

Dipper

Cinclus cinclus

Bird · Resident · here all year



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The dipper is one of Britain's true river specialists — a plump, dark brown bird with a brilliant white bib that does something almost no other songbird can: it walks along the riverbed, wings half-spread, hunting caddisfly larvae and freshwater shrimp in the current. Watch for one perched on a midstream boulder, bobbing and blinking a flash of white eyelid, before it plunges in without hesitation. Dumfries and Galloway's clean, fast-flowing rivers and burns are ideal territory, and resident pairs hold the same stretch year-round, nesting early — often before the trees are in leaf — in a domed nest tucked under a bridge or behind a waterfall. Unusually for a small bird, dippers keep singing right through the coldest months, a bubbling, warbling song that can lift a grey winter riverbank.

BEHAVIOUR

A dipper feeds by walking straight into fast water and along the riverbed itself, wings held half-open to hold it down against the current, picking caddisfly and mayfly larvae from between stones. Between dives it perches on a midstream rock, bobbing rhythmically and blinking a conspicuous white eyelid, thought to be a signal to rivals. Nests are built from moss, domed against the spray.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Dippers (Cinclidae)
SIZE	17–20cm · dumpy, a little bigger than a Robin
UK STATUS	Amber-listed

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