

WILD AUGUST

WHAT TO SEE ● BEHAVIOUR ● CONSERVATION

73%

The decline in Britain's lesser spotted woodpeckers from 1974 to 1999 (BTO Common Birds Census). They're now too rare to monitor by annual surveys.



**CHRIS
PACKHAM'S
MUST-SEE**



■ CONSERVATION

DISAPPEARING WOODPECKERS

This picture shows what was once a quintessential English scene.

But old orchards such as this one in the Malverns are an exceedingly rare sight nowadays, as is the lesser spotted woodpecker visiting its nesthole in a veteran apple tree. Ella, the orchard's owner, farms organically and likes things to look "a little on the scruffy side". The result is a rural idyll that is overflowing with invertebrate life – and birds.

"Visiting Ella's place is like stepping back in time to the 1960s," says Ben Macdonald, a birder and a researcher for natural-history TV. "This summer her land has hosted three calling cuckoos, four pairs of redstarts and 15 pairs of spotted flycatchers. But best of all it boasts breeding lesser spotted woodpeckers, which still thrive in this part of Herefordshire. Food is abundant here – caterpillars galore in the canopy of mature oaks, sawflies and bark lice on crumbling bark, and mayflies and craneflies in streamside alders. There is also plenty of dead wood, vital for both feeding and nest sites. Finally ancient hedgerows studded with oaks provide habitat connectivity, enabling fledglings to disperse and occupy new territories."

Brett Westwood explores the contrasting fortunes of great and lesser spotted woodpeckers in *Nature*: <http://bbc.in/1lwo0MW>

Sparrow-sized lesser spotted woodpeckers excavate a new nest cavity every year. This is a male – females have black crowns.

**SEEING
A 'LESSER
PECKER' – EVEN
JUST A GLIMPSE
– HAS BECOME
A HOLY GRAIL"**