

= Eurasian treecreeper =

The Eurasian treecreeper or common treecreeper ( *Certhia familiaris* ) is a small passerine bird also known in the British Isles , where it is the only living member of its genus , simply as treecreeper . It is similar to other treecreepers , and has a curved bill , patterned brown upperparts , whitish underparts , and long stiff tail feathers which help it creep up tree trunks . It can be most easily distinguished from the similar short @-@ toed treecreeper , which shares much of its European range , by its different song .

The Eurasian treecreeper has nine or more subspecies which breed in different parts of its range in temperate Eurasia . This species is found in woodlands of all kinds , but where it overlaps with the short @-@ toed treecreeper in western Europe it is more likely to be found in coniferous forests or at higher altitudes . It nests in tree crevices or behind bark flakes , and favours introduced giant sequoia as nest sites where they are available . The female typically lays five or six pink @-@ speckled white eggs in the lined nest , but eggs and chicks are vulnerable to attack by woodpeckers and mammals , including squirrels .

The Eurasian treecreeper is insectivorous and climbs up tree trunks like a mouse , to search for insects which it picks from crevices in the bark with its fine curved bill . It then flies to the base of another tree with a distinctive erratic flight . This bird is solitary in winter , but may form communal roosts in cold weather .

= = Description = =

Similar in appearance , all treecreepers are small birds with streaked and spotted brown upperparts , rufous rumps and whitish underparts . They have long decurved bills , and long rigid tail feathers that provide support as they creep up tree trunks looking for insects .

The Eurasian treecreeper is 12 @.@ 5 cm ( 4 @.@ 9 in ) long and weighs 7 @.@ 0 ? 12 @.@ 9 g ( 0 @.@ 25 ? 0 @.@ 46 oz ) . It has warm brown upperparts intricately patterned with black , buff and white , and a plain brown tail . Its belly , flanks and vent area are tinged with buff . The sexes are similar , but the juvenile has duller upperparts than the adult , and its underparts are dull white with dark fine spotting on the flanks .

The contact call is a very quiet , thin and high @-@ pitched sit , but the most distinctive call is a penetrating tsree , with a vibrato quality , sometimes repeated as a series of notes . The male 's song begins with srrih , srrih followed in turn by a few twittering notes , a longer descending ripple , and a whistle that falls and then rises .

The range of the Eurasian treecreeper overlaps with that of several other treecreepers , which can present local identification problems . In Europe , the Eurasian treecreeper shares much of its range with the short @-@ toed treecreeper . Compared to that species , it is whiter below , warmer and more spotted above , and has a whiter supercilium and slightly shorter bill . Visual identification , even in the hand , may be impossible for poorly marked birds . A singing treecreeper is usually identifiable , since short @-@ toed treecreeper has a distinctive series of evenly spaced notes sounding quite different from the song of Eurasian treecreeper ; however , both species have been known to sing the other 's song .

Three Himalayan subspecies of Eurasian treecreeper are now sometimes given full species status as Hodgson 's treecreeper , for example by BirdLife International , but if they are retained as subspecies of Eurasian , they have to be distinguished from three other South Asian treecreepers . The plain tail of Eurasian treecreeper differentiates it from bar @-@ tailed treecreeper , which has a distinctive barred tail pattern , and its white throat is an obvious difference from brown @-@ throated treecreeper . Rusty @-@ flanked treecreeper is more difficult to separate from Eurasian , but has more contrasting cinnamon , rather than buff , flanks .

The North American brown creeper has never been recorded in Europe , but an autumn vagrant would be difficult to identify , since it would not be singing , and the American species ' call is much like that of Eurasian treecreeper . In appearance , brown creeper is more like short @-@ toed than Eurasian , but a vagrant might still not be possible to identify with certainty given the similarities

between the three species .

#### = = Taxonomy = =

The Eurasian treecreeper was first described under its current scientific name by Linnaeus in his *Systema naturae* in 1758 . The binomial name is derived from Greek *kerthios* , a small tree @-@ dwelling bird described by Aristotle and others , and Latin *familiaris* , familiar or common .

This species is one of a group of very similar typical treecreeper species , all placed in the single genus *Certhia* . Eight species are currently recognised , in two evolutionary lineages : a Holarctic radiation , and a southern Asian group . The Holarctic group has a more warbling song , always ( except in *C. familiaris* from China ) starting or ending with a shrill sreeh . Species in the southern group , in contrast , have a faster @-@ paced trill without the sreeh sound . All the species have distinctive vocalizations and some subspecies have been elevated to species on the basis of their calls .

The Eurasian treecreeper belongs to the northern group , along with the North American brown creeper , *C. americana* , the short @-@ toed treecreeper , *C. brachydactyla* , of western Eurasia , and , if it is considered a separate species , Hodgson 's treecreeper , *C. hodgsoni* , from the southern rim of the Himalayas .

The brown creeper has sometimes been considered to be a subspecies of Eurasian treecreeper , but has closer affinities to short @-@ toed treecreeper , and is normally now treated as a full species . Hodgson 's treecreeper is a more recent proposed split following studies of its cytochrome b mtDNA sequence and song structure that indicate that it may well be a distinct species from *C. familiaris* .

There are nine to twelve subspecies of Eurasian treecreeper , depending on the taxonomic view taken , which are all very similar and often interbreed in areas where their ranges overlap . There is a general cline in appearance from west to east across Eurasia , with subspecies becoming greyer above and whiter below , but this trend reverses east of the Amur River . The currently recognised subspecies are as follows :

#### = = Distribution and habitat = =

The Eurasian treecreeper is the most widespread member of its genus , breeding in temperate woodlands across Eurasia from Ireland to Japan . It prefers mature trees , and in most of Europe , where it shares its range with short @-@ toed treecreeper , it tends to be found mainly in coniferous forest , especially spruce and fir . However , where it is the only treecreeper , as in European Russia , or the British Isles , it frequents broadleaved or mixed woodland in preference to conifers .

The Eurasian treecreeper breeds down to sea level in the north of its range , but tends to be a highland species further south . In the Pyrenees it breeds above 1 @,@ 370 metres ( 4 @,@ 490 feet ) , in China from 400 ? 2 @,@ 100 metres ( 1 @,@ 300 ? 6 @,@ 900 ft ) and in southern Japan from 1 @,@ 065 ? 2 @,@ 135 metres ( 3 @,@ 494 ? 7 @,@ 005 ft ) . The breeding areas have July isotherms between 14 ? 16 ° C and 23 ? 24 ° C ( 73 ? 75 ° F ) and 72 ? 73 ° F ) .

The Eurasian treecreeper is non @-@ migratory in the milder west and south of its breeding range , but some northern birds move south in winter , and individuals breeding on mountains may descend to a lower altitude in winter . Winter movements and post @-@ breeding dispersal may lead to vagrancy outside the normal range . Wintering migrants of the Asian subspecies have been recorded in South Korea and China , and the nominate form has been recorded west of its breeding range as far as Orkney , Scotland . The Eurasian treecreeper has also occurred as a vagrant to the Channel Islands ( where the short @-@ toed is the resident species ) , Majorca and the Faroe Islands .

#### = = Status = = =

This species has an extensive range of about 10 million km<sup>2</sup> ( 3 @.@ 8 million square miles ) . It

has a large population , including an estimated 11 ? 20 million individuals in Europe alone . Population trends have not been quantified , but the species is not believed to approach the thresholds for the population decline criterion of the IUCN Red List ( declining more than 30 % in ten years or three generations ) . For these reasons , the species is evaluated as Least Concern .

It is common through much of its range , but in the northernmost areas it is rare , since it is vulnerable to hard winters , especially if its feeding is disrupted by an ice glaze on the trees or freezing rain . It is also uncommon in Turkey and the Caucasus . In the west of its range it has spread to the Outer Hebrides in Scotland , pushed further north in Norway , and first bred in the Netherlands in 1993 .

= = Behaviour = =

= = = Breeding = = =

The Eurasian treecreeper breeds from the age of one year , nesting in tree crevices or behind bark flakes . Where present , the introduced North American giant sequoia is a favourite nesting tree , since a nest cavity can be easily hollowed out in its soft bark . Crevices in buildings or walls are sometimes used , and artificial nest boxes or flaps may be preferred in coniferous woodland . The nest has a base of twigs , pine needles , grass or bark , and a lining of finer material such as feathers , wool , moss , lichen or spider web .

In Europe , the typical clutch of five ? six eggs is laid between March and June , but in Japan three ? five eggs are laid from May to July . The eggs are white with very fine pinkish speckles mainly at the broad end , measure 16 mm x 12 mm ( 0 @. @ 63 in x 0 @. @ 47 in ) and weigh 1 @. @ 2 g ( 0 @. @ 042 oz ) of which 6 % is shell . The eggs are incubated by the female alone for 13 ? 17 days until the altricial downy chicks hatch ; they are then fed by both parents , but brooded by the female alone , for a further 15 ? 17 days to fledging . Juveniles return to the nest for a few nights after fledging . About 20 % of pairs , mainly in the south and west , raise a second brood .

Predators of treecreeper nests and young include the great spotted woodpecker , red squirrel , and small mustelids , and predation is about three times higher in fragmented landscapes than in solid blocks of woodland ( 32 @. @ 4 % against 12 @. @ 0 % in less fragmented woodlands ) . The predation rate increases with the amount of forest edge close to a nest site , and also the presence of nearby agricultural land , in both cases probably because of a higher degree of mustelid predation . This species is parasitised in the nest by the moorhen flea , *Dasypsyllus gallinulae* . The juvenile survival rate of this species is unknown , but 47 @. @ 7 % of adults survive each year . The typical lifespan is two years , but the maximum recorded age is eight years and ten months .

= = = Feeding = = =

The Eurasian treecreeper typically seeks invertebrate food on tree trunks , starting near the tree base and working its way up using its stiff tail feathers for support . Unlike a nuthatch , it does not come down trees head first , but flies to the base of another nearby tree . It uses its long thin bill to extract insects and spiders from crevices in the bark . Although normally found on trees , it will occasionally hunt prey items on walls , bare ground , or amongst fallen pine needles , and may add some conifer seeds to its diet in the colder months .

The female Eurasian treecreeper forages primarily on the upper parts of the tree trunks , while the male uses the lower parts . A study in Finland found that if a male disappears , the unpaired female will forage at lower heights , spend less time on each tree and have shorter foraging bouts than a paired female .

This bird may sometimes join mixed @-@ species feeding flocks in winter , but it does not appear to share the resources found by accompanying tits and goldcrests , and may just be benefiting from the extra vigilance of a flock . Wood ants share the same habitat as the treecreeper , and also feed on invertebrates on tree trunks . The Finnish researchers found that where the ants have been

foraging , there are fewer arthropods , and male treecreepers spent a shorter time on spruce trunks visited by ants .

= = = Habits = = =

As a small woodland bird with cryptic plumage and a quiet call , the Eurasian treecreeper is easily overlooked as it hops mouse @-@ like up a vertical trunk , progressing in short hops , using its stiff tail and widely splayed feet as support . Nevertheless , it is not wary , and is largely indifferent to the presence of humans . It has a distinctive erratic and undulating flight , alternating fluttering butterfly @-@ like wing beats with side @-@ slips and tumbles . Migrating birds may fly by day or night , but the extent of movements is usually masked by resident populations . It is solitary in winter , but in cold weather up to a dozen or more birds will roost together in a suitable sheltered crevice .