

A BTO Garden BirdWatch factsheet

Goldfinch



An adult Goldfinch should be unmistakable, with its red, white and black head, gold wing-bars and black and white wings. Although males and females look similar, the red mask of the male extends back behind the eye, whereas that of the female doesn't. Recently fledged birds do not acquire the red face until late in the summer or during early autumn.

ON THE UP

Results from the year-round BTO Garden BirdWatch survey show that Goldfinch numbers are booming in gardens. Garden bird foods and feeders have diversified markedly over recent decades, enabling Goldfinches to find a happy niche. In particular, small, oil-rich seeds, such as nyjer and sunflower hearts, are favoured.

With agricultural intensification resulting in reduced availability of weed seeds, garden feeding stations have become increasingly important for birds like the Goldfinch.

BRINGING UP BABY

A GOLDFINCH NEST is a neat and compact structure, with a deep cup. The egg-laying period extends from late April through into August, with some young still in the nest into September.

The nestlings are fed a mixture of regurgitated seeds and insects, with those of early broods receiving a greater proportion of insects (presumably because there are more available). Late fledging young can be spotted in autumn gardens, their plain heads (pictured) being characteristic.



DID YOU KNOW?

The collective noun for a group of Goldfinches is a 'charm'. This rather suits these delightful little birds.

Attracting Goldfinches into your garden



In addition to bird feeding, other forms of wildlife gardening can give Goldfinches a boost. Here are some ideas:

- Like other common finches, Goldfinches seem to favour gardens that have large trees nearby. Planting a Silver Birch or Rowan can provide some much needed height and will help to attract birds.
- Plant Teasels for their seeds, which are much favoured by Goldfinches. If you are worried about the invasive habits of this plant then why not grow them in a pot.
- Goldfinches often nest quite high in the fork of a tree, but they may use a suitable shrub or fruit tree.



A sociable bird, often arriving at garden feeders in flocks, Goldfinches produce a melodic bubbling chatter. Once you are familiar with the calls, you'll soon be picking out groups of Goldfinches as they pass overhead.

ON THE MOVE

Goldfinches are very mobile birds, a habit that enables them to exploit favoured foods as the seasons turn. Goldfinches are partial migrants, meaning that a proportion of the UK breeding population migrates each autumn to more favourable wintering grounds, typically in France or Spain.

These travellers do not appear to have set wintering grounds, their opportunistic feeding behaviour promoting a more nomadic lifestyle.

There is some evidence that female Goldfinches are more likely to depart for warmer, southerly wintering grounds than are males. Although this means a tougher winter for the males, they are closer to their breeding grounds when spring arrives, which could help them to claim a good territory.



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The attractive plumage and voice of the Goldfinch meant that it was very popular as a caged bird during the 19th Century, a fashion that put great strain on their numbers. Live-trapping of Goldfinches is now banned in Britain & Ireland. In some parts of Europe Goldfinches are still caught in automatic traps known as Chardonnerets, 'Chardonneret' also being the French word for Goldfinch.

The Anglo Saxon name for the Goldfinch was 'thistle-tweaker', underlining the preference of feeding Goldfinches for the seeds of Teasel and thistle. The Goldfinch is the only one of our birds to be able to extract teasel seeds from their narrow seed heads; mind you, even female Goldfinches find this difficult because their bills, while narrow, are not quite long enough to do the job without a struggle.

Population: 300 thousand pairs
Conservation Status: Green-listed
Diet: small seeds (esp. daisies) often half-ripe, some invertebrates.

Longevity:

Typical lifespan – 1 year
Max recorded – 8 years, 8 months

Breeding Ecology

Clutch size – 5 eggs
No. broods – 2 (3)
Incubation – 13–15 days
Young in nest – 14–17 days



Make your garden count

The BTO is the UK's leading bird research organisation. Over 30,000 birdwatchers contribute to the BTO's surveys and collect information that forms the basis of conservation action in the UK. The BTO maintains a staff of 100 at its offices in Norfolk, Stirling and Bangor, who analyse and publicise the results of project work. The BTO's investigations are funded by government, industry, conservation organisations and its supporters. The BTO is a Registered Charity No 216652 (England & Wales), No SC039193 (Scotland) and a Company Limited by Guarantee No 357284 (England & Wales). Registered Office: The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU.

BTO Garden BirdWatch is the only nationwide survey of garden birds to run weekly throughout the year, providing important information on how birds use gardens, and how this use changes over time. The project is funded by participants' contributions and is the largest year-round survey of garden birds in the World. Participants receive the quarterly magazine *Bird Table*, have access to GBW Online and the expertise of the BTO's Garden Ecology Team. For more information, please visit www.bto.org/gbw

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