



Bird Watch March



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: Pied Wagtail

The Pied Wagtail, with its distinctive black and white colouring and long bobbing tail, will be a familiar bird to many. It's not entirely clear why it constantly wags its tail although several explanations have been suggested. These include: as a means of signalling to others, to flush out insects, or to camouflage the bird whilst it is hunting next to flowing water and riverside vegetation. The Pied Wagtail is often seen searching for insects along our roads and pavements, perched on rooftops (they rarely settle on tree branches except to roost), or on the short grass of playing fields. This is a bird that walks, rather than hops, and nods its head like a chicken as it moves forwards in fits and starts or darting runs. Nodding with each step, whilst the body moves, keeps the head fixed relative to the bird's surroundings, thus making it easier to spot food or danger. Males and females are of similar appearance, the female having a greyer, rather than black, back and smaller bib. The throat of breeding males is black whilst that of non-breeding birds is white.

Did you know?

- Pied Wagtails are highly territorial in spring; they have been seen attacking their own reflections in the wing mirrors and hubcaps of parked cars!
- During the colder months, hundreds of Pied Wagtails roost together in trees, reed beds or buildings.
- On average, Pied Wagtails eat a small prey item every three to four seconds during winter daylight hours.
- Their Welsh name is *Siglen Fraith*.

How to attract them to your garden: Large gardens, close to water, are favoured. Although Pied Wagtails generally eat invertebrates, they may be tempted by crumbs scattered on the ground.

Conservation status: Green listed. Whilst there seems to have been a slight decline in numbers in recent years, the longer-term trend is favourable.

BTO Garden BirdWatch data show that Pied Wagtails regularly visit around 10% of gardens, favouring those with ponds or larger lawns. During cold winters this increases to around a third of gardens. Whilst I recorded Pied Wagtails during 21 weeks of the year in my garden in 2005, I've hardly ever seen one since.

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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Pied Wagtail: Mike Davies