

STARLING

The starling is a common name applied to most species of a large and diverse family of passerine birds; some are called mynas. Starlings are widespread breeders throughout the continent, from northern Scandinavia to many Mediterranean countries and, of course, Britain and Ireland.

The adult male and female common starling attain a length of about 21.5cm. Juvenile birds are a uniform mousy brown in colour. In late summer and autumn, they moult into an essentially adult plumage; glossy green and purple almost concealed by large buff-white spots at the tips of all the body feathers. During the winter these pale tips wear away, revealing the iridescent plumage below. Males and females are similar in plumage colour, but adult males have long hackle feathers on the breast; these are shorter in females and even shorter in yearling starlings. The bill is dark brown in winter, but turns yellow as spring approaches. A spot at the base of the bill provides the only colour difference between the sexes, bluish in males, reddish in females.

It is an abundant and conspicuous species, often nesting around houses, and regularly visiting lawns and bird-tables for food.

Its call is a grating *tcheer*, which is a mixture of whistles, clicks and chuckles.