



Bird Watch September



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: Nuthatch

The Nuthatch is an instantly recognisable species and is unlikely to be mistaken for any other. This small, plump, and woodpecker-like bird is a steel-blue grey colour on top and reddish-buff (almost brick-red in males) below, with a white chin and dark dagger-like bill. The distinctive black eye-stripe always reminds me of a masked bandit, a fitting description given its habit of flying off with food to cache elsewhere! The Nuthatch can descend a tree trunk head first and is the only British bird that can do so; this posture is adopted on peanut feeders too. Nuthatches nest in tree-holes, often competing for space with Starlings. Unlike their competitor, Nuthatches make the entrance hole smaller by applying lots of mud (they'll even do this on the rare occasions they use nest boxes). As such, wet weather during spring helps to ensure they can finish their work before the Starlings can attempt a take-over. Pairs of Nuthatches strongly defend their territories throughout the year, a survival strategy that gives them an excellent knowledge of the food available in the area and where it has been stored. Since the mid-1970s populations have rapidly increased, a trend which is continuing in Wales. BTO researchers have found that Nuthatches now tend to breed earlier in the year and that there has been a large increase in the size of their broods. Could this be attributable to climate change?

Did you know?

- The size of the nest hole is 3cm – just big enough for the female to squeeze through.
- A member of the BTO's Garden BirdWatch team was surprised to find a Nuthatch's cache of peanuts under a pillow in the spare bedroom (the small window was always kept open)!
- The Welsh name is *Delor y Cnau*.

How to attract them to your garden: Peanuts are always a hit, particularly in the autumn and winter when invertebrates are harder to find. Always feed peanuts from a metal, mesh feeder.

Conservation status: Green listed due to increase in population size.

BTO Garden BirdWatch data show that Nuthatches are most likely to visit gardens near to good quality mature woodland. September and November show the highest reporting rates, with May being the lowest. Their presence in gardens tends to be higher when there is a poor beech mast crop.

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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Nuthatch: Mike Davies