

Window Strikes – first results



Top: Double glazed patio windows create a strong reflection and this may be one of the reasons why so many birds collide with them (Mike Toms). Middle: Garden Warbler, one of the more unusual species to be recorded (David Wragg). Bottom: The imprints that birds sometimes leave behind after colliding with a window are formed by dust from their feathers (Ken Williamson).

Judging by the number of completed forms that have been returned, together with the amount of detail they contain, it looks as if the BTO Window Strikes Survey is going to provide us with some very useful information. Although analyses of the data received are still ongoing – with a view to publishing a report later this year – we thought that Garden BirdWatch participants might like to see some of the preliminary results. These are mostly descriptive in nature but give an indication of the sorts of things we are looking at. We hope to produce a set of guidelines on how to reduce the incidence of window strikes, based on the results of this work.

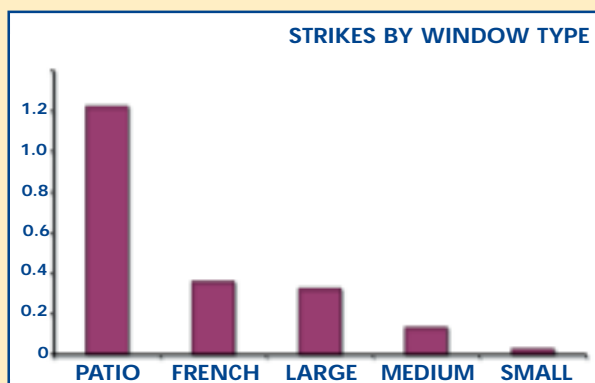
The range of information received

So far, we have received information on 12,822 individual window strikes. These come from 4,272 different gardens. Of course, not everyone looked out for strikes throughout the whole survey period. There was quite a bit of variation between gardens and it was clear that a few of you had a real problem with birds flying into windows. Some 90% of those who took part, reported that they had had at least one bird strike since they had been living at the address given and, of these people, about a third had at least three or more strikes per year. Virtually everybody reported that they fed the birds (98%) but only 6% used window feeders.

The questionnaire enabled us to look at the number of windows at each property, split by category into small, medium and large, together with sliding patio doors and french windows. We were also able to calculate the average (median) number of windows per property. The average property had two small windows, four medium windows and six large windows but no patio doors or french windows. Just 29% of observers had a conservatory. The results (see box below) suggest that patio doors have more strikes against them than other window types.

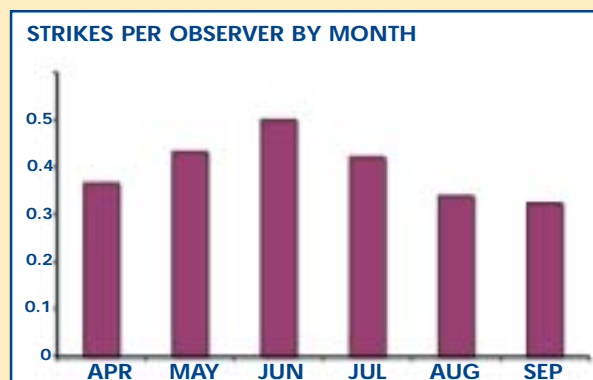
Another important piece of information was observer effort, something that will enable us to look at the pattern of window strikes across the summer months. For example, by controlling for observer effort, we can demonstrate how the average number of strikes per observer changes from spring into summer (see box). We can apply this approach to both the individual species themselves and the age/sex classes.

Some interesting results



The average number of strikes per set of patio doors (left) was more than three times greater than the figure for either French windows or other large windows and nine times greater than that for medium windows.

The number of strikes per observer shows a slight increase for the months of May to July. This is the period when many birds are breeding and there will be young and inexperienced birds present in many gardens.



The range of species encountered

Some 71 different species were reported during the course of the survey, with one or two surprises in amongst the familiar 'garden species'. The most commonly reported species was Greenfinch (see table below), closely followed by Blackbird, House Sparrow and Collared Dove. Included among the more unusual species, where just a single individual was involved, were Wryneck, Water Rail and Cuckoo.

The information supplied on finding circumstances has been used to categorise each record according to the outcome (*e.g.* whether the bird died or survived), although it is worth noting that, even if seen to fly away unaided, a bird may have sustained damage internally that would result in death soon after. We simply cannot put a figure on this component. By categorising the strikes in this manner we should be able to carry out more detailed analyses to look for differences in outcomes between species and in association with some of the other variables that you recorded (for example: Was the bird scared into the window by a predator? Did the window have a sentinel?)

What next?

The detailed analysis will take place over this summer and we hope to be able to provide more extensive information on possible 'risk factors' that may lead to window strikes and other factors that may explain differences between species in terms of the number of birds surviving the collision. We hope that, in addition to writing this study up as a scientific paper, we will also be able to produce a leaflet providing guidance on how to reduce the incidence of window strikes.

Mike Toms



Tawny Owl was one of the more unusual species to be recorded during the window strikes survey. Five individuals were noted, two found alive, two found dead and one identified by the impression left behind on the window. The Garden BirdWatch Team get occasional reports of these nocturnal predators colliding with windows and it may be that bright moonlit nights produce a clear reflection of the garden in a window. Photograph by Jill Pakenham.

Numbers of window strikes by species

Rank	Species	Strikes	Outcome (%)		
			Died	Survived	Unknown
1	Greenfinch	1,520	46	51	3
2	Blackbird	1,298	60	37	3
3	House Sparrow	1,225	81	17	2
4	Collared Dove	1,203	77	6	17
5	Woodpigeon	1,020	78	8	14
6	Starling	848	83	12	5
7	Chaffinch	837	61	37	2
8	Blue Tit	725	75	20	5
9	Great Tit	310	70	25	5
10	Song Thrush	236	42	55	3
11	Dunnock	196	45	51	4
12	Goldfinch	186	53	42	5
13	Robin	185	59	35	6
14	Sparrowhawk	163	83	9	8
15	Feral Pigeon	106	76	9	15
16	Siskin	105	49	50	1
17	Great Spotted Woodpecker	103	54	46	0
18	Bullfinch	56	48	50	2
19	Nuthatch	28	57	43	0
20	Coal Tit	25	60	40	0

In addition to the strikes shown in the above table, there were a further 291 strikes involving other species. These included: Barn Owl, Wheatear, Spotted Flycatcher, Redwing, Jay, Wren, Goldcrest, Pheasant, Swallow, Garden Warbler, Long-tailed Tit, Treecreeper, Magpie and Rook. There were an additional 2,156 records where the species involved was not known – these were typically cases where a bird was heard hitting the window or left an imprint but was not actually seen.