Sussex Wildlife Trust March 2025

**Flying Colours** By Kerry Williams: Communications Officer - Conservation

Let’s get the smug bit out of the way. This January I visited an incredible bird watching and conservation organisation in the Western Ghats, India, run by highly skilled and welcoming environmentalists, spotting 75 remarkable bird species, many endemic to this region. #sorrynotsorry.

A notable feature of these tropical species is their astonishing colour palette; vivid reds, brilliant pinks, and intense greens. There are a few reasons behind plumage colour. Bold colours can be flaunted as a display tactic in males to impress females and shame rivals in competition for a mate or territory. Colour can be used as a camouflage and survival technique, whether blending into surroundings, or by confusing predators with reflective iridescence.

A fellow Brit commented on how our birds don’t really compare when it comes to colour, but there’s some spectacular species to prove them wrong. Back in Sussex, spring is just starting to peep in; the season where we finally experience those explosions of colour after such a long wait. Aside from an excuse to show off about my grey-escape holiday, I thought a celebration of our most colourful birds was due.

Firstly, Kingfishers. They also reside in India, but they’re too bright and beautiful to not make the cut. A wetland and reedbed regular, these fabulous fishers take blue to another level. There’s no mistaking their tiny turquoise shimmer as they dart down a watercourse, or perch stock still on a branch, ripple-peering.

A regular on feeders, Blue Tits can be overlooked. Take a moment to appreciate that lemon and azure plumage, merging with navy and tinged with green. Once another common garden staple, Bullfinches are sadly now a rare treat to see. If you spot a male, peachy-coral chest set against muted hues of grey and black, it can’t be anything else.

Although wowing crowds with their aerial acrobatics in murmuration, you could be forgiven for thinking Starlings individually are somewhat ordinary. Think again. Up close, and in the right light, Starlings are a mass of beautiful iridescent purples, greens and golden yellows.

Corvids are considered a little plain, but what about an emerald Magpie tail or the sapphire flash of a Jay feather? A Jackdaw's pale iris can seem blue against dark feathers, and sometimes, in low summer sun, jet-black Rook plumage can look purple.

Who needs a Malabar Trogon or a Flame-throated Bulbul? Not me! Well... not for 11 months of the year anyway.