



Bird Watch June



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: Blackbird

Traditionally a woodland bird, the Blackbird is now a familiar sight in our gardens. The male is jet-black with a yellow-orange bill and yellow circles around the eyes. The dark brown female has a dull-yellow bill, and a slightly paler chest (with dark brown streaks) and throat. Juveniles (mid-spring to early autumn) may be mistaken for females as they too are brown, although a warmer hue, with a speckled appearance and dark bill. Blackbirds are often seen running across the lawn before stopping to look and listen for invertebrates in the soil. Ground feeding is difficult but it is even harder if there is another Blackbird competing for food on the same patch of lawn, especially as feeding rates drop by 60-80%.

Male Blackbirds sing from late-winter to mid-summer. The song is melodic and flutey, and sung from a high perch. Gaps are left between phrases to allow the bird to listen for any other males answering in the vicinity. Most bird species learn their song within their first year, but a Blackbird's song is developed over a number of years and improves with age. By listening carefully it is possible to distinguish individuals; they have a distinctive voice, just like humans. A disturbed Blackbird will fly into cover whilst uttering a loud, cross *chink-chink* call.

Did you know?

- The colour of a male's bill is a sign of its health – the more orange, the healthier he is.
- Some Blackbirds, particularly older males, may develop some white plumage.
- Ringing data estimates that, in the winter, migrants from other European countries increase the population by 12%.
- Their Welsh name is *Mwyalchen*.

How to attract them to your garden: Dried/live mealworms fed from a bird table are firm favourites with my local birds, as are rolled oats (uncooked) and suet pellets. Although not the most agile of birds, some have learned how to perch on the fat blocks to feed; others jump up from the ground to knock a few crumbs to the ground. Berries and windfall apples provide a winter treat.

Conservation status: Green listed.

BTO Garden BirdWatch data show that Blackbirds visit gardens throughout the year. There is a reduced reporting rate during the autumn corresponding with their annual moult and when birds may leave gardens to take advantage of autumnal fruits elsewhere.

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 (Swansea and surrounding areas).

Happy Garden Bird Watching!

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Blackbird (male): Mike Davies