

Goldfinch Feeding Survey

Initial results



Goldfinch, by Edmund Fellowes

An amazing 5,183 households took part in our Goldfinch Feeding Survey over the winter, which was run to determine what exactly it is about our gardens that Goldfinches find attractive. While the analysis of the results is ongoing, **Kate Plummer** and **Clare Simm** reveal the initial findings.



Goldfinch, by Paul Newton

▲ Sunflower hearts proved to be the most popular food-type for Goldfinches in the Goldfinch Feeding Survey.

It seemed like fate that we ran the Goldfinch Feeding Survey during winter 2015/16. 57.3% of Garden BirdWatchers reported seeing Goldfinches in their gardens over the period of the survey, one of the highest reporting rates for the winter. With participants from across the country taking part, there was plenty of opportunity for observing which foods Goldfinches seemed to prefer, and we received 12,535 records so thank you to everyone who took part.

WHAT YOUR RESULTS REVEALED

An average of 8.2 individual Goldfinches were seen per household during the survey, and they seemed to prefer visiting earlier in the day – 1 in 5 people saw their Goldfinches between 9 and 10 in the morning. This could suggest that birds were visiting gardens to replenish their energy after trying to stay warm through the cold winter nights. Of those households that took part, 99% provided supplementary food, and a third said that natural foods (such as thistle or teasel) were available.

The survey results revealed that Goldfinches much prefer feeding on the food that we provide, rather than the natural food found in the garden. 93.5% of participants recorded Goldfinches feeding on supplementary food, compared to only 7.4% records showing that they went for natural foods. Of the food provided, sunflower hearts were overwhelmingly the favourite, with 91.1% of records, and the runner-up was nyger seed with 76.6% of the records. Only 36% involved natural foods.

Further analyses will be undertaken by Kate Plummer as part of her BTO Fellowship, but it appears that while Goldfinches may still visit gardens to make the most of the food that we provide, their tastes have changed over

time. Anecdotally, many participants said that whereas Goldfinches used to dominate nyger feeders, they have since switched to sunflower hearts. Interestingly, as well, it seems that it is very much an either/or situation with Goldfinches preferring to only use one or the other in gardens. As the numbers of Goldfinches visiting gardens continues to grow, we want to investigate whether their increased use of bird foods is driving the upward trajectory of the national population size. The new information gathered by the Goldfinch Feeding Survey will be extremely important in helping us discover the answer.

Distribution of the households that took part in the survey summarised by 10km squares.

