

Summer



Winter



Status

Green listed.
Increasing in gardens.

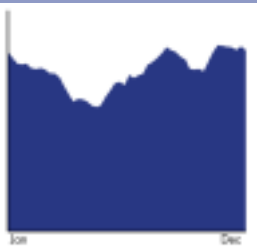
Foods

Invertebrates and seeds.

Breeding

Clutch size: 6–9
Incubates: 14–15 days
Young in nest: 23–25 days
No. broods: 1 (2)
Season: Mar–Jun

Seasonality



This is a spectacular visitor to any bird table, not least in Scotland where the species was first recorded breeding in 1989. The Nuthatch does not breed in Ireland and, given its sedentary nature, seems unlikely so to do. Nuthatches are birds of broad-leaved and mixed woodland but will use large, well-timbered, gardens, especially when situated near to blocks of suitable woodland habitat. They are surprisingly anti-social birds, with pairs vigorously defending their territories throughout the year. Even newly-fledged young can be aggressive towards each other. By holding a territory throughout the year, Nuthatches become familiar with what food is available and where it has been stored – a very useful survival strategy.

Breeding starts early, with males singing from December, and the pair quickly select and defend a nest hole in a mature tree. The size of the entrance hole is not as crucial as it is for some other species because the Nuthatch uses mud to reduce the size of the aperture to a point where the female can just squeeze through (about 3cm). Nuthatches do not take readily to nestboxes but, where they do use them, they will often either cement the roof of the box shut or cement the box to the tree, in addition to reshaping the entrance hole.

Insects and spiders are usually gleaned from the trunks of trees but in autumn and winter various tree seeds (especially beech mast, acorns and hazel nuts) are favoured. These are often wedged into cracks and crevices where they are then smashed open by the strong chisel-like bill, a behaviour that has given rise to local names like nuthacker, jobbin and nut jobber ('job' is an old English word meaning to stab with a sharp instrument). The Garden BirdWatch reporting rate for this species is influenced by the size of the beech mast crop. In years with a good crop the reporting rate tends to drop. In autumn 2002 the beech mast crop was widely in short supply and this resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of gardens in which this species was reported, as foraging adults and dispersing young roamed more widely. Nuthatches will feed on peanut feeders, often dominating them to the exclusion of most other species. Nuthatches are great hoarders of food and can sometimes be seen making repeated trips to a feeder, emptying it of its contents that are then cached locally.

Steely-blue grey above and pinky-buff below, this species has a striking black eyestripe and chisel-like bill. It can often be seen climbing down tree trunks headfirst, a behaviour not used regularly by any other British bird. Males have a stronger red-brown (virtually brick-red) colour to their flanks than females.



Nuthatch by Tommy Holden