



Bird Watch April



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.

Nest Boxes

Gardens tend to lack suitable dead standing wood but we can help cavity-nesting birds to find a breeding site by providing nest boxes. There are three main types: tit box (featuring a round hole), open-fronted, and specialist. Blue Tits prefer boxes with a smaller hole (25mm) than Great Tits (28mm) and although Nuthatches prefer a larger hole they often make it smaller by plastering the entrance with mud until it's the perfect size! Open-fronted boxes are good for Robins and Pied Wagtails. Specialist boxes are available for House Martins and Swifts, which resemble their natural mud nests.

Birds are opportunistic, so the position of your box is not necessarily critical, but there are some important points to consider. Ensure that the box is protected from wind, rain and strong sunlight. Use any suitable vegetative cover to keep the box out of sight of predators (e.g. squirrels and cats), whilst ensuring a straight flight path for the birds. Attach the box securely to a sturdy structure (e.g. fence post, tree or wall) in a quiet spot, around 2 metres off the ground. Never place a box adjacent to hanging feeders or bird tables as any nesting birds may spend more time defending the immediate area around the box than raising their brood.

When buying a box look for one that is durable and is easy for you to open *in situ*. I would strongly recommend boxes made from woodcrete (a mix of wood and concrete) as these are extremely long lasting and are impossible for squirrels or woodpeckers to break into. Avoid any design that incorporates a perch (birds don't need this and they make it easier for predators to gain access). You can prolong the life of a wooden box with a coat of water-based wood preservative, but never paint the inside.

Old nests should be removed and the box cleaned to avoid the build-up of disease and parasites; legally this is permitted between 1st August and 31st January. You can monitor nests for conservation this spring through BTO Nest Box Challenge (www.bto.org/nbc).

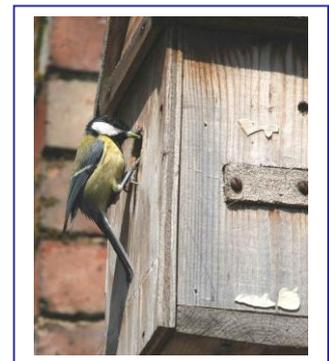
I understand that the Swansea Waste Action Team in Clydach make nest boxes and bird tables from recycled materials (Tel: 01792 796886).



Blue Tit: Mike Davies



Blue Tit eggs: Mark Mainwaring/BTO



Great Tit: David Waistell/BTO

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!

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