

## A BTO Garden BirdWatch factsheet

# Woodpigeon



Weighing around 450g – the equivalent of more than 40 Blue Tits – the Woodpigeon is a bird with considerable presence. They are considerably larger than both Collared Doves and Feral Pigeons, and have a smarter all-round appearance compared with the latter. Adults sport a white neck-collar (absent in newly fledged young), above which is an attractive patch of turquoise.

## ON THE UP

**Results from the** year-round BTO Garden BirdWatch survey show that Woodpigeon numbers are booming in British and Irish gardens. Although gardens now support many more Woodpigeons than before, gardens themselves do not appear to be driving their new found success.

Numbers of this portly bird have increased across all habitats, with agricultural change (notably the increased production of oil seed rape) improving their survival prospects over winter. With numbers on farmland increasing, Woodpigeons have spilt over into gardens and have found a happy home.

## KINGS OF SUBURBIA

**BTO records show** that, when it comes to gardens, Woodpigeons prefer suburbia. Throughout the year, Woodpigeons visit a greater proportion of suburban gardens than rural ones. Woodpigeons are persecuted in rural areas as an agricultural pest, so individuals might be more likely to visit suburban gardens, where they feel less threatened. Alternatively, bird table

fare (which is more widely available in suburban areas) might be particularly attractive, drawing the birds into gardens.



## DID YOU KNOW?

**Woodpigeons feed their** young (known as squabs) on crop-milk, a substance rich in fats and not that dissimilar to mammalian milk. Special cells in the crop (a pouch situated in the throat) produce the milk and provide food for the newly-hatched young. Very few birds produce crop-milk, which makes Woodpigeons all the more amazing.

### Not always welcome



With their large appetite, Woodpigeons are not always popular garden guests. If you find that your visiting Woodpigeons hog the bird table, try some of these tips:

- Invest in a Feeder Sanctuary – this is a metal cage that can be placed over a bird table, around a hanging feeder or on the ground. It restricts access, only allowing smaller birds through to reach the food.
- Avoid feeding seed mixes with a high cereal grain content. Big-billed pigeons favour grains and larger seeds. By feeding smaller seeds, you might deter them.
- Provide food in hanging feeders with small perches that Woodpigeons struggle to use.



## NOT A WOODPIGEON

**The Stock Dove** (pictured above) is the only bird likely to be confused with a Woodpigeon. Smaller in size, the Stock Dove looks more delicate and tends to only visit rural gardens. Note the iridescent green and wine-coloured neck patch, lack of any white plumage and presence of short narrow wing bars that are black in colour.

## A FAMILIAR SONG

**The song of** the Woodpigeon ('coo-coo-coo-co-co' – which follows the rhyme 'take two cows taffy') will be familiar to most people. This prosaic ditty is heard regularly of a spring morning, delivered from a range of suitable perches, including roofs and chimney pots.

Woodpigeons have a very long breeding season. Although their main nesting period is between April and October, they have been recorded breeding in every month of the year!

## FOOD AND DRINK

**Although most often** seen feeding on the ground or from bird tables, the Woodpigeon is surprisingly agile for a big bird, able to hang upside down from a branch as it stretches to feed on berries or buds.

Watch one when it is drinking and you'll discover that a Woodpigeon can suck up water and swallow without having to tilt its head back like most other birds do.

## TAKING FLIGHT

**During spring, male** Woodpigeons perform display flights to advertise their breeding territories. Look out for individuals soaring steeply upwards, sometimes clapping their wings together once or twice in mid-air, then gliding down with their tail spread.





Population: 2.7 million pairs  
Conservation Status: Green-listed  
Diet: seeds, leaves, fruit, buds, crops.  
Longevity:  
    Typical lifespan – 3 years  
    Max recorded – 17 years, 8 months  
Breeding Ecology  
    Clutch size – 2 eggs  
    No. broods – 1–2  
    Incubation – 17 days  
    Young in nest – 33–34 days

## Make your garden count

**The BTO is the UK's leading bird research organisation.** Over 30,000 birdwatchers contribute to the BTO's surveys and collect information that forms the basis of conservation action in the UK. The BTO maintains a staff of 100 at its offices in Norfolk, Stirling and Bangor, who analyse and publicise the results of project work. The BTO's investigations are funded by government, industry, conservation organisations and its supporters. The BTO is a Registered Charity No 216652 (England & Wales), No SC039193 (Scotland) and a Company Limited by Guarantee No 357284 (England & Wales). Registered Office: The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU.

**BTO 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. The project is funded by participants' contributions and is the largest year-round survey of garden birds in the World. Participants receive the quarterly magazine *Bird Table*, have access to GBW Online and the expertise of the BTO's Garden Ecology Team. For more information, please visit [www.bto.org/gbw](http://www.bto.org/gbw)

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