



Birdwatch



Pic: Goldcrest by Tim Porter
(A Birdwatch Reader!)

JANUARY

Welcome to this month's Bird Watch. I'm one of two Ambassadors for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO's) Garden BirdWatch Scheme in South Wales. Each month I introduce you to a bird or other animal that you might see in your garden.

Species of the Month: Goldcrest

The Goldcrest is the smallest bird in Britain and Europe. Weighing only six grams it is half the weight of a Blue Tit; similar to a 20 pence piece. Their minute size means that you may be more likely to hear than see a Goldcrest, however, their high pitched calls and song can be out of the hearing range of many people – as we age so our ability to hear high frequency sounds decreases. Their call is a sharp zee-zee. If you are lucky enough to see them Goldcrests are a dull-green above and whitish below, with striking wingbars. As their name suggests, their crowning glory is a golden stripe on the head. The crown of the male is raised during display to reveal a reddish centre. Goldcrests are associated with coniferous woodland where their small size, agility and thin bills allow them to feed on the insects at the end of branches where larger birds are unable to forage. Outside of the breeding season, look out for this species among mixed flocks of tits. Due to their high-surface-area-to volume-ratio Goldcrests are susceptible to the cold, but can survive at temperatures of -25oC providing they can eat constantly during daylight hours. In such conditions they will huddle together at night to keep warm but can still lose 20% of their body weight. When numbers do suffer during hard winters, they are able to recover well if such winters are followed by a good breeding season. Goldcrests don't often feature on the menu of birds of prey such as Sparrowhawk; their size hardly makes for a decent meal!

Did you know?

- A female Goldcrest flew 665km from Norway to Lincolnshire in just two days!
- In Norfolk it was believed that Goldcrests hitched lifts on the backs of Short-Eared Owls!
- The Welsh name is Dryw Eurben.

How to attract them to your garden: Whilst not a common sight in gardens, they may be attracted by fat and bread crumbs. They may nest in the garden if there are mature conifers.

Conservation status: **AMBER** listed because of a longer term decline.

My BTO Garden BirdWatch data show that Goldcrests are more likely to be seen in gardens close to large areas of woodland and forestry. For much of the year only around 3% of Garden BirdWatchers report seeing Goldcrests. This rises to 9% in spring and autumn when the native population is increased by an influx of migrants passing through the country. I'm still hoping to catch a glimpse of one in my Swansea garden!

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 your free enquiry pack, including a guide on plants for garden birds, or to book a talk.

Happy Garden Bird Watching!
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