



# Garden Bird

# NEWS

From Garden Bird Supplies

www.gardenbird.com

M A R C H

# 2007



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## Fairweather feeding helps breeding

*The end of winter sees the departure of some of the birds that have made our gardens their home over recent months, and the arrival of new species for the summer. Spring also means the breeding season – and more hungry mouths to feed.*

As winters go it has been a relatively mild period, with the result that many gardens reported fewer than usual avian visitors during this traditionally cold period. Those that did appear, like the Redwing, are now heading north to distant breeding grounds as far away as the Arctic Circle.

This attractive thrush, which feeds mainly on berry-bearing shrubs and trees like cotoneaster, rowan and hawthorn in winter, actually prefers birch forest for breeding, and a small number of pairs will remain to nest in northern Scotland.

Elsewhere in the country, breeding will also begin in earnest for year-round residents and summer visitors. During



*The Starling is declining as a breeding bird.*

Steve Young

March the first Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps will be singing in woodlands and gardens in the south, and in the first half of April Swallows and House Martins may also

appear. But it is not until late April that the bulk of summer visitors arrive, including most warblers, Redstart and Cuckoo, with some – notably Swift and Spotted Flycatcher – rarely in evidence before May.

Traditional wisdom had it that at this time of year, with the worst weather behind us, birds had to learn to fend for themselves, and garden birdwatchers should no longer provide a helping hand. Thankfully, research has shown that this is not the best course of action – particularly so at a time when many once common birds are showing long-term declines in numbers. Starling and House Sparrow populations, for example, have declined by more than half over the last 30 years, while Song Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher, Lesser Redpoll and Marsh and Willow Tits have all also slumped in numbers.

There are many reasons for these dramatic population changes, most of them

### Did you know?

The pleasant, warbling song of the Blackcap is a familiar sound of spring in woodlands and larger gardens across much of Britain. Blackcaps are also seen in some gardens during winter, when they can be attracted to feed on chopped apples and suet. But did you know that sightings at different times of year relate to different populations?

Our 'warm weather' Blackcaps are migrants that spend the winter further south, usually in Spain and North Africa, and return to Britain to breed in summer. The new trend for wintering Blackcaps, however, is thought to relate to birds that nest in central Europe, and migrate north-westwards – not south like most birds – to spend the relatively mild winter over here. They depart in late winter and early spring just as migrant Blackcaps from the south begin returning for the summer.



Steve Young

*Continued overleaf*

*Continued from page 1*

unrelated to events in the bird garden, but it is clear that continued artificial feeding throughout the spring and summer months can make a real difference to such species, all of which can be found breeding in or close to gardens.

These birds face extra pressure in late spring and early summer when raising their broods of young, and once eggs have hatched adult birds spend a great deal of time simply collecting food.

To help them with this vital process, a well-stocked feeding station is a must. Some of the foods you have used at other times of the year are a good starting point, but bear in mind that in summer birds' needs change – many species switch to a more insectivorous diet, for example, requiring less in the way of high-energy foods than they do in winter.

Reflecting this fact, there are various seed mixes that have been designed especially for spring and summer, and using one as

your prime feeder food is recommended. There is now also a special *Ultiva Fledgling Mix*. Other options include highly nutritious mealworms and other live foods, readily available in bulk and ideal for hungry nests full of young Robins, Blackbirds and Song Thrushes. Other species such as warblers will readily feed on them too.

Finally, and particularly as summer draws on and temperatures rise, don't forget to make a ready supply of clean water available for drinking and bathing.

## Mum knows best!

*With spring now upon us, the first young birds of the season are already attempting to make their way in life. It's a busy time for parent birds, with many hungry mouths to feed and nests to defend from predators.*

*It's at just this time that baby birds are occasionally found on lawns and paths, apparently stranded and with no parent in sight. Sometimes this happens when they are learning to fly, or perhaps because a nest has been disturbed or blown down. In almost all cases, however, a parent is close by and will respond to the calls of its young.*

*By all means move a youngster to a place nearby which is safe from predators, if this is necessary, but make sure the parents will be able to relocate their offspring easily.*



*Young birds such as these Swallows are best off fending for themselves – parents are rarely far away.*

Steve Young

## More rare treats get crowds twitching

*Although it was a relatively routine winter in the bird garden, with fewer than usual birds being seen during the prolonged spells of mild weather, elsewhere in the country there was great excitement over the appearance of rare birds.*

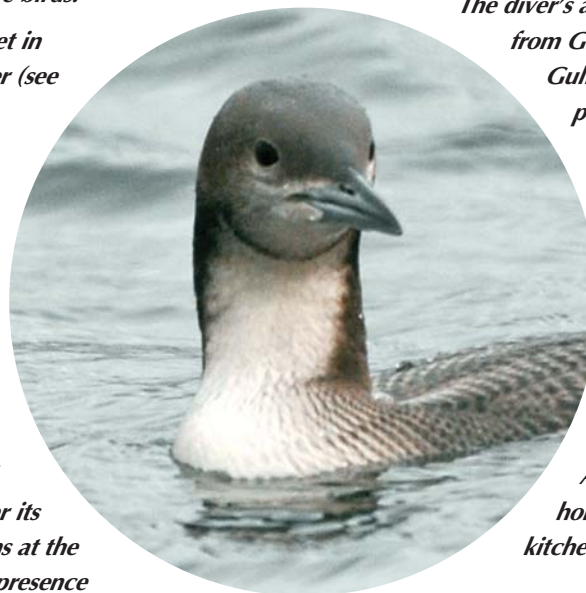
*After Britain's first Long-billed Murrelet in Devon hit the headlines last November (see the last edition of *Garden Bird News*), another bird never before seen in Europe decided to make Yorkshire its temporary home. A Pacific Diver (right), a species which normally winters along the coast of western North America, chose to settle at an old gravel pit near Knaresborough for three weeks in late winter.*

*This species closely resembles Black-throated Diver, which breeds in small numbers in Britain, and confusion over its identity, together with access problems at the Yorkshire site, meant that news of its presence*

*was kept quiet for two weeks. But eventually hundreds of birdwatchers descended on the area to see the rarity before it finally flew off one Sunday morning, never to be seen again.*

*The diver's appearance followed a belated report from Gloucestershire of a Glaucous-winged Gull, another North American bird never previously seen in Britain. If accepted by the committee which reviews occurrences of rare birds, these three sightings will together represent an unprecedented three new British birds being seen in as many months.*

*Though not quite as rare, another major find came from a small back garden in Yorkshire, where an American Robin decided to set up home. Keep on the lookout from your kitchen window!*



Pacific Diver by Steve Young

Please send your contributions to 'News from readers' to:  
GARDEN BIRD NEWS, KELVEDON PARK, LONDON ROAD,  
RIVENHALL, WITHAM, ESSEX CM8 3HB or email them to  
customerservice@gardenbird.com (photos welcome!)



# News from readers



## Dear Garden Bird News

I thought other readers might enjoy this photo. I am a professional artist specialising in dog and wildlife paintings. When I complete a painting I photograph it for my records. On this occasion I was joined by two handsome Robins, who sat on the frame to study my work while waiting to be fed with mealworms!

I think perhaps a suitable title for this photograph might be either 'The Art Critics' or 'Private Viewing'! The central object is part of my easel supporting the picture of Bernese Mountain Dogs which I was commissioned to paint.

*Richard Britton, Worcestershire*

## Dear Garden Bird News

We had to smile at the letter from Mr and Mrs Cossins (August 2006 issue) – clearly they are people who, like us, enjoy talking to the birds, in particular Robins!

We had a pair of Robins feeding their youngsters with live mealworms, which we were initially putting out in a large cage which my husband had made for small birds to enter. Unfortunately, the Robins were being intimidated by House Sparrows so we brought the mealworms

dish nearer to the house, hoping that it would deter the sparrows – but it did so only for a day.

Eventually we were putting the dish in our

## Dear Garden Bird News

I wanted to praise your helpful phone staff and your beautiful new home.

I am also enclosing some photos which I thought you might like to see. These wild Mallards fly in here in early spring – there was a large pond here at one time. I started to feed Mr and Mrs Donald (as I call them), so now when they arrive they knock with their beaks on my door. I wrote to the BBC Garden Watch, who were thrilled, and I also told them that I get all my seed and other supplies from you, and how good you are.

I am very careful to keep everywhere clean and all my bird tables are washed daily. You will also see squirrels in the photos with their own box – it does not stop them from stealing from the birds but they are so much better, as long as I keep their box filled!

In the holly bush I have put up all the bird feeders, seed, balls and blocks. The Blue

*Two by two: unlike the dogs in the painting, the Robins are real! Artist Richard Britton is talented with a camera too.*

conservatory hidden behind plants, and the Robins took them

from this new location without being harassed.

We tried to leave the conservatory door open as much as possible but on the odd occasion it was shut the Robins would perch on the door handle, giving us a big hint that they had hungry babies to feed.

One day my husband was washing plant pots in the garden and one of the Robins stood very close by, watching him and occasionally getting under the spray of water. It was lovely having such a close relationship with the Robins. There was only one snag – we didn't get many jobs done, but still it was worth it!

*Judith and David Roseblade, Stockport*



Tits, Robins and Wrens are the ones that I see most, and the usual Blackbirds. The bird song in the morning is a reason to get up each day.

I hope you enjoy the photos – I wanted to show you how much Garden Bird Supplies is loved in these grounds!

*Sheila McAlpine*

# COMPETITION CORNER

**FREE TO ENTER!**

**Win one of FIVE Butterfly Boxes worth £23.65 each!**

Attractive and functional this butterfly habitat is made from durable timber for longevity and excellent insulation. A variety of butterflies may use the box for roosting, hibernating, egg laying and during the chrysalis transformation stage. A delightful addition to any garden. You'll find full details in the Wildlife section of the Garden Bird Feeding Guide, and here's your chance to win one in our free, easy to enter competition!




**CLOSING DATE**  
30th April  
2007

If you haven't tried the BirdWord before, here's how it works:

Every letter of the alphabet is used. Each letter has its own number, 1 to 26. Some letters have been given to start you off. The shaded squares give the jumbled letters of the bird pictured in the centre of the puzzle.

A few tips. Usually the letter E is the most frequently used letter. When you discover a Q, remember that a U is often lurking nearby. And, finally, tread carefully – don't jump too quickly to conclusions and you will have a great deal of pleasure solving the puzzle.

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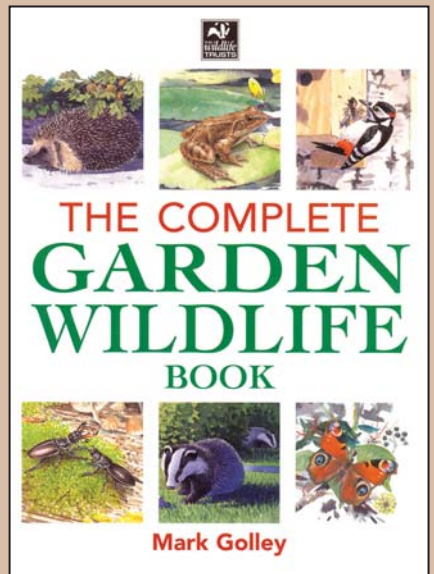
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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Post your completed puzzle to: **GARDEN BIRD NEWS, KELVEDON PARK, LONDON ROAD, RIVENHALL, WITHAM, ESSEX CM8 3HB**

RULES: The winners will be the first five correct answers drawn out of the hat following the closing date of 30th April 2007. The winners will be notified by 25th May 2007. Only one entry per household. UK addresses only. The judges' decision will be final. No correspondence will be entered into.

## Book Review



If you're looking for a little more than simple tips on feeding and identifying birds from the next addition to your bookshelf, it's worth considering one of the more comprehensive guides to garden wildlife that are now available.

One such publication is *The Complete Garden Wildlife Book*, a well-designed guide to many of the animal and insect species to be found in gardens around the country. Birds feature prominently, with attractive illustrations of more than 60 species most likely to occur in gardens – and one or two rarer visitors like Woodcock, Waxwing and Black Redstart – but many readers will find the other sections just as appealing.

For example, no fewer than 24 species of mammal are featured, ranging in size from Pygmy Shrew up to Roe Deer, and the illustrations and text are ideal for learning to tell apart similar species. Eight species of amphibian and reptile are also listed, but life starts to get more complicated with invertebrates, insects (especially moths), spiders, beetles and wasps, bees and ants. Many of these creatures will inhabit your garden – this book is great for identifying them.

● *The Complete Garden Wildlife Book*, written by Mark Golley and published by New Holland at £14.99 (hbk), is available now in bookshops, or by mail order to Garden Bird News readers at the **special price of £12.99** (including free UK postage) from the Birdwatch Bookshop – call 020 8881 0550 to order.