



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. Jays, however, 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 acorns in their bill and adapted gullet, although three is more usual. The Jay is a member of the crow family with a pinkish-brown body and black tail; look out for the dazzling azure flash on their wings and bold white rump as it flies 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 my garden, Jays visited during seven of the 52 weeks last year. This figure sounds quite low but at one point I saw seven Jays in the garden at the same time! This is very unusual – I typically only see one or two.

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, including a guide to feeding garden birds, or to book a talk.

Happy Garden Bird Watching!

Amanda Skull, Garden BirdWatch Ambassador

Evenings and weekends only:

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Jay: Tim Porter (a Bird Watch reader)