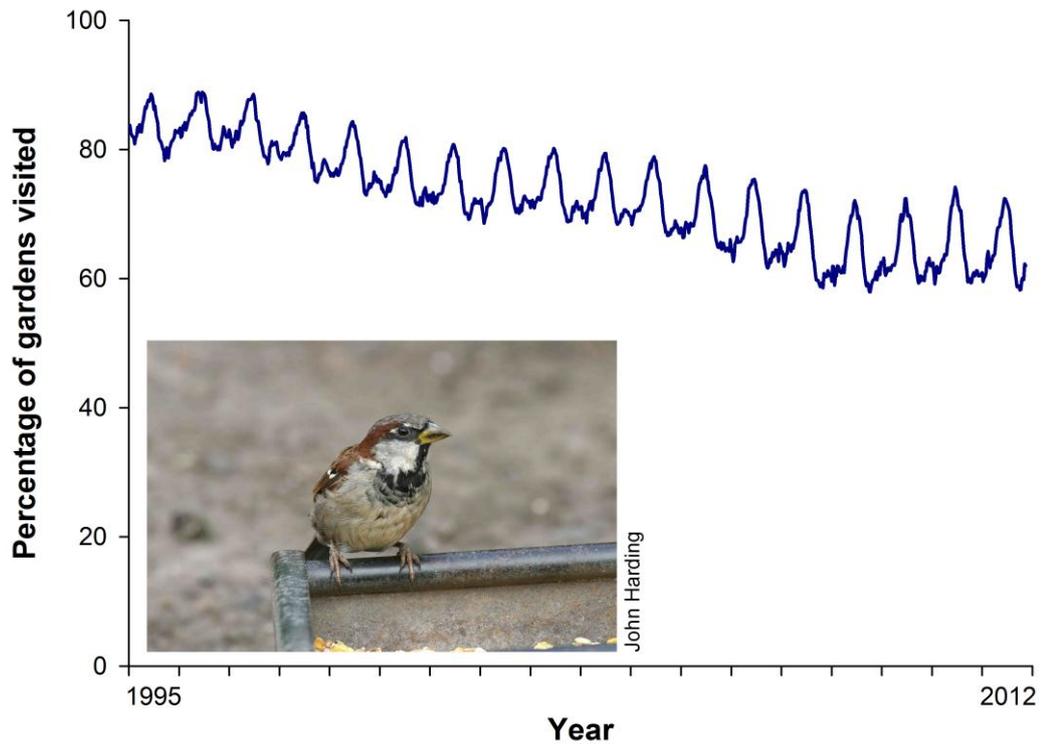


## **Making Your Birdwatching Count**

I expect many of you watch birds in your garden, and for some this can be as enjoyable as birding in other locations, if not more so. You may well have taken part in the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch, where you watch and count the birds you see in one 1 hour period during one weekend in January. When I have done this, the birds seem to know and apparently disappear, sometimes resulting in low counts! This event, with the order of half a million participants, generates a lot of useful data, which over time gives an idea of possible changes in species numbers.

However, garden bird communities change considerably over the seasons and the RSPB survey only provides a snapshot in time. To this end, year-round observing is particularly valuable, and this is where Garden BirdWatch, which is run by the BTO, steps in. The project started in 1995 and has run continuously ever since (over 900 weeks in a row)! Participants submit weekly figures for the maximum number of each species seen in their gardens at any one time. Submissions can be made on paper forms (provided by the BTO) or on-line. Records of other wildlife are also welcomed, such as butterflies, bees and other insects, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. So why not add your garden's wildlife records to the BTO's database?

Many of us will have noticed the drop in numbers of several species over the years, e.g. House Sparrow, but when it comes to challenging controversial issues, anecdotal information is not enough. This is where science-based organisations such as the BTO can provide the evidence to back up such challenges. The graph below clearly shows how House Sparrow numbers have been declining in gardens, as reported by members of the BTO Garden BirdWatch scheme. It also shows the seasonal variations of the species for each year.



The more information that is provided will help to make the statistics more accurate and reliable. So why not make your garden birdwatching count across the seasons by joining the 14,500 or so BTO Garden BirdWatch members.

For a free Garden BirdWatch enquiry pack, including a copy of the quarterly magazine for participants '*Bird Table*', please email [gbw@bto.org](mailto:gbw@bto.org) or telephone 01842 750050.

Phil Jackson