



Experts predict bird free gardens this winter

Researchers coordinating the British Trust for Ornithology's Garden BirdWatch scheme are predicting a quiet winter for garden birdwatchers, as wild plants produce a bumper crop, encouraging birds to stay away from garden feeding stations.

The BTO's Garden BirdWatch team are receiving a number of calls from concerned members of the public, asking, "Where have all the garden birds gone?"

This year has seen a bumper crop of berries, fruits and seeds in our countryside. The hedgerows are ablaze with colour from the ripening hawthorn berries and the hips of dog rose. There is also a heavy blackberry crop and a huge crop of beech mast, the highest since 2002; all this means a large natural larder for garden birds.

Paul Stancliffe, of the BTO Garden BirdWatch team, said "*When natural food is available wild birds will always choose this over what we put out for them, this will explain why we are seeing very few of them in our gardens.*" He added "*As the weather gets colder and we see our first frosts, the fruits and berries will drop and become harder to find, this should result in an increase of birds coming to garden feeding stations.*"

No one is better placed to chart the fortunes of our garden birds than the BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatchers. With over 16,000 members across the UK logging the birds that visit and feed in their gardens, they will be the first to notice if numbers of birds coming to gardens does increase over the winter.

Mike Toms, Garden BirdWatch organiser, said "*It seems very likely that seed eating species, like Coal Tit, Chaffinch and Siskin will be pretty scarce in gardens this winter. The huge crop of beech mast, favoured by these species, should keep them within their favoured woodland habitats. Only if the weather turns really cold will they be forced to visit garden feeding stations.*"

So rather than worry about the lack of birds visiting your garden, give your bank balance a well earned rest and enjoy the wonderful colours of the autumn hedgerows.

To receive a free information pack about Garden BirdWatch, please send your name and address details to GBW, BTO, Room 52, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU, email gbw@bto.org or telephone 01842-750050.

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Notes for Editors

1. **The BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch** is the only nationwide survey of garden birds to run weekly throughout the year, providing important information on how birds use gardens, and how this use changes over time. Currently, some 16,500 people take part in the project. The BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch is funded by participants' contributions and supported by CJ WildBird Foods Ltd and is the largest year round survey of garden birds anywhere in the world. For more information see www.bto.org/gbw
2. **CJ WildBird Foods** is Europe's leading supplier of bird food and bird feeding products. CJ WildBird Foods has been responsible for a number of significant developments within the bird food and feeding industry, including the introduction of black sunflower seeds to the UK as a major new bird food and the development of specialist seed mixes for use in tubular feeders. The company has also been supporting research into the changing fortunes of garden bird populations, most notably through the BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch.
3. **Bird Table magazine** is published quarterly and sent free to all BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatchers. An annual subscription to the project costs just £12 and all new joiners will receive a free copy of the BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch Book (which normally retails for £9.99).
4. **Colour photographs.** Images of garden birds are freely available for use in association with this press release. Please contact images@bto.org to request an electronic version. Please quote reference 2006/10/52.
5. **Bird Information.** For lots of facts and figures about garden birds go to www.bto.org/birdfacts
6. The BTO has an ISDN line available for radio interviews.

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The BTO is the UK's leading bird research organisation. Over thirty thousand birdwatchers contribute to the BTO's surveys. They collect information that forms the basis of conservation action in the UK. The BTO maintains a staff of 80 at its offices in Norfolk and Stirling, who analyse and publicise the results of project work. The BTO's investigations are funded by government, industry and conservation organisations.

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