



Bird Watch August



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: Goldfinch

Don't be surprised if your garden seems quieter than usual this month. Birds will be hiding themselves away in order to replace their feathers through their annual moult, and juveniles will be moving away in search of their own territories. One bird that's sure to brighten up a quiet garden is the Goldfinch, an exotic looking finch with a distinctive red, white and black head pattern. Look very closely and you may be able to separate the sexes – the red on the male's face extends slightly behind the eye. Keep an eye out for youngsters that have recently left the nest – they are streakier and lack the red face of adults, but still have characteristic gold wing bars. Goldfinches forage in flocks (the collective noun is a 'charm'), so there's a good chance of you seeing more than one. A Goldfinch's bill is thin and narrow compared with other finches, allowing them to extract seeds from hard-to-reach spaces. Unlike our jaws which are designed to bite firmly closed, their muscular strength lies in opening the bill, which enables Goldfinches to enlarge tight feeding places so that their tongue can scoop out tasty seeds.

Did you know?

- The beak of a male is about 1mm longer than that of a female. This enables males to extract the seed-heads of teasels, while females may focus on thistles instead.
- In the nineteenth century Goldfinches were popular cage birds; unfortunately this tradition still continues in some parts of Europe.
- Their Welsh name is *Nico*.

How to attract them to your garden: Feeding nyger seed from a specialised feeder can be one of the best ways, although many Garden BirdWatchers are seeing a change of allegiance to sunflower hearts. Dandelion seeds are also popular - the perfect excuse for not keeping your garden too tidy!

Conservation status: **Green** (no cause for concern).

BTO Garden BirdWatch data show a large increase in the reporting rate of Goldfinches using Welsh (and UK) gardens over the last 15 years as they take advantage of the supplementary food provided. The largest 'charm' of Goldfinches I've seen in my garden contained 22 individuals - what a fantastic sight!

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!

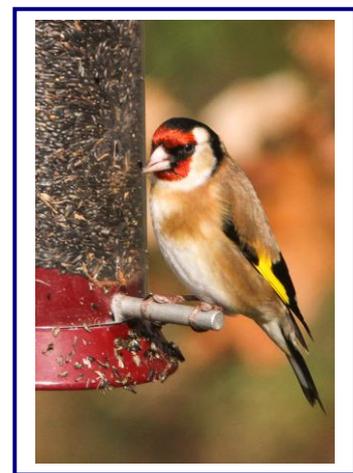
Amanda Skull, Garden BirdWatch Ambassador
07952 758293 (evenings & weekends only)

gbw@hiafi.co.uk www.bto.org/gbw

Follow me on Twitter @amanda_skull



Female Goldfinch: Russ Myners



Male Goldfinch: Nic Forbes