

## The Blackbird

Scientific Name: *Turdus merula*

Irish Name: Lon dubh

**B**lackbirds are a common sight in the garden. They are also very vocal and produce beautiful flute-like songs, which can be clearly heard in the dawn chorus (see below).

As members of the thrush family, blackbirds have similar characteristics to their relatives - a pointed beak, a plump body and a long tail. They can often be seen hopping along the ground, with their tails up in the air.

Blackbirds are resident in Ireland but some also arrive in autumn from other parts of northern Europe, to overwinter in Ireland. It is not unusual for blackbirds to have a number of broods during the breeding season, which is from early spring until late summer. Each brood produces three to five eggs and these are laid in nests made from grass, leaves, twigs or mud. Chicks are born without feathers and cannot see for about nine days. It is a few weeks before they are strong enough to begin leaving the nest under the care of their parents.



Photographs courtesy of Robbie Murphy



### What is the Dawn Chorus?

In early summer mornings, just before the sun comes up, the night's silence is broken by the sound of bird song. Huge numbers of birds take part in this chorus, some to attract a mate, others to defend their territory.

### FACT FILE:

**Colour:** Male has black plumage, orange bill and orange ring around its eye.

Female is brown all over, paler underneath, with some spots on breast. Her bill is dark.

**Length:** 23.5-29 cm

**Diet:** Worms, insects and their larvae, fruit, snails, seeds and berries.

**Habitat:** Gardens, parks, farmlands and woodlands.

**No. of eggs:** 3-5

### When is a black bird not a blackbird?

Crows, ravens, rooks and choughs are all black in colour but they are not blackbirds. They belong to the crow family, while the blackbird belongs to the thrush family.

The male blackbird (above left) is a smaller bird, with a orange beak and an orange ring around its eye.

The chough, seen above right, also has a coloured beak but it is red and the bird itself is much larger.



Blackbird (male)



Chough



Blackbird (female)



Song Thrush

### And when is a blackbird NOT black?

Just to confuse matters, the female blackbird (bottom left) is not black! It looks

more like a song thrush (bottom right), with brown plumage and pale, speckled breast.