



Bird Watch February



Welcome to this month's Bird Watch. I'm one of two 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: Blue Tit

The Blue Tit is perhaps one of our most familiar garden birds and during the course of a winter as many as 1,000 individuals may have visited your bird table! Look out for a small bird sporting a blue cap and white cheeks with black stripes through the eyes. The body is yellow and wings dark blue. Whilst its preferred habitat is woodland, it seems equally at home upside-down on a peanut feeder. Blue Tits happily occupy nest-boxes but gardens can lack the high number of caterpillars and spiders needed by chicks to fledge the nest successfully. However, the food we provide in our gardens may well help those that do fledge to survive later on. These cheeky birds were first observed pecking milk bottle tops to steal the cream in the 1920s; by the 1950s this behaviour had spread across the nation. This was learned behaviour passed down through the generations - a practice that has died out with the decline of doorstep delivery. If you see a Blue Tit flying a few metres between perches, with fast wing-beats, or an occasional glide, it is likely to be the display flight of a male attempting to gain the attractions of a nearby female.

Did you know?

- The average number of eggs laid by a Blue Tit nesting in a garden is 8.8 compared to 10.9 for one nesting in mature oak woodland.
- 85% of a Blue Tit's day is spent searching for food.
- The Welsh name is *Titw Tomos Las*.

How to attract them to your garden: Blue Tits mainly eat invertebrates and will take any live mealworms that you provide or aphids from your roses. They also feed on peanuts (always feed from a metal mesh feeder), fat balls (please remove from nets) and sunflower seeds.

Conservation status: **Green.** However, results from the BTO's Garden Bird Feeding Survey have shown a steady decline of this species in gardens (down by over a quarter), over the past 40 years (but not in other habitats). Modern foods and feeders have perhaps led to stiffer competition from other species.

BTO Garden BirdWatch data show that the Blue Tit is the most frequently recorded bird in Wales with 93% of gardens occupied. It is also top bird in my garden - since beginning the survey in 2004, there are only 12 weeks when I haven't recorded at least one in my garden!

Make Your Garden Count!

You might have just taken part in the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch. If you enjoyed this and watch birds in your garden for a few minutes during most weeks, why not step up to BTO Garden BirdWatch – the largest year-round survey of garden birds in the world? Please contact me for a free enquiry pack, or to book a talk.

Happy Garden Bird Watching!

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Blue Tit: Nic Forbes