



The Chaffinch

The Chaffinch, as the name suggests, is a member of the finch family and is one of our commonest breeding birds. It is known as the 'bachelor' bird because during the winter months, the males are often found in large flocks. The name Chaffinch refers to its habit of flocking in fields of stubble to obtain the chaff left over from harvesting. British Chaffinches are mainly sedentary birds and during their life will stay within 5km of where they originated. In winter, they are joined by many migrants from Scandinavia.

The species is found all year round over most of the UK in woodlands, hedgerows, fields, parks and gardens. One of its favourite places I notice, are car parks, especially those in rural areas. There always seems to be a Chaffinch hopping around the parked cars looking for a tasty morsel. The male of the species during breeding time is particularly attractive and is easily recognised by its pink breast and cheeks and slate-blue crown and nape. It has a chestnut coloured back, a green rump and white wing bars which easily show up when it is in flight. The female is duller and has an olive-brown back and buff-white underparts. She also has a green rump and white wing bars. You are more likely to see this bird hopping about on the ground, especially underneath feeders. Although I have seen Chaffinches at my hanging feeders, they do seem to have difficulty settling on them.

It is very likely that you have heard this bird singing its pleasant song which ends with a flourish. Amazingly, the song of the Chaffinch can vary from region to region. Its call is a repetitive 'pink pink' and it also has a monotonous one-note call 'huit' which can continue for quite a long time.



John Harding / BTO

Unfortunately, the Chaffinch is susceptible to *Fringilla papillomavirus* which causes warty growths on its feet and legs. Although not necessarily life threatening, it can cause the bird to become lame and it may lose the affected digits. In most cases, affected birds tend to look quite healthy. The species may also be prone to the more serious Trichomonosis which is spread by having unclean tables, feeders and bird baths, so good levels of hygiene at feeding stations may reduce the impact of disease. The latter disease can be fatal for birds but neither can be transmitted to humans.

Jean Parrott

Jean is a voluntary Ambassador for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Garden BirdWatch scheme in Nottinghamshire. If you are interested in the birds and other wildlife which visit your garden, then BTO Garden BirdWatch may be perfect for you. Please contact Jean for a free information pack about the scheme on jpbirds@talktalk.net