

Brichtie

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For three days he battered my window, a young chaffinch, relentless, male and horny. He was slender and very beautiful.

We'd eye each other through the glass. He was little more than an arm's length away, but I'm sure if the glass wasn't there and I stretched out my hand with a few sunflower seeds, he would land on me.

He sat on the clothesline, or more usually on the clothes peg that holds the suet block, and charged into the window, hovering, battering the glass seven, eight times or more before he faded, dropped to earth, eventually making it back to the log store roof where he stared at me from the very nearest edge to the window, stretching to his full height, showing off his wee legs before moving back to the clothes line, though he sometimes had another idea on the way over, so he turned and pummelled the window.

I had rarely been this close to a living bird, not even a budgie in a cage and could have looked at him forever. He is one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen.

His breast is tan, though I can see why some folk think it could be a shade of pink; it seems to shimmer when the sun lands. He has a slate grey head, a bit like a dunnock, but more lavish, more of a cap. His wings are Picasso, especially when they open, lines of black and white with yellow strips, clustered in the middle and down the side. And they tell me this aristocrat is one of our most common birds. Bring on the others, for surely no one holds their head the way he does, over to the side, his eyes like glass beads, fixed as he moves around or stretches to see God knows what, perhaps his reflection.

Edwin Morgan's *Chaffinch Map of Scotland* gave me his name. He's *chaffinch* in the north, *chye* and *chaffie* in

Aberdeenshire and Angus, *shilly, shelly, shelfie, shelliefaw* and *shiely* more or less where I am now and down into the Lothians. The combinations continue through Argyshire, finishing with *brichtie* in Galloway.

When the suet block was eaten, an occasional blue tit came by to complain, great tits and woodpeckers had a look, before moving on, leaving his launch pad intact. I didn't take a photo or even a wee video, the way I caught the Christmas robin in the snow or the long tailed tits who arrived mob handed. A photo wouldn't be him.

My window is manky, but I wanted to keep him and missed him when he left. He seemed to have everything to set up home, with an obvious exception. There's a dense rhododendron about 10 feet away. They'd be cosy there and no one would bother them.

He was this year's most positive sign of spring. The suet block has been replaced twice, the robins are in constant attendance and a wren started packing the nest box with leaves, bracken and dog hair. He was busy for two days, but hasn't been back. I expect his intended preferred one of his other options.

Then, exactly as you would expect to find him, there he was, Brichtie, back again, staring from the top of the clothes peg. I caught him in the corner of my eye and turned as he saw me and flew into the holly tree where he lifted his head and sang a wee song.