



Bird Watch January



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.

Bird of the Month: Great Tit

The Great Tit, as perhaps the name suggests, is the largest of our tits. The species is easy to identify with its black head and chin, white cheeks, yellow breast and a black stripe running down the front. In the female this stripe ends about half way down the belly whilst the male's extends between the legs and is bolder and wider than that of the female. A bird in an upright posture (generally male) will be showing off its stripe. A broad stripe is a sign of dominance and earns the bird the right to feed on feeders closest to cover, thus reducing the risk of a predator attack. The most easily recognisable Great Tit call is that of 'teacher teacher', but this is just one of many. It is often said that if you do not recognise a bird call it will be a Great Tit (many a birdwatcher has been caught out waiting for an unknown species to appear from a bush, only to find that is, after all, a Great Tit!). Amazingly, the shape and size of a Great Tit's bill changes during the course of the year. In the spring and summer it is slender to suit its diet of insects but in the winter it becomes shorter and deeper to better cope with a diet of seeds.

Did you know?

- Of all the tits, the Great Tit has the widest distribution in the world.
- Great Tits have been studied intensively in Wytham Woods, Oxfordshire, since 1947.
- There has been a steady increase in their abundance since the 1960s which may be linked to an increase in the feeding of birds in gardens.
- The Welsh name is *Titw Mawr*.

How to attract them to your garden: Great Tits enjoy sunflower hearts and peanuts (the latter provided in a metal mesh feeder so that only small bits of peanut are taken) as well as fat blocks. In the spring and summer they'll be on the hunt for invertebrates such as beetles and caterpillars.

Conservation status: **Green** (no cause for concern).

BTO Garden BirdWatch data show that tit species use gardens more in winter when food in the wider countryside is depleted. During the winter we see up to five Great Tits in our garden at any one time.

Make Your Garden Count!

If you enjoy watching birds and other creatures in your garden, and want to help track their fortunes, then BTO Garden BirdWatch could be perfect for you. 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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Great Tit: Mike Davies



Great Tit: Russ Myners