to hills and can be seen all year round. They feed on insects, worms and berries.

Blue tit

[Can be found throughout LVRP and are most evident in the hedgerows and on the edge of woodland.]



The blue tit's colourful mix of blue, yellow, white and green make it one of the most attractive resident garden birds. Almost any garden with a peanut feeder will attract them and they readily breed in nest-boxes. In winter, they form flocks with other tit species and a garden with four or five at a bird table at any one time, may be feeding 20 or more.

A common woodland and garden bird, also seen along hedgerows and in most places with trees and bushes resident all year round. Blue tits generally feed on insects, caterpillars, seeds and nuts.

Bullfinch

[Not particularly common but can be seen almost anywhere, prefer to stick to the hedgerows and edges of farmland and parkland.]



The male bullfinch is unmistakable with his bright pinkish-red breast and cheeks, grey back, black cap and tail, and bright white rump. The flash of the rump in flight and the sad call note are usually the first signs of bullfinches being present. They feed voraciously of the buds of various trees in spring and were once a 'pest' of fruit crops.

Found in woodlands, orchard and hedgerows. Best looked for at woodland edges - usually located by its mournful call and can be seen all year round. They feed on seeds, buds and insects (for young).

Buzzard

[Can be seen in several locations and due to the size of the bird and the heights they climb to make them easy to spot from most locations. Are regularly seen over the Giant's Ring, Minnowburn, Barnett's, Drumbeg, McIlroy Park and farmland adjacent to the towpath from Hilden to Union Locks except where the path takes you through Lisburn town its self.]



The buzzard is now the commonest and most widespread UK bird of prey. It is quite large with broad, rounded wings, and a short neck and tail. When gliding and soaring it will often hold its wings in a shallow 'V' and the tail is fanned. Birds are variable in colour from all dark brown to much paler variations; all have dark wingtips and a finely barred tail. Their call can often be mistaken for a cat.

Found in most habitats particularly woodland, moorland, scrub, pasture, arable, marsh bog and villages. May even be seen in towns and cities. Look for birds soaring over wooded hillsides in fine weather, or perched on fence posts and pylons. All year round. Birds soar, display and call most in spring. Will feed on small mammals, birds and carrion can be seen feeding on earthworms and large insects when other prey is in short supply.

Coal tit

[Found throughout LVRP easily spotted along the hedgerows and woodland edges.]



Not as colourful as some of its relatives, the coal tit has a distinctive grey back, black cap, and white patch at the back of its neck. Its smaller, more slender bill than blue or great tits means it can feed more successfully in conifers. A regular visitor to most peanut feeders, they will take and store food for eating later. In winter they join with other tits to form flocks which roam through woodlands and gardens in search of food. Common in woodland, especially conifer woods, parks and gardens and are here all year round feeding on insects, seeds and nuts.

Tufted duck

[Can be spotted all year round on the lagan, populations are concentrated at Lockview, Blue Bridge and Becky Hogg's lock.]



The tufted duck is a medium-sized diving duck, smaller than a mallard. It is black on the head, neck, breast, back, and white on the sides. It has a small crest and a yellow eye. In flight, it shows an obvious white stripe across the back of the wing. It breeds in the UK across lowland areas of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but less commonly in Wales, with most birds

being residents. Numbers increase in the UK in winter because of birds moving to the UK from Iceland and northern Europe.

Look in suitable habitat such as a local reservoir, lough or river as they dive for molluscs, insects and some plants.

Mallard

[Abundant throughout the Park, can be seen all year round on the river, disused canal and ponds within LVRP.]



The mallard is a large and heavy looking duck. It has a long body and a long and broad bill. The male has a dark green head, a yellow bill, is mainly purple-brown on the breast and grey on the body. The female is mainly brown with an orange bill. It breeds in all parts of the UK in summer and winter, wherever there are suitable wetland habitats, although it is scarcer in upland areas. Mallards in the UK may be resident breeders or migrants - many of the birds that breed in Iceland and northern Europe

spend the winter here.

It is the commonest duck and most widespread so you have a chance of seeing it just about anywhere where there is suitable wetland habitat, even in urban areas all year round. They will feed on seeds, acorns and berries, plants, insects, small fish, frogs and other aquatic dwellers.

Mistle thrush

[Can be seen in woodland and hedgerows across LVRP but is a shy bird so not often seen.]



This is a pale, black-spotted thrush - large, aggressive and powerful. It stands boldly upright and bounds across the ground while in flight, it has long wings and its tail has whitish edges. It is most likely to be noticed perched high at the top of a tree, singing its fluty song or giving its rattling call in flight.

This is a widespread bird in the UK, found almost everywhere and can be seen in woodland, parkland and gardens. Is resident all year round, watch for flocks in July and August. They can be seen feeding on worms, slugs, insects and berries.