



Bird Watch March



Welcome to this month's Bird Watch. I'm one of two volunteer Ambassadors for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Garden BirdWatch scheme in South Wales. Each month I introduce you to a bird or other animal that you might see in your garden.

House Martin Survey

Spring is officially here, and it won't be long before House Martins are with us once again and perhaps even nesting on your home. This migratory species spends the winter in Africa and usually returns during April and May to breed. The only time that you are likely to see them on the ground is whilst they are gathering mud to build or repair their nest (most commonly constructed under the eaves of houses). The nest takes around ten days to complete and is made up of between 700 and 1,500 individual mud pellets. The first brood help to feed later chicks, gaining valuable parenting skills for their own breeding attempts the following year. Nests tend to be occupied from one year to the next, although it is unlikely to be by the same pair. Males often return to where they were born, whilst females move several kilometres away. House Martins are aerial feeders, taking aphids and other small insects so, unless they nest on your house, you are most likely to see them flying above you. Look out for a blue-black back, and a white rump and underside; the tail is short and forked, lacking the streamers of a Swallow. Their flight consists of long glides, rapid fluttering and quick changes of direction. You may also see them skimming the surface of ponds as they dip their bellies to bathe or scoop water into their bills.

House Martins feed in flight and so cannot be attracted to gardens by providing food. A muddy puddle from which they can collect nesting material may prove attractive, however, particularly during dry weather. They may also use an artificial nesting cup. BTO Garden BirdWatch data show that Wales has a higher reporting rate than other parts of the UK.

House Martins are a species in decline. Between 1966 and 2013 there was a population decline of 69% in England. Yet, whilst the southern half of Britain has seen a decline in abundance, there has been an increase in the northern half. The BTO is running the first ever national survey to examine the timing of nesting, number of nesting attempts and the behaviour of birds while they are breeding. If you are fortunate enough to have House Martins nesting on your home, or could easily and regularly view a nest elsewhere, please consider helping the BTO with this special survey.

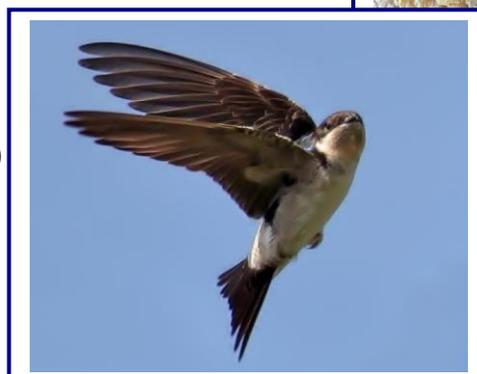
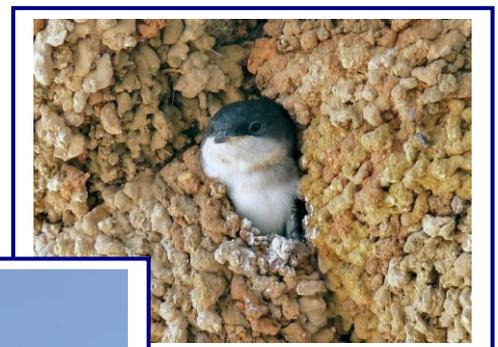
To register your interest and more information about the House Martin Survey, please visit <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/house-martin-survey>. Alternatively you can contact the BTO directly (01842 750050 or info@bto.org).

Make Your Garden Count!

If you enjoy watching birds and other creatures in your garden, and want to help track their fortunes, then I'm sure you'd enjoy BTO Garden BirdWatch. Please contact me for a free enquiry pack or to book a talk (Swansea and surrounding areas).

Happy Garden Bird Watching!

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House Martins: Mike Davies