



GBFS News 2010

A newsletter for participants of the BTO Garden Bird Feeding Survey

The ruby anniversary of the GBFS in 2009/10 was marked in style with the coldest winter for 30 years. This special double-length issue of GBFS News celebrates the survey's 40 year history with exciting findings past and present. The BTO extends a huge 'thank you' to all participants – the Trust retaining its status as world-leaders in the study of garden birds. We look forward to many more happy years of garden bird feeding, observing and recording in partnership with you.

Thrushes lead the rush into gardens

In many respects, the winter of 2009/10 was like any other. Blackbird, Robin and Blue Tit occupied the greatest percentage of GBFS sites, as they have every winter for the past 40 years. However, in many species substantial changes were afoot. The shroud of snow and ice that covered the ground during large parts of last winter appeared to drive ground-feeding birds into gardens in pursuit of an easy meal. Thrushes were recorded at a particularly large number of GBFS sites: Blackbirds at all sites and, when compared with the previous winter, Fieldfare was up by 19%, Redwing by 16%, Mistle Thrush by 12% and Song Thrush by 4%.

The flocking of birds into gardens was not restricted to thrushes. Compared with the previous winter, other notable increases included farmland buntings, namely Reed Bunting (up by 6%) and Yellowhammer (up by 5%). The elegant Bullfinch increased from 22% of sites occupied in 2008/09 to 32% of sites last winter, and there was a 6% increase in Blackcap – a species that has become increasingly common in gardens over the 40 years that GBFS has been running. Many garden rarities also made an appearance, with Snipe recorded in two gardens, Woodcock in one, and Little Egret – a brand new species to the GBFS – recorded in Wendover, Buckinghamshire.

For many of you, it appears that last winter was a great time to be stuck indoors, unable to move for snow and ice. Indeed, perhaps the only journey that was worth making was to go and put out some more bird food. With you and a cup of tea on one side of the window pane, and an idyllic snowy landscape and unusual birds on the other, the winter of 2009/10 was armchair birdwatching at its very best.

Goldfinch by Jill Pakenham, Fieldfare by Edmund Fellowes



GBFS: a 40 year history

The GBFS was launched in the winter of 1970/71, during fieldwork for the first Breeding Atlas. The survey was designed to keep a large work force of birdwatchers busy during the winter, to explore the increasingly popular habit of wild bird care in gardens and to provide a useful yardstick of winter bird numbers. Forty years on, the GBFS is the longest running survey of its kind in the world and has revealed many fascinating and important results.



Blue Tit by Jill Pakenham

Bird feeding: then and now

In the 1970s, the provision of food for birds in UK gardens was enjoyed widely but this activity was largely limited to simple hand-crafted softwood tables, wire mesh containers filled with peanuts, coconut shells stuffed with kidney fat or dripping and 'wild bird seeds' sold at corner shops. Such feeding was also restricted to the winter months because it was considered that birds struggled most during this harsh period. Indeed, during frosty spells listeners to BBC Radio 4 used to be prompted to provide kitchen scraps and fresh water in their gardens on a daily basis.

How things have changed! Billions of pounds are now spent on food supplements and associated hardware across the Western world each year. In the UK, this corresponds to ~£200 million with ~50-60 thousand tonnes of food provided per annum, and feeding of birds in gardens is now recommended all year round. Around 40-50% of UK households are thought to provide food for birds in gardens at some point during the year and this corresponds to

a mean feeder density of ~100 per km², or one feeder for every nine individual birds that could perch and feed on it! The global market for bird seed is now so large and expanding so fast (a recent estimate was ~4% per annum) that the United Nations has promoted speciality seed as a cash-crop in developing nations. Such commercialisation has been accompanied by a proliferation in the types of food available, with new seeds (e.g. nyger), fat based foods (e.g. fat blocks impregnated with insects) and live-foods (e.g. mealworms) to name but a few. Many of you have charted these changes over the years and it is exciting to think how bird feeding may develop next.



Wren by John Harding

Do gardens matter?

Gardens are heavily manicured and largely 'artificial' habitats – so why is the BTO interested in the birds that use them? The simple answer is that gardens are, and will become increasingly, an important habitat for birds. Rates of human population growth in the UK have risen in each of the past three decades. Changes in land-use reflect this, with the area of gardens and urbanised land increasing by 3.4% between 1998 and 2007. Indeed, gardens now encompass a land area that exceeds national and RSPB nature reserves combined.



Formal Garden by Mike Toms

Gardens hold nationally-significant populations of birds, including species of conservation concern such as House Sparrow and Starling. In addition, gardens can be very important to people. Over 50% of the world's population now live in urban areas (the figure was 30% in 1950) and there is concern that people may develop an 'extinction of experience' with nature. Seeing and feeding birds in gardens is probably the most regular interaction that most people have with wildlife. Research shows that access to a garden can reduce levels of anxiety and that interactions with nature can reduce levels of stress and attention deficit in humans.

What have your observations revealed?

There have been many exciting findings in the 40 year history of the GBFS. The diversity of birds using food and water provided in gardens has increased from an average of 17 and 21 species, in the 1970s, to an average of 23 and 25 species, in the 'noughties', in suburban and rural gardens each winter, respectively. Such changes probably reflect a diversification of food supplements over time, the sheer scale at which these supplements are now provided and birds developing new feeding behaviours.

Interestingly, not only does bird feeding increase the abundance and diversity of birds in gardens, it can also enhance the diversity of species in adjacent green spaces, such as parks. Such ripple-like effects into surrounding habitats remind us that our garden does not operate in isolation but is part of a wider living landscape.

Perhaps the most famous finding in the history of the GBFS has been spotting the decline of House Sparrows. GBFS was the first survey to highlight the collapse of House Sparrow populations in gardens, and declines in other species have also been reported (pages four and five). Conversely, other species have 'boomed' in gardens over the past 40 years and their success has been charted closely too (pages six and seven). Many of your observations have been analysed and published in peer-reviewed scientific papers (page 13) – something of which you and the BTO can be rightly proud. With 40 years of data now stored safely in the BTO bank, the value of the GBFS can only continue to grow.



House Sparrow by Rob Robinson

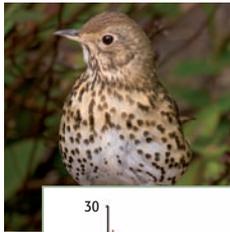
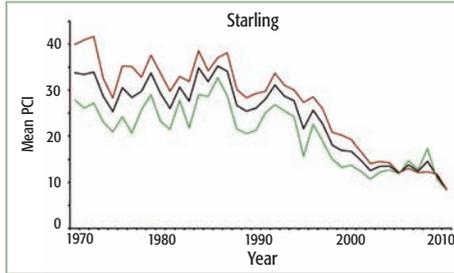
On a slippery slope

The last 40 years have not been kind to all garden birds, with some showing considerable declines. While some downturns have been brought to the public's attention, others are only just emerging.

Familiar patterns

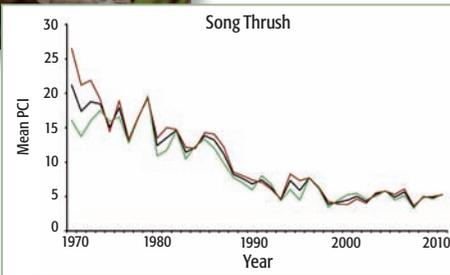
With their iridescent sheen and white snowflake dots, **Starlings** are a familiar sight in UK gardens. However, this species is in long-term decline: in the winter of 1970/71 GBFSers recorded an average peak count of 13.5 Starlings per week in their gardens but in

the winter of 2009/10 this figure plummeted to just 3.4. The BTO has been at the centre of research to identify the reasons for this downturn and has found that the survival prospects of juveniles declined during the last 40 years, perhaps driven by more intensive management of agricultural systems resulting in reduced availability of invertebrates.

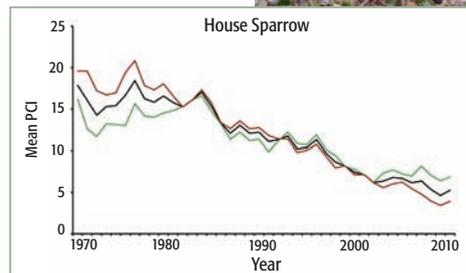


The BTO has also been involved in establishing reasons for the decline of the **Song Thrush**. GBFS data show that only a quarter of the number of Song Thrushes that were present in gardens during the winter of 1970/71 were recorded in 2009/10. Survival of fledglings

through their first year of life has emerged as an important factor in the decline. As many of you experienced last winter, different species of thrush can pour into gardens during harsh winter weather and the food that you provide could provide a lifeline for them.

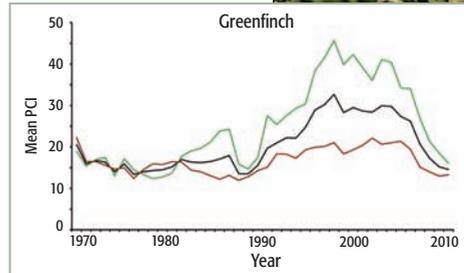


Numbers of **House Sparrows** have diminished in areas of human habitation in the UK ever since the internal combustion engine superseded the horse. However, in the 1990s this decline was dramatic and numbers in the GBFS have remained on a downward trajectory since. The BTO has researched possible reasons for their demise including a loss of nesting and foraging habitat, increased competition for food, disease and elevated rates of predation by domestic cats.



Emerging concerns

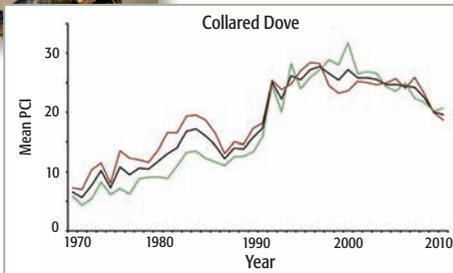
In recent years, concern has grown that a new species was flitting over, and was set to land on, the slippery slope – the **Greenfinch**. Your GBFS observations illustrate this downturn, with an average peak count of 6.0 Greenfinches per garden per week in the winter of 2003/04, down to 2.9 in 2009/10. A new study, in which the BTO has played a major part, has revealed that the disease *Trichomonosis* has driven this downward trend. This disease can be transmitted at feeding stations and bird baths, and as the garden bird feeding community moves forward the importance of good hygiene will become more prominent.



Collared Doves

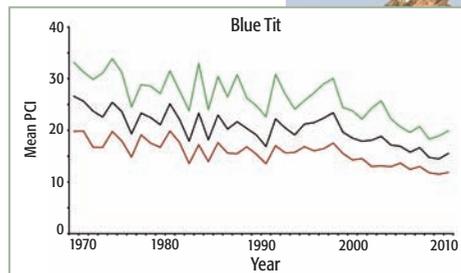
are another emerging story.

GBFS data show that their numbers increased dramatically until the millennium but declined thereafter, possibly driven by increased competition from Woodpigeons and perhaps, again, by *Trichomonosis*.



To date, the decline of House Sparrows has received unrivalled publicity – but a story of equal, if not greater, magnitude could be unfolding. If there is one species that we associate with garden feeders more than any other it is, arguably, the **Blue Tit**. Could this colourful acrobat be

somersaulting in the same direction as the House Sparrow? The GBFS, BTO Garden BirdWatch and the Breeding Bird Survey all suggest a downward spiral. It is early days, but your GBFS records might have given us an early warning that this iconic garden bird is meeting troubled times.



Understanding the graphs on pages 4–7:

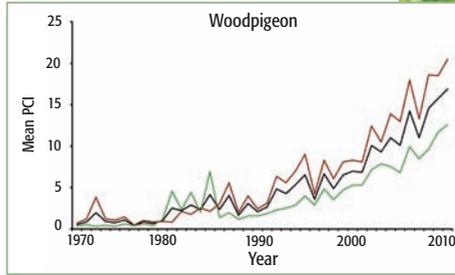
- 'Mean PCI' is the Mean Peak Count Index (*i.e.* the average weekly peak count per garden)
- The black line illustrates all sites combined
- The green line illustrates rural gardens
- The red line illustrates suburban gardens

On the up!

The previous two pages might have felt like doom and gloom but rest assured there is a wide range of species that has flourished in gardens over the last 40 winters – big, small, resident and migrant.

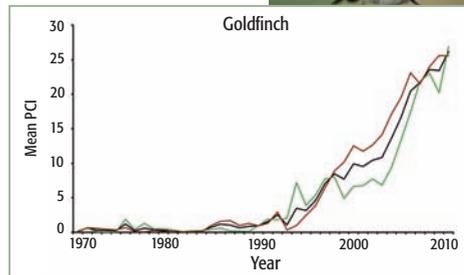
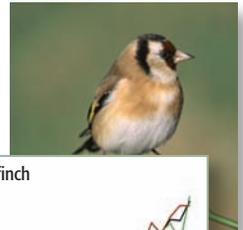
The big guys

If it were defined by sheer physical presence alone, there is only one bird that dominates the current garden bird feeding scene – the **Woodpigeon**. The air over UK gardens is now filled with the 'clap clap clap' of the wings of these portly birds as they take off from one garden to the next. This species has become infamous with householders for hoovering up huge quantities of bird food that has, in the majority of cases, been intended for other, smaller, birds. In the winter of 1990/91 this handsome but much maligned species mustered an average peak count of only 0.3 individuals each week in GBFS gardens. Last winter this figure had rocketed to 1.7 individuals. Increased production of oilseed rape has boosted the over winter survival prospects of Woodpigeons and the proliferation of bird feeding in gardens has probably also contributed to this trend.



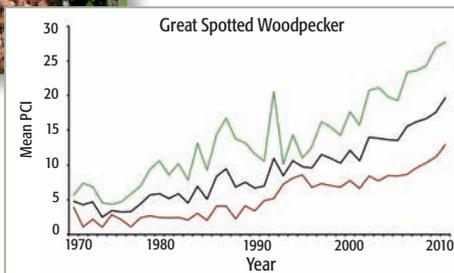
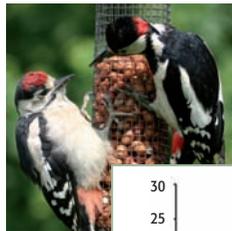
Striking gold

A number of smaller species have also found rich pickings in gardens during recent winters, with the



winters, with the

most striking increase seen in **Goldfinches**. In the winter of 1990/91 an average peak count of only 0.2 individuals of this colourful finch was reported each week in GBFS gardens, but in 2009/10 this number had soared to 2.6 individuals. Agricultural intensification has reduced

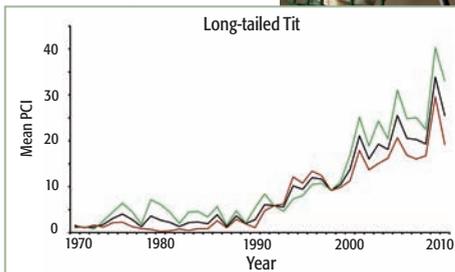


the availability of the preferred natural foods of Goldfinches (e.g. weed seeds) and, during the course of the GBFS, it appears that food supplements in gardens have become increasingly important. In particular, greater availability of speciality seeds such as nyger and sunflower hearts seems to have been key.

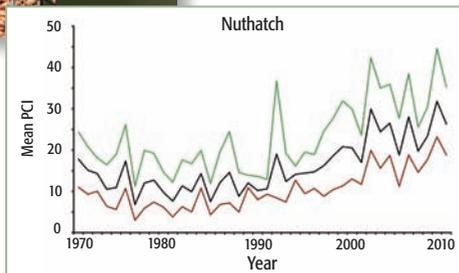
The GBFS has also revealed big increases in other garden favourites. **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** have been seen darting into gardens more and more, bashing their beaks on peanuts in the early years of the survey and now probing into a wide range of foods, particularly fat-based products. **Long-tailed Tits** have also swept into gardens, swarming through bushes and over fatty foods in their ineffably wonderful way.



The rufous hue of the **Nuthatch** has been spotted in increasing abundance, as have the more familiar shades of the **Chaffinch**.



There are also early signs that **Lesser Redpoll** are on the march into gardens, so let us know if you see any this winter through the GBFS!

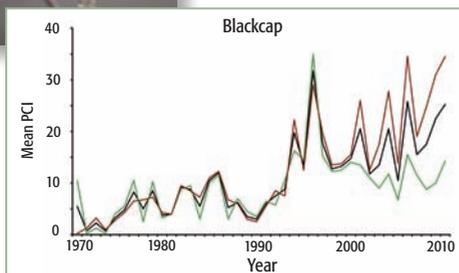


Winter traveller

Perhaps the most exciting story is that of the **Blackcap**. Individuals of this species that winter in the UK are not, as one might assume, those that bred here and have 'decided' not to migrate in the autumn. Indeed, ringing data have shown that UK-breeding Blackcaps up sticks for warmer southerly climes at this time of year, only to be replaced by compatriots that breed

in central Europe. Blackcaps have wintered sporadically in the UK for over a century but, in the past, it is considered that these birds were relatively unsuccessful and often succumbed to the cold UK

winter. However, now a warming climate and the vast provision of food supplements in gardens appear to have helped them to survive. Tellingly, these birds also gained an advantage over Blackcaps that travelled to normal wintering grounds around the Mediterranean – their journey back to their breeding grounds in central Europe was shorter, enabling them to return first and to secure the best breeding territories. Because these birds were successful they were able to breed and to pass on their genes, giving rise to more and more Blackcaps 'programmed' to fly northwest to the UK in the autumn. GBFS participants have provided a unique insight into the increase of this species in UK gardens over the past 40 years.



Images on pages 4-7 supplied by Brian Todd; Jill Pakenham; John Harding and Mark R Taylor

Garden Bird Feeding Survey Results

Winter 2009/2010

TOP TWELVE SPECIES

Species	Plots Feeding	%	Species	Plots Feeding	%	Species	Plots Feeding	%
Blackbird	233	100	Dunnock	226	97	Coal Tit	205	88
Robin	232	99	Chaffinch	225	97	Goldfinch	203	87
Blue Tit	231	99	Greenfinch	211	91	Woodpigeon	201	86
Great Tit	228	98	Collared Dove	209	90	House Sparrow	192	82

ADDITIONAL SPECIES

Species	Plots	%	Species	Plots	%
Starling	189	81	Herring Gull	28	12
Long-tailed Tit	181	78	Lesser Redpoll	26	11
Magpie	180	77	Yellowhammer	24	10
Song Thrush	153	66	Marsh/Willow Tit	22	9
Great Spotted Woodpecker	135	58	Grey Wagtail	21	9
Sparrowhawk	123	53	Stock Dove	20	9
Jackdaw	120	52	Goldcrest	16	7
Wren	117	50	Mallard	14	6
Carrion Crow	94	40	Moorhen	13	6
Pheasant	92	39	Marsh Tit	11	5
Fieldfare	83	36	Grey Heron	10	4
Pied Wagtail	81	35	Buzzard	9	4
Siskin	79	34	Common Gull	8	3
Bullfinch	74	32	Tawny Owl	7	3
Blackcap	72	31	Treecreeper	7	3
Nuthatch	69	30	Red-legged Partridge	6	3
Redwing	68	29	Green Woodpecker	5	2
Mistle Thrush	60	26	Kestrel	4	2
Rook	58	25	Lesser Black-backed Gull	4	2
Brambling	54	23	Raven	4	2
Jay	49	21	Chiffchaff	4	2
Black-headed Gull	49	21	Red Kite	3	1
Reed Bunting	43	18	Merlin	3	1
Feral Pigeon	33	14	Hooded Crow	3	1
Tree Sparrow	29	12	Hen Harrier	2	<1

Species	Plots	%	Species	Plots	%
Snipe	2	<1	Goshawk	1	<1
Grey Partridge	2	<1	Great Black-backed Gull	1	<1
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	2	<1	Rock Dove	1	<1
Skylark	2	<1	Barn Owl	1	<1
Willow Tit	2	<1	Little Owl	1	<1
Canada Goose	1	<1	Ring-necked Parakeet	1	<1
Goosander	1	<1	Black Redstart	1	<1
Teal	1	<1	Crested Tit	1	<1
Water Rail	1	<1	Crossbill	1	<1
Green Sandpiper	1	<1	Little Egret	1	<1
Woodcock	1	<1			

Number of garden feeding stations: 233
Number of species taking food/water: 82
Species in **bold** are new to GBFS

Are garden birds facing cat-astrophe?

For a garden bird, there are two main predatory foes – the Sparrowhawk and the domestic cat. The former were uncommon at the start of the GBFS but now over half of participants' gardens are frequented by this impressive hawk (see more on page 13). In addition, the UK cat population has grown from ~6 million in 1981 to ~9 million in 2003. Could cats be taking an unsustainable harvest of birds? A recent study suggests that rates of cat predation in urban areas can be so high that urban bird populations would collapse were it not for immigration from non-urban areas. As the human and, doubtless, the domestic cat population continues to expand, the impact of our feline companions on garden birds will need to be monitored closely.



Cat in bird table by Unity Norwak

Garden spotlight north - John Wilson

John Wilson is the Garden BirdWatch Ambassador in Lothian. Last winter was his first with the GBFS survey and his garden housed many species during the harsh Scottish winter.

"My back garden, measuring about 20 x 30 m², has been the source of data for Garden BirdWatch since 1995. It is reasonably mature and sheltered, containing a high evergreen hedge and several deciduous trees as well as shrubs and fruit bushes. We are fortunate to be at the edge of the city of Edinburgh with neighbouring farmland, hedges and woodland, thus we expect to see around a dozen species per week on average and have seen almost 40 in total over this period.

Perhaps the commonest birds are Chaffinches, although like many other Garden BirdWatchers, in the past we saw many Greenfinches as well. This past winter our garden was shrouded in a layer of snow for several weeks and we fed 22 species, with good numbers of both Tree and House Sparrow. The latter have once again taken to roosting in thick clematis on the house with consequent noisy comings and goings throughout the day. We do not have any very unusual visitors: occasional Brambling, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, Long-tailed Tits and Goldcrest are amongst the more colourful.

We are also privileged to see our local Sparrowhawk fly through and silence any bird activity for a short period. Great Spotted Woodpecker parents regularly bring their offspring to feed on seeds or peanuts and Starlings bring their fledglings each spring to feed on fats and clear the lawn of leatherjackets.



Chaffinch by Jill Pakenham

Over the past year I have been pleased to become involved for the first time in the GBFS. At the same time I am now Ambassador for Garden BirdWatch in Lothian region, to promote wider participation in this straightforward survey. Both activities have encouraged even closer family interest in our garden bird population and we can now see longer term changes in visiting species as well as the fairly repeatable seasonal variations.

Like most people we see birds making less use of peanuts as a preferred food (although still enjoyed by the odd Grey Squirrel) and the clear popularity of sunflower seed in all forms. Although Goldfinches do feed on the 'no mess' sunflower seed I intend to see if we can attract more of these next winter with nyger seed. We will also try to provide fat-cake in a form that does not just attract Jackdaws, Rooks and Crows, and will continue providing apples from our winter store of Bramleys to bring in visiting Redwing, who have appeared each December to strip berries from nearby shrubs and trees."

Garden spotlight south - Anne Mansell

Anne Mansell is one of our longest serving GBFSers, having recorded birds in her Surrey garden for 35 years. Anne describes exciting comings and goings during that period.

"I joined the BTO shortly after we moved here in 1975 and applied to do a Common Birds Census in the area, the GBFS and the Nest Record Scheme because I found that being a member of the RSPB was unexciting. The garden, formal and wild, extends over four acres but the GBFS is focused on the area outside the kitchen window. I live on the very edge of Farnham so garden and woodland birds abound. I have seen over 90 species in or over the garden since moving here.



At the beginning there were House Sparrows and Starlings coming to the feeders and Spotted Flycatcher and Willow Warbler nesting in the garden. The House Sparrows and Spotted Flycatcher have disappeared while the Willow Warbler just passes through and occasionally a Starling turns up. I average roughly 20 species per week, mainly tits, finches, songbirds and larger birds too.

Jackdaws nested in an old Elm tree and moved into the chimneys as the tree crumbled. They are very noisy and quick to exploit the feeders, teaching the Magpies similar tricks. When the young have fledged it is rather like a scene from Hitchcock's 'The Birds' outside the window!

Each year brings its surprises. One morning a pair of Mandarin ducks was discovered on the bird table and a cock Pheasant has turned up too. One cold winter I counted 13 Robins and once had 57 Siskins. Very occasionally there has been an overwintering Blackcap or a Pied Wagtail. Stock Doves have joined the Woodpigeons and Collared Doves in recent years. They stand no nonsense from the Woodpigeons, often seeing them off the bird table. The numbers of birds, such as Chaffinch and Robin, clinging to feeders has increased and this year a juvenile Robin has worked out how to get on to the fat balls.



Mandarin by Jill Pakenham

Black sunflower seeds and fat are the most popular foods. I gave up feeding peanuts a few years ago as the tits and finches seemed to prefer the sunflower seed. I also started feeding live mealworms a few years ago which often has birds queuing up when I bring them out, particularly in the breeding season. I have even been chased up the drive by a desperate Robin.

This winter I am aiming to buy a fat ball feeder which will only let the small birds in. Jackdaws and Magpies can account for eight small fat balls every day."

David Glue's trusty old bird table

David Glue is the longest serving member of BTO staff, having joined the Trust's research team in 1968. David was confined to a wheelchair in 1971 following a nasty car crash that resulted in tetraplegia, and since then he has championed the enjoyment and rewards of studying garden birds.



"Boosted by an 'O' level pass in woodwork, one of my early tasks was to make a bird table. It was crafted from three sections: softwood timber struts and larch feather-boarding roof purchased from local Forestry Commission sawmills (£8); a base scrounged from my Grandmother's redundant mahogany Victorian kitchen draining board (free); and a split two metre high fence post ('seconds' at £5). My bird table has travelled from origins at Dibden Purlieu (New Forest) to Tring in the Chiltern Hills. Each spring it has been religiously

coated with black wood stain, defying the elements from torrid summer heat (e.g. 36°C in 2003), hurricane force winds in autumn 1987 and being clothed by snow in most winters.

In Tring, my bird table has been strategically positioned at the lawn edge, easily viewed from both kitchen and bedroom windows. Proprietary seed mixes, peanuts and kitchen scraps (chiefly bread and cheese crumbs, dried fruit and meat strips) are provided daily; feeding is maintained at a low-level in summer (mainly sunflower hearts, raisins and salt-free lard in tubs). My trusty old bird table has taken on the mantle of an old friend and is simply the best – although you may beg to differ..?

Over forty years there have been many exciting visitors which have brought with them incalculable therapeutic rewards. In total, 56 species have been attracted to supplementary food and water provided. Six species are regulars: Robin, Blue Tit, Blackbird, Dunnock, Collared Dove and Chaffinch. On the 'credit' side, Blackcap, Brambling and Siskin have become winter regulars since the 1980s, while Goldfinch, Long-tailed Tit and Woodpigeon now come to food year-round. Red Kites are occasional visitors following their reintroduction to the Chiltern Hills in 1989. 'Scarce' and 'one-off' visitors, observed drinking at my bird baths, include Chiffchaff, Crossbill and Nightingale which have added extra spice. On the 'debit' side, Bullfinch, Marsh Tit, Willow Tit, Meadow Pipit and Tree Sparrow have been lost as feeding birds in winter. Moreover, House Sparrow, Starling and Greenfinch flock-sizes have reduced in size by 85%, 70%, and 65%, respectively since the 1980s, reflecting concerns countrywide.

Our memory tends to fade fast and can play tricks as the years tick by. Best then to enjoy taking part in GBFS, encourage all fellow birders to join Garden BirdWatch, and make sure that our hard won records are housed safely for good use with the BTO. My role, along with the countrywide 'family' of BTO garden bird counters, has been to enjoy observing, to interpret, swap notes, relay counts and benefit from the rich visual and health rewards of the absorbing hobby that we share."

Feeding the scientific community

Your participation in the GBFS has not only nourished the birds in your garden – it has provided a unique snapshot of this habitat over 40 years increasing our understanding of garden ecology.

Boom and bust

There are some species that we think of as regular visitors to our bird tables when, in reality, their occurrence varies considerably between years depending on the availability of natural foods in the wider countryside. A particularly important natural food during winter is the seed of Beech trees, known as 'beechmast'. In some years, so called 'mast years', there is a preponderance of beechmast in the wider countryside, whereas in other years it is relatively scarce. When the latter occurs, GBFS data show that several species that we think of as predominantly 'woodland birds' use food supplements in gardens in greater numbers. These include Great Spotted Woodpecker, Woodpigeon, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Jay and Chaffinch . These findings suggest that the food we provide in gardens has a substantial influence within the wider landscape. *Bird Study (2007) 54, 120–126*

Charting populations

There is a consistent problem when it comes to interpreting the findings of garden-based surveys such as the GBFS and Garden BirdWatch; are the results only true of gardens or do they tell us something about wider populations? Your GBFS

observations have helped us to answer this fundamental question. In several species GBFS counts correlate strongly with relative population size during the previous breeding season. These species include Sparrowhawk, corvids (the crow family), Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Chaffinch, Starling, House Sparrow and Song Thrush . Not all species show such strong correlations but these findings demonstrate that the GBFS can provide an indication of changes in bird populations at large. *Ibis (2005) 147, 563–575*

Sparrowhawks make a comeback

In the 1960s, use of organochlorine pesticides decimated the UK Sparrowhawk population meaning that at the start of the GBFS this species was a rare sight in gardens. Changes in farming practices enabled Sparrowhawks to recover and their increase coincided closely with the 40 years of the GBFS. Indeed, most GBFSers (53%) now see at least one Sparrowhawk in their garden during winter and, while this is great news for Sparrowhawks and perhaps for your viewing 'pleasure', an army of small birds is far from enamoured. So what effect has this increase had? Could

it have driven the decline of some garden birds? Research conducted using your GBFS observations indicate that, in most species, there is little evidence that the re-colonisation of this agile predator has driven long-term population declines. It seems that a healthy number of Sparrowhawks could represent a healthy number of smaller birds too. *Journal of Ornithology (2009) 150, 247–254*



Jay by Christine M Matthews



Sparrowhawk by Jill Pakenham

Extracts: Winter 09/10

Runcton, Chichester, Sussex



Beautiful Indian summer week with plenty of berries in garden but eight Long-tailed Tits paused at fat feeder – early herald of autumn proper.

Andreas, Isle of Man



First ever sighting of Lesser Redpoll (four birds) feeding on nyjer seed in 50 years of observing, which Goldfinch (max 40) have now abandoned in favour of sunflower seeds - wonderful view.

Boat of Garten, Inverness

Crested Tits grace the feeders – flagship bird.

Tring, Herts

Single Reed Bunting and 'first-ever' Yellowhammer (two) feeding on seed mix were highlight of Christmas Day: bossy Woodpigeon (21) a less welcome record.

Theale, Wedmore, Somerset

Woke up at first light to find record 'high' count of 36 Blackbirds feeding in snow, taking apples and sunflower chips. Reed Bunting regular at feeders, peaking at 10 birds in February.

Deeping St. Nicholas, Spalding, Lincs

House Sparrow flock size increased in autumn (max 50) by feeding mealworms throughout the summer.

Lyndhurst, Hants



New Year brought Little Egret and Bullfinch into garden for first time, but not to feed, though Lesser Spotted Woodpecker at peanuts.

Stapleford, Cambridge

House Sparrow decline continues, highest count just four birds, absent mid-February for first time since inception of GBFS.

Dunsford, Exeter, Devon

Black Redstarts paused briefly in late November taking fine seeds, later for windfall apples provided, alongside Fieldfares.

Benenden, Kent

Male Great Spotted Woodpecker captured by hunting female Sparrowhawk and devoured on lawn.

St. Margaret's Hope, Orkney

Female Sparrowhawk sat on lawn and shredded a House Sparrow – feathers everywhere. Juvenile Hen Harrier hunting across garden landed for a short while – awesome sight.

Weston, Beccles, Suffolk



Two Snipe resorting to apple peel and cores, left-overs from crumble making, presented in a patch scraped from snow.

Disley, Stockport, Lancs



Tawny Owl perches on a feeder at first light and eyes up potential prey.

Dunstable, Beds

Robin trying to get to grips with seed dispenser – looking like a hummingbird.

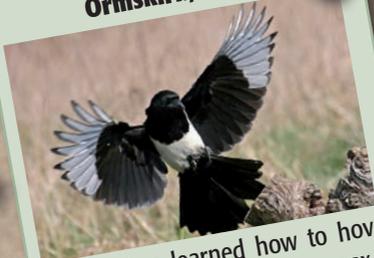
Kirkbride, Wigton, Cumbria

Seed-eaters dominating in New Year: peak counts Chaffinch (90), Tree Sparrow (83), Yellowhammer (18), Lesser Redpoll (seven) and Goldfinch (five) – quite a sight.

Belfast, Co. Antrim

Our first ever Fieldfare in the garden, feasting on waste apples and pears, collected up and provided in frosty weather.

Ormskirk, Lancs



Magpie has learned how to hover and take suspended fat snax – ungainly but successful.

Llwyngroes, Tregaron, Dyfed



Garden given over as mini wildlife reserve, small ponds with ground feeders holding corn attracting Canada Goose, Mallard, Moorhen and Water Rail; likewise Buzzard, Goshawk, Merlin and Red Kite.

Photographs supplied by Edmund Fellowes; Jill Pakenham; John Harding; Nigel Clark; Tommy Holden & www.grayimages.co.uk

WINTER 2010/11: COULD IT HAPPEN AGAIN?

Like the snow that comes with them, cold winters can often occur in flurries. The winter of 2008/09 was, at the time, the coldest in the UK for 12 years; but last year was coldest for 30 years. How will our birds, such as the diminutive Goldcrest, cope if the freezing weather sets in again? Your participation in the GBFS, along with a few new recruits who will join us, will help us to chart their progress as the winter of 2010/11 unfolds.



Coverage of GBFS sites winter 09/10



The GBFS Team:

Tim Harrison: Garden BirdWatch Development Officer

David Glue: BTO Research Ecologist

Fran Bowman: Data Assistant

Mike Toms: Head of Garden Ecology

Jacky Prior, Heather Pymar and Donna Hobbs:

Garden BirdWatch Team

**A special thank you to
Alic Prior and Fran
Bowman for
their help with
data entry.**



Robin and Goldcrest by John Harding

BTO Garden Bird Feeding Survey:

GBFS has been monitoring the numbers and variety of garden birds coming to supplementary foods in winter since 1970. It is the longest running annual survey of its kind in the world and allows direct comparison of garden types and locations over time.

Contact us:

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