

The Blackbird



BTO

Looking out for birds

As I gaze out of my kitchen window, there are eleven Blackbirds in my small back garden. At this time of year, not all of them will be local residents. Some will be winter migrants from Scandinavia and they can be easily recognised by their dark bills. As it is so cold, none of them are moving far as I have a plentiful supply of food to attract them. They are enjoying almost everything I have put out for birds including mixed seeds, sunflower hearts, mealworms and apples. When they are full, they position themselves on the fence or on nearby trees waiting until they feel ready to eat again. When feeding, they are often argumentative and appear to spend more time seeing off a fellow competitor than consuming their food.

The Blackbird is one of the most common visitors to our gardens. In my garden it vies for top position with the Blue Tit. Almost every day I see a Blackbird in my garden and it is only a few weeks during early autumn when their presence is missed, as at that time of the year, they are



Photo by Jean Parrott

moulting or obtaining their food from other sources in the countryside.

The male Blackbird, as its name suggests, is black. It has a bright orange yellow bill and a yellow ring around each eye. The female of the species is a warm brown colour and on closer inspection, you will see a slight speckling on the breast and throat. Juveniles look quite similar to the female but are a little lighter with more speckles. It is a member of the Thrush family and is a vocal bird. Many people enjoy its fluty song on a fine spring morning and often remark that it is their favourite birdsong. It is a convenient bird to have around as it is usually the first to give out any alarm calls. If you surprise a Blackbird, it will always give out a 'chuck chuck' sound as it flies off. If danger lurks, it will burst forth with a continuous 'chink chink chink' call.

As spring fast approaches, many of the 'foreign' Blackbirds in my garden will leave and fly back to their breeding grounds. I will then be left with probably two or three resident Blackbirds and will feel very pleased that by feeding both residents and migrants, I have helped to get them through the cold days and long, dark nights of winter.

Jean Parrott

Jean is a voluntary Ambassador for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Garden BirdWatch scheme in Nottinghamshire. If you enjoy watching the birds and other creatures which visit your garden, the scheme may be perfect for you. Contact Jean on 0770 4809741 or jpbirds@talktalk.net for a free information pack.