



Early birds

How early do birds start coming to your garden?



The early bird catches the worm

This is a great experiment for those who wake up early. During cold weather birds need extra energy to keep warm. They also need to lay down fat reserves to help them through the night. Small birds, like Blue Tits, do not lay down a lot of fat – perhaps only enough to get them through a single night – and this means that they might be under pressure to find food as soon as day breaks. Is there a pattern to the time at which different bird species arrived at garden feeders?

What you'll need

- Pen and paper
- Bird feeders
- Bird guide
- Binoculars (optional)
- Camera trap (if you don't want to get up early!)



Set-up

1. Fill the feeders before you go to bed or just before light in the morning.
2. Find out the time of dawn. First light is before this time, so aim to be watching your garden about half an hour before, so you are awake when your feeding station first becomes visible to the birds.
3. Note down at what time you see the first of each species coming into the garden.

If you want to take it further

You can continue doing this experiment to see if you consistently get the same results. You can also do the same thing in the evening; which birds are last ones feeding in your garden, in low light? Do you have a lot of artificial light locally? If so, how do you think this could influence your findings? Do you live in a rural location or in a town or city, and do you think that this might affect the result? Remember that the food you provide will influence the species that you see. If you currently only put one type of food out, why not try varying this and see if you record different birds. For advice about the best foods to provide visit www.bto.org/gbw.

What does BTO do?

Garden BirdWatch records garden birds year-round on a weekly basis, and you can get involved. Each week over 11,000 participants across the UK let us know which species they are seeing in their garden and the maximum numbers they see at any one time. The survey allows us find out more about the ways birds are using gardens and how that changes over time. Find out more about the survey and join at www.bto.org/gbw.

