



Bird Watch October



Welcome to this month's Bird Watch. I'm one of two volunteer Ambassadors for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Garden BirdWatch Scheme in South Wales. Each month I introduce you to a bird or other animal that you might see in your garden.

Bird of the Month: Coal Tit

The Coal Tit is the smallest of our true tits, weighing a mere 8-10g. For me, it's a sign that autumn has arrived when this little bird reappears in my garden after the summer. But you'll have to be quick to spot one! Unlike the more familiar Blue and Great Tits which happily hang about the feeders, the Coal Tit dashes in and away in a flash. Whilst most birds peck at food to break it up and then swallow, Coal Tits grab a seed and fly off with it, often returning every minute or so. This helps them to avoid competition from the bigger birds and allows them to cache their supplies for later consumption, although they don't always remember their hiding places! The widespread establishment of conifer plantations has been to the liking of Coal Tits; BTO surveys show an increase in this species where such plantations mature. They feed in the upper branches and are very agile, often hanging upside down. Coal Tits are particularly drawn into gardens in years when Beech and Sitka Spruce seeds are in short supply in the countryside. So, how do you identify a Coal Tit? Look out for a small black-headed bird with white cheeks and a white stripe down the nape (always reminds me of a badger). There is a distinctive white double wing bar, which, when viewed at close range, is actually made up of separate spots. The Coal Tit's underside is buff coloured and the back is an olive grey.

Did you know?

- Coal Tits typically live for two years; the maximum recorded age is eight years, nine months.
- The 'coal' of Coal Tit probably just refers to the black head.
- The Welsh name is *Titw Penddu* which translates as Black-headed Tit.

How to attract them to your garden: Coal Tits will readily take small seeds, such as sunflower hearts, or peanuts (provide in a metal mesh feeder so that only small bits of peanut can be taken). They also feed on insects and spiders.

Conservation status: Green (no cause for concern).

Garden BirdWatch data show that Coal Tits move back into gardens this month, following the summer. Coal Tits are reported in 86% of Neath Port Talbot gardens, 60% of Swansea gardens, and 44% of Pembrokeshire gardens taking part in the scheme.

Make Your Garden Count!

If you enjoy watching birds and other creatures in your garden, and want to help track their fortunes, then BTO Garden BirdWatch could be perfect for you. Please contact me for a free enquiry pack or to book a talk.

Happy Garden Bird Watching!

Amanda Skull, Garden BirdWatch Ambassador

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Coal Tit: Mike Davies