

Will this become the norm? 18th Garden Bird Watch

2015's Garden Bird Watch took place at the end of a cold snap with ice and snow cover lasting around 4 weeks, although the winter as a whole was generally mild. But for the second year running Goldfinch was the most numerous of garden birds. The survey was better supported this year with 44 gardens having taken part and 44 species recorded.

Greenfinch declined again this year, dropping to 16th with an average of 0.75 birds/garden and a decline of 36% from 2014 to 2015. Even nationally Greenfinches have declined by 53% since 1979, much of which is probably due to the Trichomonosis disease (RSPB, 2015). Song Thrushes remained at a similar number to 2014.

The results this year show an increase in ground feeding species coming to gardens as a result of the cold and wintry conditions, including snow cover. These birds need access to the ground to feed, so increasingly need to rely on gardens in cold and especially wintry conditions. Blackbirds remained at number 2 this year, but increased by 10% on 2014 and were present in 93% of gardens. Robins increased by 11%, Dunnocks by 35% and Pheasants by 200%. Chaffinches increased by 7%, averaging 1.95 birds/garden which is much higher than the Lancashire and UK average of 1.2 and 1.22 respectively according to the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch. Starling, another ground feeder also increased this year by 27% averaging 2.18 birds/garden at no.5, far below the Lancashire average of 3.7. Woodpigeon declined by 19% this year, but can move further afield to find food in cold conditions due to their larger size.

This year's results also show a substantial increase in small birds visiting gardens as a result of the colder conditions. Blue Tits averaged 2.8 birds/garden, jumping from no.5 to no.2 with an increase of 32%. Blue Tits were present in 98% of all gardens, compared to 68% in 2014. Long tailed tits increased by 37%, averaging 1.57 birds/garden at no.9. Consistent with national trends this year, Wrens increased by 42%.

House Sparrows dropped to 4th this year, but increased by 10%. This is probably due to a better breeding season last summer. Goldfinches remained the most numerous species for a second year running with an average of 3.77 birds/garden. While this shows a slight decline of 5%, birds in our area appear to be far more numerous than in Lancashire and the UK as a whole with an average of 1.38 and 1.29 birds/garden respectively. The real question is will this order at the top of the table become the norm? Will Goldfinches remain the most numerous birds in our gardens or will House Sparrows and Starlings recover to their previous numbers? Only time will tell.

	Bird Species	Total Number	Mean/garden	Frequency (%)
1	Goldfinch	166	3.77	34
2	Blackbird	123	2.8	93
2	Blue Tit	123	2.8	98
4	House Sparrow	121	2.75	52
5	Starling	96	2.18	39
6	Chaffinch	86	1.95	64
7	Woodpigeon	77	1.75	70
8	Great Tit	72	1.64	73
9	Long tailed tit	69	1.57	32
10	Magpie	61	1.39	68
11	Robin	58	1.32	84
12	Jackdaw	57	1.3	27
13	Dunnock	54	1.23	66
14	Collared Dove	44	1	45
15	Coal Tit	39	0.89	52
16	Greenfinch	33	0.75	27
17	Feral Pigeon	32	0.73	5
18	Bullfinch	26	0.59	30
19	Carrion Crow	18	0.41	16
20	Wren	15	0.34	30
21	Jay	13	0.3	16
22	Pheasant	12	0.27	11
22	Black headed Gull	12	0.27	9
24	Nuthatch	11	0.25	20
25	Song Thrush	9	0.2	16
26	Great s Woodpecker	5	0.11	11
26	Redwing	5	0.11	5
26	Brambling	5	0.11	2
29	Sparrowhawk	4	0.09	9
29	Treecreeper	4	0.09	7
29	Siskin	4	0.09	2
32	Pied Wagtail	3	0.07	7
32	Reed Bunting	3	0.07	7
34	Mistle Thrush	2	0.05	5
34	Goldcrest	2	0.05	5
34	Rook	2	0.05	2
37	Kestrel	1	0.02	2
37	Common Buzzard	1	0.02	2
37	Herring Gull	1	0.02	2
37	Tawny Owl	1	0.02	2
37	Grey Wagtail	1	0.02	2
37	Blackcap	1	0.02	2
37	Tree Sparrow	1	0.02	2
37	Lesser Redpoll	1	0.02	2

2016's Garden Bird Watch will be on the 30th and 31st of January. Thank you to all who took part.

Jonathan Fry.

Reference – RSPB (2015). Retrieved on 8th April 2015 from <http://www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/discoverandlearn/birdwatch/>