



Bird Watch March



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.

Species of the Month: Hedgehog

The Hedgehog was recently listed as the UK's favourite wild animal and is probably already familiar to you. Now is a great time to start looking for them in your garden as they will be waking up from hibernation. Helpfully, you don't need to see this spiny creature to know it is there. Nocturnal and rarely seen during the day (if you do see one there maybe something wrong with it), you might only hear rather than see this noisy eater tucking into a worm, slug or beetle. If you spot a black dropping (around 5 cm long by 1 cm wide) it's a sure sign that you've been visited by a Hedgehog! Look even closer and you might spot remnants of the invertebrates it has been eating. You might be surprised at how quickly Hedgehogs can run; when they need to beat a hasty retreat they lift their spines up off the ground, exposing their long and nimble limbs. Hedgehogs visit many gardens on their nightly wanderings, covering a distance of 1–2 miles, with males travelling further than females. Often the victims of our roads, an estimated 12,000–15,000 are killed every year. Discarded red rubber bands, such as those used in the postal system, have also been linked to Hedgehog injuries and deaths as these might be mistaken for earthworms.

Did you know?

- A Hedgehog has around 6,000 spines.
- British settlers introduced the Hedgehog to New Zealand in the early 1900s.
- The Welsh name is *Draenog*.

How to attract them to your garden: It's possible to buy food that is specially made for Hedgehogs, but they will also eat dog or cat food (meat or biscuits). A shallow dish of water will be much appreciated, as will gaps under your fence to allow this mammal to move from one garden to the next. Avoid using slug pellets; let this natural predator do the work instead. Milk should not be put out as it gives Hedgehogs an upset tummy.

Conservation status: The Hedgehog is a UK priority species with numbers thought to have declined by around 50% over the last 25 years, a trend which seems to be continuing in England and Wales. If this trend is not stemmed, by 2050 the Hedgehog could become extinct from certain areas. Now protected, it's ironic that the Hedgehog was once considered to be a pest.

My BTO Garden BirdWatch data show that Hedgehogs are quite rare in my garden now – they were only present for 5 weeks of the year in 2013 (compared with 16 weeks in 2005).

Make Your Garden Count!

If you enjoy watching the birds and wildlife in your garden why not take part in 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!

Amanda Skull, Garden BirdWatch Ambassador
07952 758293 (evenings & weekends only)

gbw@hiafi.co.uk www.bto.org/gbw

Follow me on Twitter @amanda_skull



Hedgehog: Maurice Burrows