

Birds on the lake

These are six types of bird that live on the lakes in Pittville Park. The best time to see them is in the breeding season from March to June, but you should see several of them at any time of the year.

<p>Mute swan</p>		<p>The mute swan has a long S-shaped neck, an orange beak with a black knob and is between 140 and 160 cm long. The male and female look very similar. This pair of swans on the lake (known locally as George and Zelda) have been together here for many years. They are very territorial, will not let other swans on the lake and will even chase off their own young when they can fly.</p>	<p>They nest on the island on the lower lake. They produce between four and six cygnets each year but not all survive.</p>	<p>They eat aquatic plants, insects and snails.</p>
<p>Mallard</p>		<p>The mallard is a large duck with a long body. The male duck has a dark green head, a white neck ring, a broad yellow bill, a purple and brown body breast and a grey body. The female is mainly brown with an orange bill. They are approx. 50-65 cm in length.</p>	<p>They usually build their nests in a depression in the ground and have between eight and twelve eggs.</p>	<p>They eat aquatic plants and animals, and seeds.</p>
<p>Moorhen</p>		<p>The moorhen appears black, but seen more closely the back is dark brown and the underside grey. It has a red beak with a yellow tip and long yellow legs. The tail moves constantly and the head bobs forward when swimming. It is often seen on the grass next to the lake. The male and female look similar and are 32–35 cm in length.</p>	<p>They make their nests to float on the water, or make them in thickly vegetated banks, and have four to ten eggs.</p>	<p>They eat aquatic plants, grass and insects.</p>

<p>Coot</p>		<p>The coot is a round black bird with greenish legs and toes and a white beak. The male and female birds are similar although the male is slightly larger. They can be aggressive in spring, defending their territory. They swim and dive well but are happy on the water's edge. They are about 36–38 cm long.</p>	<p>They build a nest of plant material in the taller marginal plants and have between six and ten eggs.</p>	<p>They eat aquatic plants, insects and grass</p>
<p>Gull</p>		<p>Several types of gull can be seen in the park including the common gull, the black-headed gull and the herring gull. The gulls can feed at sea but have adapted to feed on inland lakes, ploughed fields and landfill sites. Gulls generally have a round white body, a grey back and black wing markings. They vary in length from 36–60 cm, depending on the species of gull.</p>	<p>They normally nest on the ground, though not in the park, and have three eggs.</p>	<p>They eat fish, insects, mice, carrion and general food waste.</p>
<p>Great crested grebe</p>		<p>The grebe has a long, slim white neck and slim head, with distinctive dark brown and orange plumage in the breeding season, and a black cap above the eyes. In the breeding season grebes put on a ritual dance raising themselves from the water and paddling their feet while displaying the orange and brown tufts around their necks. Male and female birds look similar and are about 48 cm long.</p>	<p>They make their nests from a floating pile of leaves from water plants and lay three to five eggs. They sometimes carry their young on their backs. They tend to leave the park after raising their young.</p>	<p>They eat mainly fish and some aquatic plants.</p>

Other birds that visit the lakes

There are a number of other birds that visit the lakes for short periods, such as Canada geese, or birds that get lost, like the great northern diver and the tufted duck. There are also those that visit to hunt for food, such as the heron or the cormorant. The most frequent visitor is the grey heron.

Grey heron (see picture right) This is a frequent visitor to the park due to the large number of fish in the lakes. It is a tall elegant bird, around 90 cm long. The male and female birds are similar. They can stand completely still for a long time waiting for a fish to approach and then strike with lightning speed.

Please note that all of these birds are wild and choose to live on or visit the lakes in Pittville Park.

Can you answer these questions?

- How many birds can you see on the lakes on your visit?
- Should you feed the birds and what should you feed them with?
- What dangers do the birds in the park face?
- There is a small bright blue bird that flies along Wymans Brook and the lakes looking for fish but you will be very lucky to see it. Can you guess its name?

A useful website: www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife

