

We have three species of woodpecker in the UK, two are highly visible (and audible!) residents of the HLS Occold site and I know the third (the shy one) lives just down the road in Eye so it may be here as well!



The **Green Woodpecker** or **Yaffle**, is the biggest of the three, so called because of its loud “Peeu, Peeu, Peeu” laughing cry.

A heavy-looking bird, it is roughly pigeon sized with a short tail, long strong bill, greeny-grey plumage on its upperparts, a red top to its head and bright yellow-green rump.

It has an undulating flight, climbs tree trunks and branches, but is most often seen “anting” on the lawns after its favourite food.

I have a pair that nest in an old oak tree near my house in Eye, every year they bring their youngsters to the front of the house and show them how to catch ants. They also introduce them to my cats, shouting “CAT! CAT!! CAT!!!” very loudly outside my bedroom window at 4 o’clock in the morning – a wake-up call that I could do without!

The **Great Spotted Woodpecker** is blackbird sized (not so “Great” really!), and is the one heard “drumming” in the spring, using a dead tree branch as a sounding board for a display audible for half a mile!

Its plumage is black and white with a red vent area, the male has a distinctive red patch on the back of the head. When not drumming or hunting for insects under the bark this bird has a distinctive bouncing flight and a loud “Kik Kik” call.

Great Spotted eat seeds and nuts as well, so are often seen at bird-tables and peanut feeders; they also take the eggs and young of other hole-nesting birds, especially tits, so are a bit of a mixed blessing in the garden.

Both Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers nest in the old trees around the HLS site and are often seen on our grassy areas and in the younger trees.



So far, however, I’ve not seen a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** on site. This diminutive sparrow-sized bird is also black and white but lacks the red vent area of its larger relation – the males do, however, have a distinctive red crown.

Their drumming is more rapid and higher pitched, but quieter, than that of the Great Spotted, and their call is a soft “pee pee pee”.

I have had one in the old apple tree in my garden and I know they have nested near King’s Bridge on the edge of Eye, so, has any one seen one closer?

They tend to creep along branches and flutter from branch to branch, remaining almost invisible, but have the typical undulating woodpecker flight in the open. Unlike the Great Spotted, they do not visit birdtables and nut feeders.