



BTO

Looking out for birds

Big Butterfly Count 2014

At this time of year, it often seems that our garden birds have deserted us. This is not necessarily the case. Our feathered friends are probably skulking amongst shrubs and hedges and the reason for this is because they are moulting. Losing their feathers means they are more vulnerable to predators so they tend to adopt a low profile.

If you have noticed this absence of birds in your garden recently, there are many other creatures for you to discover. The most obvious are butterflies. If you have a Buddleia bush, you should be rewarded with visits from an assortment of species including Peacock, Comma, Red Admiral, Painted Lady and Small Tortoiseshell. Living in a rural area, you may also observe other species in your garden such as Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood and Ringlet. This year seems to be particularly good for the latter.

To encourage butterflies in to our gardens, it is important that we grow the right plants. They don't just need plants that provide nectar but also specific plants on which they can lay their eggs. For example, Orange Tips will lay their eggs on Honesty and, Holly Blues like Holly in the spring, and Ivy in late summer. The plant which many species like to lay eggs on is the Common Nettle so if you have room in your garden, why not accommodate a small bed of nettles? The Common Nettle has many attributes and being a major source of food for butterfly larvae is just one of them. Another tip is to grow single flowers rather than double varieties, because butterflies find it difficult to extract nectar from the latter as they have too many petals.

If you would like more involvement helping butterflies, you could engage with the Big Butterfly Count which has been held every year since 2010. It is run by Butterfly Conservation in association with Marks and Spencer. This year it is being held from Saturday 19th July to Sunday 10th August so you still have plenty of time to be involved. The idea is to find a sunny, sheltered spot and record the butterflies you see during a 15 minute period. You then send your results on-line to the website of the Big Butterfly Count. Even if you don't see any butterflies in that period, it doesn't matter as this is equally important to know about. You can also do this as many times as you want between those dates and you can carry it out in your garden, parkland, school grounds, fields and woods. If you are not sure about identifying butterflies, Big Butterfly Count provides an identification chart for you to download. Visit [www. bigbutterflycount.org](http://www.bigbutterflycount.org) for further information.



Small Tortoiseshell ©Jean Parrott

Outside of these dates, you can still record butterflies in your garden by becoming a BTO Garden BirdWatcher. As well as birds and butterflies, you can also record some other insects, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles.

Jean is an Ambassador for the British Trust for Ornithology's Garden BirdWatch scheme in Nottinghamshire. If you would like to help the BTO by recording birds and other wildlife which visit your garden, please contact Jean at jpbirds@talktalk.net

Jean is also able to arrange talks to groups.