



Bird Watch July



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: Great Spotted Woodpecker

Great Spotted Woodpeckers are woodland birds but at this time of year they will regularly make forays into gardens to take beakfuls of food away for their young. Eventually the adults will bring the fledglings with them and teach them how to feed from peanut, suet and other feeders. They are about the size of a Blackbird with black and white plumage, and red under the tail. It is very easy to tell the family members apart and it's all to do with the head and neck. Adult birds have a black head whilst juveniles sport a red cap; the male has a red nape whilst the female's is black. The head and neck of Great Spotted Woodpeckers are specially structured to prevent brain damage when they bang their beak (at 10-40 hits per second) on dead trees or even metal. Drumming, as it is known, is performed by both sexes and enables a pair to keep in touch with each other. The male will also use it as a kind of song to deter rivals and to attract a mate. Their strong beak is used to excavate the nest cavity, pull off bark to locate hidden larvae and even to extract the seeds from pine cones. However, you may be surprised to learn that they are equally capable of boring into the sides of nest boxes to take the nestlings of birds such as Blue Tits. To help prevent this scenario from playing out in your own garden, you may wish to invest in a 'woodcrete' (a mixture of wood chippings and concrete) bird box or use a metal plate over the nest box hole.

Did you know?

- 'Descent' is the collective noun for woodpeckers (not specific to Great Spotted Woodpecker).
- The tongue is so long that it coils around the back of the woodpecker's skull and is used like a harpoon to extract insect larvae from within trees.
- The Welsh name is *Cnocell Fraith Fywaf*.

How to attract them to your garden: Great Spotted Woodpeckers adore peanuts (always feed from a metal mesh feeder) and fat blocks - don't be surprised if they eat a block per day!

Conservation status: **Green** (no cause for concern). There has been a rapid increase in the breeding population since the 1990s.

BTO Garden BirdWatch data show that there is a peak in gardens in early summer when the adult birds bring their young to garden feeders. Living near woodland, I see this bird for around half of the year. I'm looking forward to welcoming this year's young.

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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Great Spotted Woodpeckers: Russ Myrners