



Bird Watch May



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: Chaffinch

The breeding season is now in full swing and the familiar song of the Chaffinch can be heard in gardens, farmland, woodland and other habitats. The song is delivered by the male seeking to define its breeding territory and defend its main food source of invertebrates (in the winter the Chaffinch mainly eat seeds and other plant material). A recently fledged bird will peck at anything which contrasts with the ground, gradually learning what is edible and developing a preference for the largest seeds that can comfortably be handled.

The male's plumage is colourful – it has a chestnut back and pinkish-orange underside, a blue crown and nape, and distinctive double white bars on the wings. The buff-brown female is darker above than below and has pale wing bars. The white outer tail feathers and wing bars are particularly obvious in flight.

You may see a Chaffinch giving a 'forward threat' display to other birds in your garden, whereby it crouches and flutters its wing with the neck extended and an open beak, visually stating "I'm strong, keep away!"

The Chaffinch is susceptible to the *Fringilla papillomavirus* disease which produces growths on the foot or bare part of the leg. These can vary in size from a small nodule to something that covers the whole leg and they may last several months. Instances of disease can be reported to Garden Wildlife Health (www.gardenwildlifehealth.org).

Did you know?

- In the same way that we have different dialects, so does the Chaffinch!
- After the Wren, the Chaffinch is the 2nd most numerous species of bird in Britain, with an estimated 5.8 million pairs.
- The Welsh name is *Ji-binc*.



Female Chaffinch: Russ Myers



Male Chaffinch: Mike Davies

How to attract them to your garden: although largely insectivorous at this time of year, Chaffinches will eat seeds, such as sunflower hearts, but are more likely to eat from the ground than from a feeder.

Conservation status: Green (no cause for concern).

Garden BirdWatch data show that Chaffinches were seen in low numbers during 2015, suggesting an ongoing decline. This is perhaps a legacy of disease outbreaks seen over recent years.

Make Your Garden Count!

If you enjoy watching the birds and wildlife in your garden why not take part in BTO Garden BirdWatch – the largest year-round survey of garden birds in the world? Please contact me for a free enquiry pack or to book a talk (Swansea and surrounding areas).

Happy Garden Bird Watching! Amanda Skull, Garden BirdWatch Ambassador
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