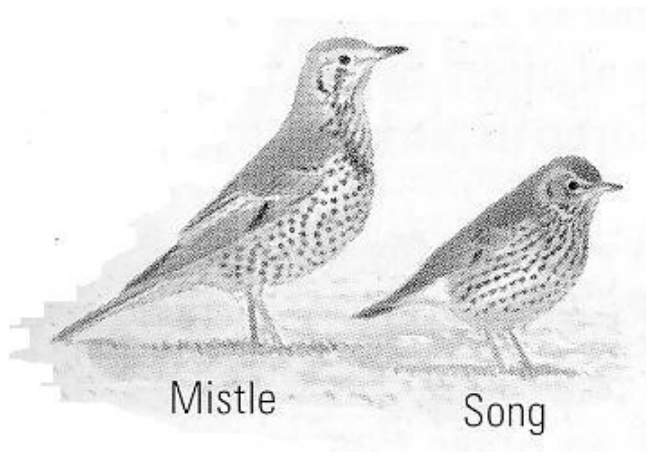


## Thrushes

This time last year I wrote about the invasion of migrant thrushes – Redwings and Fieldfares from Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. They have been with us again this year, but have been accompanied by good numbers of Song Thrushes and a few Mistle Thrushes. Both of these latter birds are also resident here – the Song Thrush is well known and quite common hereabouts.

The Mistle Thrush however is not so well known, though it is not uncommon. It probably often goes undetected as it is not always easy to tell it apart from a Song Thrush. The Mistle Thrush is bigger, longer tailed and looks longer necked and longer beaked. It is also a pale greyish-brown bird with whitish breast (under the spots) with a greyish and whitish head (sorry about all the “ishes”!) while the Song



Thrush has warmer brown colours, with tinges of buffy brown on the chest and flanks. The Mistle Thrush often stands up very tall while the Song Thrush is more compact. We often think that the Mistle Thrush looks somehow reptilian – I think it is the strong face pattern and strong beak - while the Song Thrush looks cuddly!

The breeding behaviour of the Mistle Thrush is quite different to a Song Thrush. The Mistle Thrush nests early in the year usually high in a tree and defends its nest with a harsh call just like a football rattle – a very characteristic sound which identifies a Mistle Thrush from far off. It sings from high up often in bad weather in early spring, hence its country name of Stormcock, and the song consists of short, Blackbird-toned phrases which are not repeated like a Song Thrush. It likes to live in park-like country with lots of grass and a scattering of trees, and during the summer family parties can often be seen feeding together out in the middle of a field. It is therefore not a bird which is often seen in smaller gardens except in harsh conditions such as we have recently experienced. We had both thrushes together on our lawn earlier in the month which gave us a great chance to compare and contrast, but it is quite unusual to see this.

And incidentally, its name comes from its fondness for Mistletoe berries.

*Rosemary Royle*