



# Bird Watch August



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: House Martin

The House Martin is a migratory species that arrives during April and May to breed, having flown all the way from Africa. The only time that you are likely to see them on the ground is whilst they are gathering mud to build or repair their nest (most commonly constructed under the eaves of houses). The nest takes around ten days to complete and is made up of between 700 and 1,500 individual mud pellets. The first brood help to feed later chicks, thus gaining valuable parenting skills for their own breeding attempts the following year. Nests tend to be occupied from one year to the next, although it is unlikely to be by the same pair. Males often return to where they were born, whilst females move several kilometres away. House Martins are aerial feeders, taking aphids and other small insects so, unless you are fortunate enough to have them nesting on your house, you are most likely to see them flying above you. Look out for a blue-black back and a white rump and underside; the tail is short and forked and lacks the streamers of a Swallow. Their flight consists of long glides, rapid fluttering and quick changes of direction. You may also see them skimming the surface of ponds as they dip their bellies to bathe or scoop water into their bills. House Martins migrate during the day and will begin their return journey to Africa next month.

## Did you know?

- House Martins have been known to nest on sea-faring vessels – feeding their young between voyages whilst the ship is in dock!
- The collective noun for martins is 'richness'.
- The Welsh name is *Gwennol y Bondo*.

**How to attract them to your garden:** House Martins feed in flight and so cannot be attracted by providing food. However, a muddy puddle from which they can collect nesting material may prove attractive, particularly during dry weather. They may also use an artificial nesting cup.

**Conservation status:** **Amber** listed due to a steady long-term decline. This pattern can also be seen in Europe. Please do not prevent them from nesting on your house or destroy old nests as this could be a contributing factor to the decline. If you are worried about the mess of droppings on your pavement or windows, try erecting a tray beneath the nest.

**BTO Garden BirdWatch data** show that more gardens report seeing House Martins during August than in any other month. Wales has a higher reporting rate than other parts of the UK.

## Make Your Garden Count!

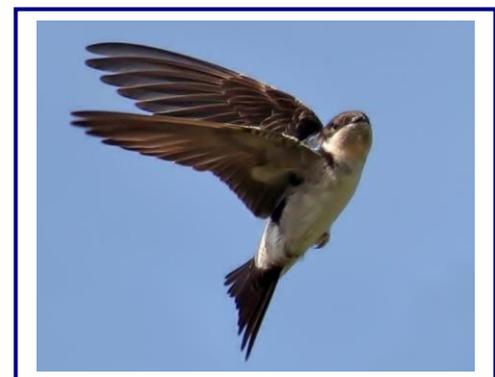
If you enjoy watching birds and other creatures in your garden, and want to help track their fortunes, then BTO Garden BirdWatch could be perfect for you. Please contact me for a free enquiry pack or to book a talk (Swansea and surrounding areas).

## Happy Garden Bird Watching!

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House Martin: Mike Davies