

# Small Birds Thrive – 19th Garden Bird Watch

2016's Garden Bird Watch took place on the 30th and 31st January, the weather over the weekend was cold with some hail, snow and rain. However the results demonstrate the impacts of a mild winter with only a brief cold spell in mid January, the RSPB also saw similar results in their country wide survey. 38 gardens were involved in the survey this year and 31 species were recorded, less than last year but as a result of not recording flyover species.

Out of the top 11 bird species this year 8 showed some decline on 2015's figures, however within this top group Starling, Long Tailed Tit and Great Tit were the only ones to show increase. Most declines were probably caused by the mild weather as demonstrated by the absence of species such as Redwing and Fieldfare, which are usually present in gardens during the harshest winter months.

Mild weather means more natural food resources are available in the countryside obviating the need for some species to come into gardens and face possible competition from rivals and the threat of predation. However mild weather means more small birds can survive the winter and therefore more are recorded as we see this year with an increase in Long Tailed Tit and Coal Tit.

House Sparrow takes back the top spot this year with 2.68 birds per garden, however showed a 2.5% decline on 2015, probably due to increased food resources available, but this is a negligible decline. Blue Tit showing a similar pattern remains at No 2 but only declined by 6%, but again negligible and was present in 95% of gardens. Goldfinch drops to No 3 this year after 2 years at the top, they declined by 36% on last year, probably because more seed sources are available in the countryside in a mild winter. Starlings increased by 7.3% this year and moves to No 4, however they were only in 26% of gardens, revealing that larger flocks visited fewer gardens. The reason for the increase could be a better breeding season.

Mild weather will impact species that feed on the ground more than those that don't, because food like worms are more easily accessible in soft ground. This is shown in the results with Blackbirds particularly. Blackbirds dropped to No 5 and declined by 26%, better access to food like worms in soft ground as opposed to frozen ground means food is widely available so less birds have to enter gardens looking for food. Other birds requiring access to the ground showed similar declines, Chaffinch by 5.6%, Woodpigeon by 21%, Robin by 8.3% and Jackdaw by 6.9%. Great Tit increased by a very small 1.2%.

Long Tailed Tits showed an increase of 11% this year, Coal Tit also increased, by 30.3% and expanded the number of gardens they were recorded in. Small birds require a more

|    | Bird Species    | Total Number | Mean/ garden | Frequency (%) |
|----|-----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1  | House Sparrow   | 102          | 2.68         | 45            |
| 2  | Blue Tit        | 100          | 2.63         | 95            |
| 3  | Goldfinch       | 92           | 2.42         | 34            |
| 4  | Starling        | 89           | 2.34         | 26            |
| 5  | Blackbird       | 79           | 2.08         | 84            |
| 6  | Chaffinch       | 70           | 1.84         | 50            |
| 7  | Long tailed tit | 66           | 1.74         | 32            |
| 8  | Great Tit       | 63           | 1.66         | 63            |
| 9  | Woodpigeon      | 53           | 1.39         | 58            |
| 10 | Robin           | 46           | 1.21         | 82            |
| 10 | Jackdaw         | 46           | 1.21         | 26            |
| 12 | Coal Tit        | 44           | 1.16         | 61            |
| 13 | Dunnock         | 43           | 1.13         | 63            |
| 14 | Magpie          | 41           | 1.08         | 58            |
| 15 | Greenfinch      | 34           | 0.89         | 29            |
| 16 | Collared Dove   | 30           | 0.79         | 37            |
| 17 | Carrion Crow    | 17           | 0.45         | 18            |
| 18 | Nuthatch        | 14           | 0.37         | 21            |
| 19 | Wren            | 10           | 0.26         | 26            |
| 20 | G S Woodpecker  | 7            | 0.18         | 16            |
| 21 | Reed Bunting    | 6            | 0.16         | 5             |
| 22 | Pheasant        | 5            | 0.13         | 11            |
| 22 | Jay             | 5            | 0.13         | 13            |
| 24 | Feral Pigeon    | 4            | 0.11         | 3             |
| 24 | Treecreeper     | 4            | 0.11         | 8             |
| 26 | Bullfinch       | 3            | 0.08         | 5             |
| 27 | Song Thrush     | 2            | 0.05         | 5             |
| 27 | Mistle Thrush   | 2            | 0.05         | 5             |
| 28 | Sparrowhawk     | 1            | 0.03         | 3             |
| 28 | Grey Wagtail    | 1            | 0.03         | 3             |
| 28 | Goldcrest       | 1            | 0.03         | 3             |

constant supply of food to prevent heat loss due to small size, therefore they visit gardens more. Mild weather means more small birds survive during winter to visit our gardens.

Bullfinches declined by 86.4% this year, but this may not be as it seems. These birds eat seeds but also buds, so a mild period may mean more of this food is available, but it is a big drop. Greenfinch on the other hand actually increased this year by 18.6% and the species gained a place up to 15th, but this is the first increase we have seen in 5 years when the survey has been done in January, that's still a drop of 44% from 2012! However this could indicate the first signs of recovery from the Trichomonosis disease that has decimated local populations in recent years. The next Garden Bird Watch will be on 28th and 29th January 2017. Thanks to all those who took part this year.

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