



# Bird Watch October



Welcome to this month's Bird Watch. I'm one of two volunteer 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: Jay

At this time of year there is generally plenty of natural food around. Birds only have themselves to care for – they have no dependants and, generally, no territories. Mixed-species flocks of birds can often be seen foraging together. You won't see Jays among these as they prefer their own company – even established pairs spend much of their time apart. Jays are tree seed specialists with a passion for acorns. Although they favour woodlands, at this time of year you may spot them using your garden as an acorn larder, carefully burying their treasure in the lawn or borders. They find a different hiding place for every single seed! Birds can travel up to 2 ½ miles to find acorns, carrying up to nine in their bill and adapted gullet, although three is more usual. Part of the crow family, Jays have a pinkish-brown body and black tail; look out for the dazzling azure flash on their wings and bold white rump as they fly away. Jays are shy birds and tend to see you before you see them. To warn all other birds in the area they issue a loud, harsh screaming call.

## Did you know?

- A Jay will stash up to 5,000 acorns during autumn. They have great memories but will inevitably forget the location of some, thus helping new oak trees to grow.
- Our Jays may be joined by cousins from northern and eastern Europe if those countries have a poor acorn crop.
- The Welsh name is *Ysgrech y Coed*, meaning Scream of the Wood.

**How to attract them to your garden:** Jays are relatively infrequent garden visitors, but may be tempted by peanuts and scraps. They are more likely to use your garden for storage of seeds. Aside from seeds they feed on carrion and eggs.

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

**BTO Garden BirdWatch data** show that, at this time of year, one in ten participants record Jays in their garden. In 2014 I saw a Jay during two weeks of the year, in 2013 it was ten weeks and so far this year it's been six.

## 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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Jay: Russ Myners