



Garden Bird

NEWS

From Garden Bird Supplies

www.gardenbird.com

M A Y

2007



RSPB Corporate Partner
BTO Business Ally
Birdcare Standards
Association Member



Hungry migrants arrive in force



Steve Young

are home to Robins and Song Thrushes or Blackcaps and Spotted Flycatchers, a good supply of food in your garden is essential. Please keep your feeders topped up, remembering to offer seasonally formulated seed mixes wherever possible – for example, high-energy Ultiva® Spring & Summer Mix. For young birds, there is also the new Ultiva® Fledgling Mix which contains protein-rich and nutritious ingredients to help them gain weight quickly.

Finally, bear in mind that prolonged warm temperatures also mean that lawns and flowerbeds dry out quickly, making it harder for thrushes and Dunnocks to look for worms and other invertebrates. You can help avoid this problem by providing live foods such as mealworms. You should always have fresh water available in a bird bath or pond for drinking and bathing – always a hit with the birds in warm weather!

House Martin was among the summer visitors to be recorded arriving early.

Where did spring go? While March traditionally sees the end of winter in the bird garden and the start of spring, the rapid rate at which warm weather covered the country from the beginning of April, lasting through Easter and late into the month, meant exceptionally early summer-like conditions.

As Britain bathed in mid-April temperatures well into the mid-20s Celsius, summer migrants arrived weeks earlier than usual and quickly set up pairing up and nesting. Despite slow arrivals in March, April saw huge numbers of Swallows, House Martins, Northern Wheatears and Willow Warblers push northwards ahead of schedule. By mid-month there were reports of Common Swift as far north as the Outer Hebrides and Spotted Flycatcher reaching Yorkshire – truly remarkable when you consider that these species are often not evident in many areas until mid-May.

The effect has also been obvious in the bird garden with, for example, hawthorns and lilacs flowering much earlier than usual. Warm, dry weather is good news for insects and thus insectivorous birds, and it seems likely that, assuming the

weather is set fair and early summer is not dampened down by unseasonal showers, some species may attempt early second broods, and perhaps go on to raise a third.

The other side of the coin for successful breeders, though, is that there are more mouths to feed. This applies to all species, resident and migrant alike, so whether you

What are those funny Blackbirds?

One of the exciting things about watching birds is that there is always the chance of seeing something unusual. This is especially true in spring and autumn, when migrating birds are on the move and scarcer species can appear unexpectedly.

A notable feature of this spring in Britain has been the unusually high numbers of Ring Ouzel, a scarce thrush which nests in small numbers on the uplands of northern and western Britain, as well as other parts of Europe. Ring Ouzels look similar to Blackbirds, but both sexes can be separated by the distinct white 'gorget' across the upper breast, as well as whitish wing markings and a duller yellow bill. On migration the species sometimes can be found resting at coastal watchpoints or, more rarely, inland on grassy areas and even in gardens. Have you seen one in your area? Write and let us know.



Dominic Mitchell

Winter event logs birds in low numbers ...



RSPB

Greenfinches were recorded in lower than usual numbers in the RSPB event, in contrast to the experiences of Garden Bird Supplies customers.

In the world's biggest such survey, more than 400,000 people counted 6.5 million birds across 236,000 gardens in the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch during the weekend of 27-28 January 2007. In addition, over 41,000 children and teachers took part in Big Schools' Birdwatch, with children spending an hour gazing out of classroom windows to count the birds in their school grounds. However, despite such massive support, the survey found smaller than usual numbers of several species in gardens, notably those whose numbers are usually boosted by wintering visitors from Continental Europe. For example, Blackbird, Song Thrush and Robin numbers were logged at their lowest levels for five years. Participants in the nationwide event also noted a decrease in the numbers of resident birds. Greenfinches, in particular, dropped four places down the top 10 of most recorded species

compared to last year's event, from sixth to 10th, while in contrast Starlings and House Sparrows showed a reversal in fortunes, with small increases in the average number per garden. Despite its long-term national decline, this is the third year in a row that the Starling population has increased. House Sparrow retained top spot with an average of 4.42 birds recorded per garden, although its numbers have decreased by more than half since 1979. Starling remained in second place and Blue Tit completed the top three, with average numbers of 3.67 and 2.82 per garden respectively. It is thought that milder winter temperatures across Europe and bumper fruit and seed crops in hedgerows and woodlands contributed to more birds feeding in the countryside and fewer visiting British gardens during the winter.

BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH 27-28 JANUARY 2007

GBS Customer Birdwatch Top 10

This table shows the most common species in your gardens, the average number you recorded per garden and, for comparison, the average number per garden from the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch:

Position	Species	GBS average	RSPB average
1	Starling	5.0	3.67
2	House Sparrow	4.8	4.4
3	Blue Tit	3.3	2.82
4	Greenfinch	2.7	1.2
5	Blackbird	2.5	2.26
6=	Chaffinch	2.1	1.9
6=	Collared Dove	1.9	1.56
8=	Robin	1.6	1.26
8=	Woodpigeon	1.8	1.53
10=	Magpie	1.2	-
10=	Goldfinch	1.2	-

... but GBS gets results!

In a separate winter survey, observations by the nation's keenest backyard birdwatchers – Garden Bird Supplies customers – painted a slightly different picture of bird distribution, perhaps reflecting local abundance as well as national trends.

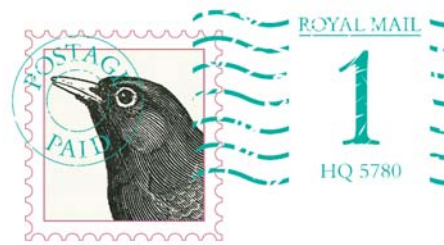
We were overwhelmed by the response to this fun winter watching event, many of you responding to the invitation to take part on www.gardenbird.com. And although the results were broadly similar, there were also some interesting differences: Starling and House Sparrow swapped positions at the top of the table, for example, the former coming in top with an average of five birds per garden in which it was recorded, compared with just 3.67 birds in the RSPB's survey. Clearly, you are giving them the best food!

Greenfinches were also logged at the impressive average level of 2.7 per garden in which they were recorded, ending up in fourth place overall rather than 10th place as in the RSPB survey. In fact, the majority of species in our top 10 were recorded at greater densities in gardens than in the RSPB survey.

All this was despite the low numbers of birds visiting gardens last winter because of both the abundance of food in the countryside and warmer temperatures. It was certainly hard going at times – "Never had so few birds in the garden for years" was a typical comment – but the results showed that the effort was worth it, as were sightings of more unusual species like Common Buzzard and Treecreeper.

Thanks to all those who took part, and remember to watch our website for details of fun surveys in which you can take part, product news and much more.

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

Adult Red-legged Partridge: unusual garden bird.



Steve Young

Dear Garden Bird News

I thought you might like to hear about a partridge I started to feed. She used to run up the garden whenever I called her, and got very tame. It was lovely to share her life, but after a few weeks she stopped coming and I thought she was probably sitting on eggs. Some time later, one very

wet rainy evening, I went to put rubbish in the dustbin and there she was, with 12 tiny chicks, dripping wet, under her wings. I was surprised she still let me near her. She was still in the garden next morning, and so I started feeding them. After a couple of days she lost two chicks overnight, so my husband built her a secure run with a nesting box to shelter her and her family from the elements.

In her usual way Mother Nature eventually left her with just four chicks. She used to leave them in the garden, I suppose for us to feed! They stayed around for a few weeks, and even in the following summer we could still call them to feed. I don't know if it was the chicks or mum who came – by that time they all looked alike! I fed them on seeds, crushed peanuts and anything suitable from the kitchen, but the favourite was mealworms. It was an honour to be so close to these little birds.

L K Fraser, Faulkbourne

We'd love to hear more from *Garden Bird News* readers, so send us your news and views and you could win this fabulous **Globe Feeder** worth **£15.95!** We'll select a star letter to receive a prize each month, so get writing now!



Bringing wildlife closer to children



Surrey Wildlife Trust

Children in Surrey have been given a great opportunity to get closer to nature, thanks to a donation of binoculars by Garden Bird Supplies.

Working with the Surrey Wildlife Trust at its nature reserve at Bay Pond in Godstone, the new binoculars will quite literally focus attention on wildlife and add a new dimension to visitors' natural

history experiences. The reserve is a popular venue for school groups, and for some youngsters that first glimpse of a wild bird through binoculars may be the beginning of a lifelong interest in natural history and conservation.

Throughout spring and summer, parties of schoolchildren visit the seven-hectare reserve to learn about wildlife and

habitats. As well as a bird hide, it's a great chance to make contact with the colourful (and smelly) world of plants in the wildflower meadow. Children are encouraged to discover how grasses and flowers grow, and the important role they have in the lives of insects. Games are used to demonstrate pollination, germination and competition, adding a fun element to learning.

'Minibeast' safaris and pond dipping are also great favourites with pupils and teachers. Children catch and identify 'creepy crawlies' living in the pond or under logs, and education staff and volunteers help them learn about the lives of these fascinating little animals.

In short, the Trust's aim is to give children a personal experience of natural history and encourage observational skills – something they are now certainly equipped to do thanks to Garden Bird Supplies.

COMPETITION CORNER

FREE TO ENTER!

Win one of FIVE amazing Up & Under feeders worth £13.20 each!


What a great idea! This wooden feeder, complete with hanging cord, takes any of our standard Treats supported on a steel mesh underneath. Smaller, acrobatic birds have no problem feeding this way, while the bigger, greedier birds will suddenly find life a little more difficult. Delightful to watch too!



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.

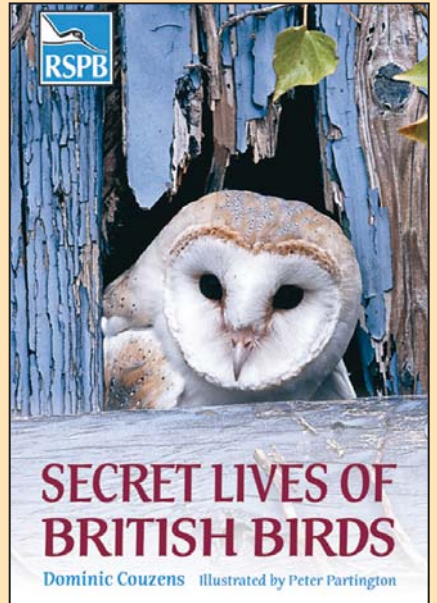
14	20	12	4	19	4	10		16	7	6	7	5
		4		4		11		4		7		16
21	7	5	1	3	11	18	7	8		3	26	20
7				4		26		1				6
9	26	22	16	8		26	13	1	8	1	10	7
		14		26		2				16		11
4	21	10	26	16	21		10	15	22	4	5	25
23		7				17		22		3		
7	13	3	26	2		26		4	19	7	6	8
16				26		8		2				20
4	8	8		11	16	1	3	1	11	1	10	7
9		26		18		4		24		11		
7	3	18	26	10		11	26	20	6	7	10	10
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
									S			
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
				H								O

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 31st May 2007. The winners will be notified by 12 June 2007. Only one entry per household. UK addresses only. The judges' decision will be final. No correspondence will be entered into.

Book Review



One of the most popular bird books in recent years was Dominic Couzens' *Secret Lives of Garden Birds*, a fascinating insight into the daily routines of all those familiar species which brighten up back gardens across the country.

Now the same author has taken the winning formula a step further and expanded the content to include other British species in this equally endearing new book. *Secret Lives of British Birds*, again illustrated with Peter Partridge's beautiful watercolours as well as many superb photos, looks at our birds in the context of their habitats, and is written in an informative but light and entertaining way.

From the coast to the hills via marshes, scrub and woodland, 12 chapters are given over to the main habitat types, with sub-sections within each to explain the different aspects of avian lifestyles. There are fascinating facts about many familiar species, and also some less well-known ones, making this 160-page book an essential companion to the earlier volume on garden birds. All in all, a great read!

Save 10% on Secret Lives
Secret Lives of British Birds is available by mail order to *Garden Bird News* readers at the special price of £13.49 (full retail price £14.99) from the Birdwatch Bookshop – call 020 8881 0550 now to order. Postage and packing are free in the UK.