



Bird Watch February



Welcome to this month's Bird Watch. I'm one of two Ambassadors for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO's) 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: Fieldfare

The Fieldfare is a winter visitor to Britain. From late October they arrive in large flocks from Scandinavia – their arrival coinciding with the end of the Rowan berry crop in their breeding areas. They may remain with us until May. Fieldfares are members of the thrush family and are about the same size as a Blackbird but appear larger due to their upright stance. Their hopping run is typical of all thrushes. Males and females are identical in appearance (although the female has a slightly longer tail) with slate-grey head, nape and rump and contrasting chestnut coloured back and black tail. The throat and breast are a golden-brown with black streaks; if you get a really good view you should be able to see how the spots on the upper breast become dark chevrons as they progress downwards. Flocks of Fieldfares can be seen feeding on worms and insects in fields, often alongside species such as Redwing, or in berry-laden trees in the wider countryside. During severe winter weather, and when fruit crops are depleted in the wider countryside, Fieldfares will venture into gardens.

Did you know?

- The maximum recorded age of a Fieldfare is 14 years, 8 months and 24 days (set in 2010).
- At their breeding grounds, Fieldfares join together to pelt predators with their droppings.
- Bird rings from Norwegian and Finnish Fieldfares have been found in the pellets of a Peregrine Falcon in the Brecon Beacons.
- The Welsh name is *Socan Eira*.

How to attract them to your garden: When the ground is frozen, Fieldfares may be attracted by fallen apples or berries on trees such as holly, rose hips or Ivy.

Conservation status: **RED** due to recent breeding population decline (1969–2007).

BTO Garden BirdWatch data show that Fieldfares are more likely to visit gardens during harsh winters. During eleven years of surveying my garden, I have only recorded Fieldfare three times and that was during the hard winter of 2010 at the very beginning and end of the year.

Make Your Garden Count!

If you took part in the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch last month and enjoyed it, 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 (Swansea and surrounding areas).

Happy Garden Bird Watching!

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Fieldfare: Derek Moore