



Welcome to the start of our stitch-a-long!

It's great to have you join along, and I hope you enjoy the process of stitching along with some new virtual stitching friends. And that I can pass on some useful tips to you too! And any tips you have to share along the way, please feel free to join in the conversation on our Facebook and/or forum page.

Some general tips before starting our bird

Transferring the design

If you are stitching the bluebird from Inspirations, you will need to transfer your design. There's a number of methods to choose from, and it really is up to you and your own personal preference. I used the light box method and traced it using a Bohin sewing pencil. You can also use a normal mechanical pencil for this (and for drawing in direction lines if you choose). I prefer to use the Bohin pencil as they are made for fabric and come in a light and dark colour. There are other brands that also make pencils for fabric like this, and you also have the option of quilting pencils if you prefer.

When tracing the design, you will notice it can at times be a complicated design when viewing it through fabric. Always keep a copy of what you are tracing close by to help you interpret what you are seeing through the fabric. It's useful to do this regardless of the transfer technique you use and on any designs you transfer.



Before transferring your design, also make sure you cut off any selvedge edge. You do this as the selvedge doesn't stretch in quite the same way as the other edges of your fabric.

Starting and finishing your thread

One of the things I have learnt and now use almost exclusively, is the use of waste knots, rather than knotting the thread on the back.

This isn't because of any high and mighty ideas, I just find it works better for me! When I use a knot on the back I seem to manage to get the knot tangled with the first few stitches.

If you wish to use the waste knot method (but use whatever method suits you!), here's the way I use it:

1. Knot the end of the thread, and find either an area to be filled with stitches, or a design line close to your area to be worked.
2. With the knot on top of the fabric, stitch a couple of small tight stitches (backstitches work best), then continue to work your area.
3. Cut the knot off close to the fabric with a pair of sharp scissors. The thread will pop through to the back, but will be secure because of your stitching over it.
4. To finish, stitch a couple of small backstitches in an area to be stitched or a design line. Cut the excess thread close to the fabric, and again, it will hold securely.



A word of warning with this method and Nicola's birds - I have found these designs to be quite 'busy' at first. This means you need to pay close attention to if the area you think is going to be covered with stitching will actually be covered!

Keeping your work clean

This is something we should all be mindful of with every project, but if we are honest, probably don't do this as well as we should.

I use white acid free tissue paper for this purpose, but a clean fabric cloth could also be used. I also pin the paper so only the area I'm working on is visible. If you wish to use tissue paper you will develop a real love hate relationship with the stuff!

Remember to tighten your work before starting each stitching session

Again, something we should remember to do with everything! But in something like the Crewelwork birds, this becomes particularly important, as the design has a lot of areas of very solid and heavy stitching, and close by, empty and void of stitching areas. This means the design is naturally going to want to pucker in those areas. Stretching the fabric regularly will help with this.

If you do end up with some puckering, I will talk you through a way of blocking your Crewelwork which will help tremendously (and avoid the need of ironing it) when we come close to finishing our birds. So it is not the be all and end all if you do get some puckering.

Thread length

Whilst it may seem like a good idea, using long lengths of thread isn't actually a good idea. Yes, you will need to thread your needle and start more frequently, but, your thread will show signs of wear, and become 'fluffy'. Some brands (I find this with Appeltons), the thread will just snap when you least want it to. Obviously, there will be times when just one or two more stitches will see an area finished. Try to keep your stitching thread to 30 or 40 cm. I find if I'm spilt stitching, anything more than 20 cm will end in tears, as the thread wears so much and snaps so easily.

Also on the topic of split stitch - if you have just finished the split stitch before your satin stitch or long and short stitch, don't be tempted to use the same thread. The thread will appear very worn next to a fresh thread.

Needles

With the crewelwork birds, Nicola has supplied a size five embroidery needle in the kits. I find I can't work with Appeltons thread and such a small eyed needle. I use a Chenille size 24. This helps in not only threading the needle, but also in preserving the thread, as it doesn't wear on such a tight fit through the eye of the needle.

With the Inspriations surface work piece, the recommendation is for a size 10 embroidery needle. This will work absolutely fine, however I have swapped it for the slightly finer size 12 - just



another personal preference! If you do decide to try a size 12 needle, it is quite small, and you may find threading it difficult. It's much easier if you run the end through a bit of beeswax first. If you do use beeswax, just remember to use it away from your work, as it can stain and mark your work.

Time to stitch!

Now you are all set up and ready to go, the real fun begins.

The first element to stitch on our birds are the legs and beak. This is also where we get to practice our satin stitch! There are other opportunities once we move onto other areas to practice again, so this is a great place to start and get into the swing of it!

Some tips for working satin stitch

Outline your area to be stitched in split stitch.

Split stitch outline

Your split stitch should be worked with small and tight stitches. Just be careful to use short lengths of thread as this stitch is very hard on the thread, and it will snap and break on you. Some colours hold up better than others, but I've not yet worked out exactly what the pattern is!

Working satin stitch

Bring your needle straight up on one side of the shape, and angle it so it is at 45 degrees or less on the other side. This helps the thread to roll over the split stitch line. Try to at the same time as angling the needle over the split stitch line, to also angle it towards the previous stitch. This helps the stitches to lay closely together, but not overlap each other.

You don't want to crowd your stitches so they sit on top of each other, but at the same time, you don't want any fabric to show. Once you are in the rhythm of the stitch, your eyes will be able to judge where the needle should come up. However be prepared for the first couple of stitches to be reworked if you don't quite get the placement right.

'Nudge' stitches

When working the legs on the Crewelwork bird (not the one in Inspirations), you may need to work a few 'nudge' stitches. This means that the area on one side of the shape is greater than what it is on the other side. And to get our stitches to lay next to each other nicely, a stitch may be required to help work around the angle.

To work a 'nudge' stitch, come up as you would normally on the side with the greater area to be covered. However don't take this stitch down over the split stitch line. Take it down just inside the area. You need to take it down at such a point that the next full satin stitch is going to cover its entry into the fabric.

The next stitch will be a normal satin stitch, worked at an angle, and will cover the end of the nudge stitch.



When you need to use a nudge stitch, only use one at a time, as it does get tricky to cover the ends and get a gradual turn if you use multiple nudges in a row.

Tips on working stem stitch

Stem stitch is also known as outline stitch. However there is a small difference.

Stem stitch has the 'loop' on the bottom of the line, outline stitch has it on top of the line. It's really a personal preference which one you prefer. I personally prefer using stem stitch as to me it covers the line better.

When working stem stitch, you can reduce the wear on the thread by using two hands to stitch it.

What this means is before coming up under the first stitch to complete the stitch, pull the thread almost all the way through to the back before pulling through on the front.

This does take some getting used to, as it can get a little confusing as to what thread belongs to what part of the thread when you first start doing this!

When finishing each stitch, try pulling the thread back along the design line, rather than in the direction of the loop created. It makes the stitch lie flat along the line.

I've always struggled with changing threads with this stitch. Until I decided to use two needles for the purpose! I set up my



second needle and thread, and come up using that needle rather than the one which has run out of thread. You do have to be careful of the tension on the thread you are finishing, but I do find I get a better result overall.

Where to place the satin stitch on the legs

On both the crewelwork and surface work bluebirds, the design is a bit more explicit about where to pop in the satin stitch on the legs, and where to leave blank.

However on at least the Robin, you have to make your own judgement on this. Feel free to use the picture as a guide, and lightly draw in the lines with a pencil. As with any line on the design, just remember it will need to be covered.

Additional guidance for the crewelwork bluebird

Both the crewelwork bluebird and the bluebird in Inspirations 82 have the same design lines. If you are stitching the crewelwork bird, but also have a copy of the magazine, in the future you may find it useful to have this issue to hand. The magazine's pattern pieces have popped in some stitch direction lines you may find useful in the future.

Don't forget to share your progress!



Do remember to share your progress, questions and other tips with the others. And if you have any other questions, do let me know. I'm sure between us all we will have an answer for you!

Happy stitching

Catherine