



“If it’s common, it isn’t worth photographing!”

The light flickers as a different image appears on the screen. An attentive audience has been eagerly welcoming each new picture as my slide show ticks merrily along. “Here is a white-tailed eagle plucking a cod from the cold North Sea.

- flicker -

Now you are looking at a golden eagle mantling its mountain hare prey.” Murmurs of approval bolster my confidence and the show rolls on. Later, up pops a male blackbird and an empty silence fills the room.

- flicker -

“This male chaffinch is in full breeding plumage”, more silence. At this point I’m sure that I saw a tumbleweed blow by.

- flicker -

“These arctic terns are at their northern breeding grounds and are showing some classic pair-bonding behaviour”. Nods of approval and whispered comments resume. The sweat slowly running down my back dries, my pulse rate drops and the show goes on.

Silence sometimes speaks more loudly than any amount of words

can and the message I’m getting here is “If it’s a common or garden bird, then it isn’t worth taking”. People who don’t know birds don’t have this problem, those that do, do. Bird photographers often seem to be worst of all in this respect, believing that a subject has to be exotic or hard to get before a decent photograph can be had.

I disagree with this. In fact, I often turn this whole concept on its head. Looking at a picture of a rare or exotic species I mentally replace it with a common subject and ask myself, “Does it still work as a photograph?”

Because garden birds are easily seen, photographs of them can be dismissed with a wave of a hand or merely the raising of an eyebrow. Starlings seem to come under particular criticism here. “Boring black blobs”, is how I’ve heard them described.

How wrong can you be? At the right time of the year I think starlings are one of the best dressed and showy birds to visit a garden. Their multi-

coloured iridescent plumage and pale cream spots create an outfit that any Las Vegas showman would be proud of.

What about robins?

If any bird can be honestly described as being over exposed it has to be this delightful little creature.

Will the silent judgement call on my choice of subjects stop me from taking photographs of common and garden birds? No, because ultimately I have the luxury of being able to choose what I want to photograph, sufficient pig-headedness to do it because someone else thinks that I shouldn't and the stupidity not to know any better.

And besides, *everybody* loves a robin.

