

Chiffchaff

Phylloscopus collybita

Bird · Summer migrant · Mar-Sep



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A small, plain, olive-brown warbler with a fine bill, a faint stripe over the eye and dark legs. It is very hard to tell from a willow warbler by sight, and even experienced birders rely on the voice. Chiffchaffs are among the first summer migrants back in Dumfries, often singing from the tops of still-leafless trees in the second half of March, in woodland edge, scrub and larger gardens.

BEHAVIOUR

The song is exactly the name: a monotonous, slightly hesitant 'chiff-chaff-chiff-chaff' repeated for minutes on end from a high perch, usually with a tail-dip on each note. Chiffchaffs feed restlessly in the canopy and scrub, taking small insects, and flick their wings and tail almost constantly. A few now overwinter in southern Britain rather than migrating at all.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Leaf warblers (Phylloscopidae)
SIZE	10–12 cm · smaller than a sparrow
UK STATUS	Green-listed

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