Wild birds are susceptible to a range of different diseases, some of which are more common than others. Outbreaks of disease may occur in populations of wild birds wherever they occur, including those visiting gardens, and can cause significant declines. Diseases can be a welfare concern (especially if they are caused, or exacerbated, by human activities) and some can affect human and domestic animal health. As such, it is important to be able to recognise signs of disease and to adopt good hygiene measures to reduce the risk of disease transmission between individual birds. With increasing numbers of bird species visiting gardens, it is possible that there may be negative implications involving disease transmission. Species that wouldn’t normally interact in close proximity may be mixing at garden feeding stations or birds may gather at higher densities than seen in other habitats, both of which may increase disease transmission. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some bird species may be more susceptible to disease than others. Species such as Starlings, House Sparrows and Blackbirds are amongst the most commonly reported victims of disease. The most likely place for disease to spread in gardens is at garden feeding stations where wild birds actively gather as disease vectors could come into contact with food or through communal roosting and feeding features where birds perch or roost – this will prevent contamination with droppings. The most likely point for disease spreading in your garden:

- Use several feeding stations to reduce the numbers of birds at any one place.
- Remove the use of feeding stations so they’re not in constant use – mice/ rats can help reduce the risk of infection.
- Avoid placing feeding stations under garden furniture where birds perch or roost – this will prevent contamination with droppings.
- Regularly (fortnightly) clean and disinfect features where birds perch or roost and birdtables and birdhouses with a variable disinfectant, such as AquaFX or Serenade. Bird feed can carry diseases.
- Maintain careful personal hygiene, including wearing gloves, as some diseases can affect human and domestic animal health.
- Make sure that any brushes or equipment you use are not used for other purposes.
Join Garden BirdWatch today for just £17...


When you join Garden BirdWatch you will be part of an established community of like-minded individuals. You will also discover new and exciting things about the behaviour of birds and other species using your garden.

A great gift for the bird lover. Garden BirdWatch is a present with a difference and is something that lasts the whole year. If you would like to make your garden more special, order one of our smart gift boxes (£19.95). Call us for details (01842-750050) or visit our website (www.bto.org).

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Get engaged with your garden by becoming a BTO Garden BirdWatch and enjoy birdlife.

Garden BirdWatch is a great way to understand and help the birds and other wildlife on your doorstep. Please help by making your garden a ‘bird-friendly’ one.

Chris Packham
BTO Vice-President

*The Garden BirdWatch benefits

- A welcome pack.
- A quarterly magazine packed with interesting articles.
- Access to Garden BirdWatch Online.
- Recording forms and instructions.
- Access to the BTO’s team of garden wildlife experts.
- The opportunity to contribute valuable information that can be used to help conserve birds and other wildlife.

What to do if you find a diseased bird...

Finding a diseased bird in your garden can be distressing. Here are some tips about what to do if you come across one.

Should I stop feeding?

If it’s likely that birds will disperse to feed at other locations, consider taking birds elsewhere. If the local environment, then it may be sensible to cease feeding for a short period. If the birds still struggle to find food elsewhere, you will need to arrange for the garden feeding station nearby. It is best to continue feeding, but only if you are confident in your hygiene regime.

Can a diseased bird be treated?

Treatment is normally an appropriate option. If you find a sick or injured bird that is capable of avoiding threats (such as domestic animals), it may be best to leave it entirely alone. However, if you judge that the animal is not capable of feeling healthy, you could contact your local veterinary surgeon. Alternatively, the RSPCA (England and Wales) and the Scottish SPCA (Scotland) may provide veterinary care for wildlife casualties. Please be aware that wildlife hospitalisation requirements for survival after treatment are relatively indifferent of predation support.

Reporting diseased birds

It is important that cases of diseased animals, including birds, are reported to the Garden Wildlife Health (GWH) project so they can build a picture of the issues affecting garden wildlife throughout the country. Every report submitted by the public contributes to a national database of wildlife disease incidents. Every sample submitted is examined and then archived into one of the largest wildlife tissue banks in the world. These are invaluable resources, which provide a solid grounding to study and safeguard the health of our garden wildlife.

The Garden Wildlife Health project needs your help! To report a diseased animal please visit www.gardenwildlifehealth.org.

The Garden Wildlife Health (GWH) project is a collaborative project between the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), FrogLift and the Royal Society of London (ZSL), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). The Garden Wildlife Health (GWH) project is a collaborative project between the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), FrogLift and the Royal Society of London (ZSL).

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) is a Registered Charity (No 216652 – England & Wales, No SC039193 – Scotland) dedicated to producing unbiased information that is at the heart of bird conservation. Find out more about us at www.bto.org or write to us at BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU.

About the BTO

www.bto.org/gbw

GARDEN BIRDS AND WILDLIFE

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