

Translation of the exhibition 'Vogelvreugd'

Vogelonderzoek = Bird research

Rode lijst = red list

Aanpassers = adapters

Nieuwkomers = newcomer

In this illustration from "*Nederlandsche Vogelen*" (Dutch Birds), we see a male (above) and female chaffinch. The chaffinch is a very common species in the Netherlands, especially found in forests, gardens, and parks. Among all finches, which also include the crossbill and European canary showcased in this exhibition, the chaffinch is the most prevalent. The population has been increasing in Nijmegen since the 1980s, as well as in the rest of the country.

"*Nederlandsche Vogelen*" is an impressive five-volume work published from 1770 to 1829. Christiaan Sepp, his son Jan Christiaan Sepp, and Cornelis Nozeman collaborated to provide a comprehensive overview of all the birds that were present in the Netherlands at that time.

"*Vogelvreugd, 'a picture book for the dear youth'*" by Theo van Hoytema from 1904, inspired the title of this small exhibition.

The great tit is one of the most well-known birds in the Netherlands. Extensive research has been conducted on the behaviour and occurrence of tits. The population on the Hoge Veluwe has been thoroughly studied since the 1950s. During severe winters, they depend on supplementary feeding; otherwise, significant mortality can occur. Meanwhile, the population has been growing throughout the Netherlands since the 1980s due to the increased size of forested areas, the ageing of forests, and the high number of nest boxes and feeding tables. Around Nijmegen, the number of tits has remained relatively high and stable over the past 15 years.

The print, a linocut, was created by writer and artist Octavie Wolters and is featured in "*Dit gaat nooit voorbij*" (2024) with prints of twelve birds and accompanying texts.

The coal tit in an illustration from "*Histoire Naturelle*" by Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707–1788) is depicted in a mountainous landscape. This French encyclopaedia naturally presents birds in a different environment than "*Nederlandsche Vogelen*."

The robin, like the coal tit, is a commonly occurring and beloved bird. Although the robin appears curious and trusting, they can be aggressive towards their own kind, especially when they approach the concealed nests built on the ground. The birds then use their red breast to deter intruders. After a decline in numbers around 2008, both in Nijmegen and the rest of the country, their population has increased again. Their distinctive singing and the ticking sound they make can be heard abundantly even in winter.

The three taxidermied birds (chaffinch, robin, and coal tit) played a role in education. They were used to teach students how to distinguish between different species. Nowadays, this is mostly done digitally, with photos and videos.

The black tern is primarily found in shallow marshes. As evident from this illustration from "*Nederlandsche Vogelen*," this bird nests on floating aquatic vegetation such as water soldier or, as shown here, on lilies. For suitable nesting sites, human-made nesting rafts are also employed, as seen in the Oude Waal. The Ooijpolder near Nijmegen is, therefore, a highly suitable habitat for black terns. Their presence has been well documented here. In the Netherlands, their numbers have significantly declined in recent decades, but in the Ooijpolder, the black tern, which had disappeared in 1983 and 1984, has made a complete comeback. Their population is stable and substantial in this region, as the map illustrates.

The house sparrow, depicted here in a linocut by Octavie Wolters, is a very common bird species in villages and cities. The bird builds its nests under roof tiles and in the crevices of buildings. Besides the blackbird, the house sparrow is the most prevalent bird in our country, although the numbers are declining significantly: in the 1970s, there were still one to two million individuals, but that number has since halved. Reasons for this decline include the reduced use of roof tiles on roofs and the replacement of hedges with fences in gardens.

In 2016, the house sparrow was placed on the 'red list.' This list serves as a means to draw attention to the state of birds among the general public. Since 2000, the population has stabilised at a low level, although the sparrow is quite common in and around Nijmegen.

The crested lark, now a rare bird in the Netherlands, originates from steppes and semi-deserts and has been present in Western Europe since the nineteenth century. It feels at home in dry and sandy soils. Due to increasing urbanisation, its habitat has diminished, leading to a decline in the number of crested larks. In "*Nederlandsche Vogelen*," the lark is depicted in the grass, recognisable by its crest.

While the crested lark and the (more well-known) skylark are facing challenging times, the woodlark, also depicted in the illustration, is doing much better. This lark is portrayed as if lying flat on a table and not in a natural flying posture. It is likely that this indeed occurred; many prints in "*Nederlandsche Vogelen*" are based on mounted or deceased specimens.

The wryneck is part of the woodpecker family, as seen in this illustration from Buffon's "*Histoire Naturelle*." The drawing of its plumage, resembling tree bark, provides effective camouflage when the bird is perched on a tree. The wryneck gets its name from the long neck it can stretch, allowing its head to rotate 180 degrees in any direction. They lead a sheltered and inconspicuous life. Since the 1960s, the wryneck population has been declining, especially outside the Veluwe but also within this natural area where they were traditionally abundant.

A male and female sparrow, depicted in "*Die Singvögel der Heimat*" (1921) by Otto Kleinschmidt.

The wryneck is taxidermied in a lifelike manner for educational purposes. However, the house sparrow is 'study skin' This method of taxidermic preparations is widely used in science. Comparing feather patterns is easy, and a large number of stuffed animals can be stored in drawers efficiently. Even now, 'old' study skin animals remain of scientific interest. Some specimens are used for historical or DNA research, provided precise information about when and where the study skin animal was created is known.

The European canary, originally a South European species, has been present in the Netherlands for decades. In the 1970s, there were still several hundred pairs in the Netherlands, but the population was estimated to be between ten and twenty individuals in 2018. This decline may have been caused by the reduction in weed vegetation, where the European canary finds its food. In winter, the majority of the population migrates to southern Europe. In Buffon's "*Histoire Naturelle*," we also see a species that can be easily confused with the European canary, namely the Eurasian siskin.

The corn bunting was a common species in the Netherlands for a long time, as we assume, although there is little information about the exact numbers. In the 1970s, there were only about a thousand breeding pairs left. In 2022, there might be only one breeding pair left in our country.

The oystercatcher, depicted in "*Nederlandsche Vogelen*," is shown in its original habitat: the beach, surrounded by shells, crabs, and other potential prey of the oystercatcher. What stands out in this print is the yellow colour of the beak, while the natural beak colour is red (as seen in the illustration from Buffon in the drawer below). This can be explained by the fact that the colour of the beak changes after the bird's death. In "*Nederlandsche Vogelen*," a presumably deceased (mounted) specimen is depicted.

The oystercatcher from Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon's "*Histoire Naturelle*" is standing at the water's edge, precisely where we would expect to find the bird. The beak is red in colour, unlike the oystercatcher's beak in "*Nederlandsche Vogelen*." The photo shows an oystercatcher nesting on a rooftop somewhere in a city. Increasingly, the bird is finding a home in this new habitat.

The blackbird needs hardly any introduction. This is the most common and numerous breeding bird in the Netherlands, transforming from a shy forest bird to a bold city bird. The Blackbird Route, a short city walk, showcases how the bird feels at home in Nijmegen. Between 2018 and 2020, the estimated number of breeding pairs ranged from 500,000 to 900,000. The bird, found throughout the country where there are grassy fields, trees, or bushes, is easily recognizable by

its melodious song. 'Blackbird at Dusk,' a linocut by Octavie Wolters, depicts the bird in a recognizable pose.

The taxidermied blackbird is a male, identifiable by its black colour and striking yellow beak. Females are brown in colour.

In Dutch the name of the swift (*gierzwaluw*) seems to indicate that it belongs to the swallow family (*zwaluwen*). This is however not the case, as the swift is more closely related to the hummingbird. Swifts are found in rocky landscapes, where they seek cavities to build nests. Due to the resemblance of rocks to large buildings, it is not surprising that we encounter swifts more and more in the city. The illustration from "*Nederlandsche Vogelen*" shows something peculiar: a swift sitting and another one about to land. This is noteworthy because swifts spend the majority of their lives in the air. They endure this for months on end without a break, even when they sleep.

The peregrine falcon is one of the larger falcon species, with an average size of 43 cm. They are true hunters, snatching their prey from the air in a dive at speeds of up to 200 km/h. In this illustration from "*Nederlandsche Vogelen*," the sharp talons with which this species accomplishes this feat are beautifully depicted. Due to hunting and the use of pesticides, this species had almost disappeared from the Netherlands. However, through protection efforts, the peregrine falcon has made a comeback. A few years ago, a pair even nested on the Erasmus Building in Nijmegen.

The Egyptian goose is originally from Egypt and the entire African continent south of the Sahara. In the illustration from Buffon's "*Histoire Naturelle*," it is depicted in a landscape with a pyramid in the background. The ancient Egyptians revered this sacred bird, often representing it in their art. Meanwhile, the Egyptian goose has become a very common species in Western Europe. Interestingly, despite its name, the bird is not a goose but a duck and is often found foraging in road verges. Biologist Kees Moeliker suggested giving the animal a new name: the verge duck.

The crossbill occasionally descends in large numbers in the Netherlands and is a relative newcomer. However, in other years, the bird is almost absent. The bird gets its name from its unique bill, where the upper and lower halves cross each other. With this bill, the crossbill can extract seeds from, for example, pine cones. The points of the beak are so large and sharp in Buffon's "*Histoire naturelle*" illustration that it almost appears cartoonish, likely emphasising the remarkable shape. The illustration also features a hawfinch, formerly known as a grosbeak. The hawfinch has become more common as a breeding bird in recent years.

The taxidermied crossbill, from the biology education collection, clearly shows the actual appearance of the species' beak. This example also illustrates that mounted birds in education provided a better understanding of their physical characteristics than drawings.

The ring-necked parakeet originates from India and Central Africa. Alexander the Great was the first to bring this species back to Europe, and since then, the parakeet has become a popular caged bird worldwide. The ring-necked parakeets that are now found in numerous European cities have either escaped from aviaries or were intentionally released, forming feral populations thereafter. As the map shows, the species is primarily found in the Randstad, where the number of individuals was estimated to be ten thousand in 2013. Ring-necked parakeets are now breeding in various locations in the Netherlands. Not yet in Nijmegen, but occasionally, a ring-necked parakeet has been spotted in Park Brakkenstein. Who knows, they might breed in Nijmegen in a few years!

The drawings by Elwin van der Kolk depict the ring-necked parakeet and, in the larger drawing, also the Alexandrine parakeet, recognizable by red spots on the wings. This bird is also found in the western part of the Netherlands and is expanding its habitat.