



The Great Tit

During spring, one of the most strident bird songs to be heard is that of the Great Tit. It is a persistent and metallic 'teacher-teacher' sound which can even be heard above the sound of heavy traffic. This isn't the only sound it makes and it has been revealed that a single male Great Tit may have a repertoire of any number between one to eight different songs. It is said by birdwatchers that if you hear a song you don't recognise, then it is probably a Great Tit.

The Great Tit is a rather handsome and colourful bird, and is the largest member of the Tit family. Its back is green, turning blue-grey towards the rump and wings. The crown, nape and throat are black and the cheeks are white. The crown is quite glossy in the male of the species. The breast and belly are yellow with a black stripe running down the centre. Both sexes are similar but the black stripe of the male is broader than that of the female and reaches all the way down to the legs. It is believed the broader the stripe of the male, the better parent he will be and this, of course, makes him more attractive to prospective mates.

Primarily a woodland bird, this species has adapted well to gardens and parkland. It nests in the holes of trees or walls and will quite readily take to nest boxes. Only the female constructs the nest while the male will defend his territory from other males. The female incubates the eggs alone but the male will help by feeding her and the chicks.

Because of its size, the Great Tit can be a bit of a bully towards smaller birds and may dominate at bird feeders. Also, because of its larger size, it is more likely to forage on the ground than other members of the Tit family. In spring and summer it is principally an insectivorous bird, its main diet consisting of insects and spiders. However, it feeds its young on caterpillars which are higher in protein. It will also take seed, peanuts and suet from bird feeders especially during the winter months. The Great Tit is considered to be an intelligent bird and will learn tasks quite easily. Some of you may remember the time when milk was more regularly delivered to the door. The Great Tit was one species which soon recognised this was an excellent food source and consequently it learnt to peck the foil cap and sip the cream from the top of the bottle. It is also known to follow Coal Tits and steal seed from their caches. There is obviously more to this bird than we think.

Jean Parrott

Jean is a voluntary British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Garden BirdWatch Ambassador for Nott's. If you would like to help the BTO by recording birds and other wildlife which visit your garden, please contact Jean at jbirds@talktalk.net

Great Tit photo by John Harding

