



# Bird Watch August



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.

## Species of the Month: Domestic Cat

When I mention cats to people I'm often met with one of two opposing views – that of a treasured pet or that of a wildlife killer. Many people want to encourage birds into their garden but because of their own cat, or that of a neighbour, they are afraid to do so. There are, however, a number of steps that can be taken to help protect the birds in your garden from cat predation.

Cats rely on cover to approach prey and to launch surprise attacks; by positioning feeders in the open away from trees/bushes, birds are given the space they need to spot a rushing predator. Attracting groups of birds to your garden can actually increase their chances of spotting danger; the more eyes and voices there are the better to warn others of any risk. It is helpful if you can spread your feeders around, thus increasing the number of look-out posts; it also reduces overcrowding in a small space where social distraction could leave birds vulnerable to attack. A sonic device delivers an unpleasant sound when a cat crosses in front of it and can work as an effective deterrent; move it around periodically to ensure the cat doesn't learn to just avoid a particular route. Think also about the positioning of any nest boxes; are they within easy reach of cats? The open nests of birds such as Blackbird can be protected by chicken wire of a suitable gauge and also think about planting thorny vegetation as this will provide good nesting cover when it matures.

Cat owners can also take steps to reduce the hunting impact of their pets, which in turn helps to reduce flea and worm infestations. Bells fitted to collars have been shown to reduce a cat's success at catching prey; however, bells should be replaced regularly as they lose their sound clarity over time due to the constant friction of use. There are lots of inexperienced fledglings around during the spring and early summer so limiting the time a cat spends outdoors could help their chances of survival and reduce nest raiding. Dawn and dusk are important feeding times for birds, particularly in the winter, so, again, try to keep cats indoors during these times.

## Did you know?

- It has been estimated that cats kill 55 million birds in Britain every year and that such predation could contribute to long-term declines of familiar garden birds such as House Sparrows.
- Cats are well-known for keeping themselves clean; their saliva acts as a deodorant allowing them to hunt up or down-wind of their prey.
- The Welsh name is *cath*.

## 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.

## Happy Garden Bird Watching!

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Chloe, 1 year old tabby - Richard Trahar