

Making your garden work for birds . . .



Fieldfare on *Sorbus*, by John Harding

While some trees and shrubs offer birds nesting opportunities, others provide food in the shape of berries and seeds. Knowing which plants provide particular resources can help you put together a garden that really works for garden birds.

Trees and shrubs for nesting cover

Some birds will make their first nesting attempt of the year in an evergreen shrub, since these provide cover at a time when most broadleaves are still in bud. Various ornamental conifers and evergreen shrubs will provide nesting opportunities, some of which may be native (e.g. Holly and Yew), others introduced. Deciduous shrubs come into their own later in the year.

Various finches nest in shrubs and small trees, including fruit trees, often choosing to nest in the fork of a branch or up against the trunk. Others may use the cover of a native hedge.

Some of the best shrubs are those which produce thick, thorny cover; the thorns adding an extra level of deterrent to potential nest predators. Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* is particularly good in this respect, as are many of the different *Berberis* and *Pyracantha* species.



Berry and seed-producing plants

Different fruits become available at particular times of the year, with some 'available' on the plant for a substantial period – perhaps because they are long-lasting or because they are only taken after more popular fruits are exhausted. Holly, in particular, has a long fruiting season; the first berries become available during September and the long-lasting fruits may remain on the tree through until the following July. Although one reason for this is the durability of the fruits, another is the fact that many Holly trees are defended by Mistle Thrushes, which prevents other birds from feeding on the fruits. The nutritional characteristics of fruits may also vary with season, notably with the water content of the pulp declining and the lipid content increasing as the season progresses.

Aliens and cultivars

Introduced species and the cultivated varieties of native species may produce suitable fruit but this is not always the case. There is, for example, variation in the attractiveness of the berries produced by different cultivars of *Sorbus*. Since birds have been shown to use berry colour as an indicator of nutritive rewards, it seems sensible to use shrubs whose berries are red or black – the colours favoured by berry-eating birds. Ornamental fruits whose colours are not widely replicated within native fruits (e.g. white – seen only on Mistletoe) may prove less attractive to birds. This could explain why white-berried forms of *Sorbus* remain on the tree for so long.

Bird-friendly plant guide . . . Providing fruits and seeds



Waxwing on *Sorbus*, by Jill Pakenham

The provision of seeds for birds can be as simple as leaving some of your flowers to set seed, rather than dead-heading them. Lavender *Lavandula* and Lemon Balm *Melissa officinalis* are great in this respect and are wonderful plants in their own right. There are lots of options when it comes to berry-producing plants and shrubs, as our guide (below) demonstrates.

Our recommendations



John Harding

Rowan

Sorbus shrubs are well-used by birds. Try to pick a native species with red berries as birds prefer these.



Mike Toms

Hawthorn

Mix Hawthorn with Elder, Yew, Blackthorn and Spindle to provide a mix of nesting cover and berries.



Dawn Balmer

Elder

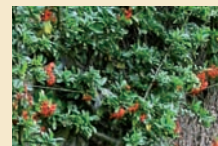
While Elder flowers are great for insects, the berries are exploited by Blackcaps and various thrushes.



John Harding

Guelder Rose

These bright red berries are not only attractive to birds but they add a splash of colour to a garden.



Mike Toms

Pyracantha

Provides both dense nesting cover and a supply of red berries, the latter well used by wintering thrushes.



Ivy

As well as being a great provider of nesting cover, ivy berries last late into the season.

Best of the rest

Other good berry-producing plants include: Bird Cherry *Prunus padus*, Cotoneaster *bullatus*, Crab Apple *Malus sylvestris*, Dog Rose *Rosa canina*, Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, Mezereon *Daphne mezereon*, Mistletoe *Viscum album*, Oregon Grape *Mahonia aquifolium* and Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides*.

Good seed-producing plants include Alder *Alnus glutinosa*, Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis*, Silver Birch *Betula pendula*, Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum* and *Carduus* and *Cirsium* thistles.

Get detailed advice on plants, including planting schemes, from the book *Gardening for Birdwatchers*, by Mike Toms and Ian & Barley Wilson. Order online at www.bto.org.



Greenfinch on Guelder Rose, by John Harding

What is Garden BirdWatch?

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Chris Packham,
BTO Vice-President



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- The opportunity to contribute valuable information that can be used to help conserve birds and other wildlife.

Bird friendly plant guide . . . Shelter and nesting cover



Pied Wagtail, by Jill Pakenham

Our recommendations

Conifers

Try planting one of the *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* varieties, such as 'Ellwoodii' (grows to 10ft, with a conical habit), 'Minima' (5ft, rounded habit) 'Gnome' (3ft, rounded habit). There are lots of others.



Mike Jones

Yew

This slow-growing native provides thick evergreen cover and food for birds. Its fruits are toxic to mammals.



John Harding

Holly

A dense holly bush provides excellent cover for nesting birds, and deters nest predators



Other options

Cotoneaster franchetti and *Pyracantha atalantiodes* both provide good nesting cover and carry berries.

Mixed planting

A mixed hedge is better for wildlife and one containing Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Holly, Yew, Elder, Spindle and Dog Rose should provide birds with nesting cover, song posts and berries.

Ivy

Ivy is particularly valuable, providing both nesting and roosting cover. As a climber, it provides useful cover against walls, buildings or other structures.

Coastal options

In coastal gardens, Sea-buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* can be particularly useful. Tolerant of the salty conditions, it provides shelter, nesting opportunities and berries (although since it is dioecious you will need both male and female plants to get berries). Other useful plants for a coastal garden are *Cotoneaster lacteus*, *Euonymus japonicus* and *Viburnum tinus*.

Notes on pruning and care

Pruning can be used to encourage growth, create a desired shape, remove diseased tissue and promote flowering and fruiting.

All cuts should be made with sharp tools; secateurs for shoots and smaller branches and loppers or a pruning saw for larger ones. Always try to cut back to just above a healthy bud to prevent die back of the tissue below the cut. Outward facing buds will encourage the plant to branch in that direction and to develop an open structure, whereas inward facing ones will form a more bird-friendly denser plant.

Major cutting back of deciduous shrubs should be carried out during the dormant winter season but evergreens are best left until late winter or early spring, so they can photosynthesise earlier in the winter.

Many garden plants support insects and spiders that are, in turn, prey for insectivorous birds like this Willow Warbler.



Willow Warbler, by Jill Pakenham

About the BTO

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) is a Registered Charity (No 216652 – England & Wales, No SC039193 – Scotland) dedicated to monitoring wild birds. We work with birdwatchers and scientists to produce 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.



A BTO Garden BirdWatch Guide

GARDEN PLANTS FOR BIRDS . . .

