

Feed the birds please in the snow...

✘ As snow and ice covers much of the country this week, the Scottish Wildlife Trust has issued an appeal to the public today asking everyone to help look after Scotland's wildlife this winter by following some simple tips.

Simon Milne, the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Chief Executive, said: "Heavy snow fall and plunging temperatures means that the ground is frozen and inaccessible. For ground-feeding birds such as dunnocks and thrushes, this prevents them accessing the invertebrates they usually rely on for food. Equally, frozen water bodies could prevent ducks, otters, water voles, and wading birds from feeding or behaving as normal. Small birds can find it tough to find berries in amongst snowy shrubs and larger birds and mammals will find it more difficult to hunt for prey.


"In these conditions, our wildlife could be restricted in their movements and food supplies could quickly dwindle as competition increases. You can help our wildlife by simply clearing areas of snow so that wildlife can access the ground underneath or by providing food for them which is similar to the food they would eat in the wild. Make sure feeders are free from snow and that they are placed at a safe height above the ground to avoid attacks from domestic animals.

"For birds use a variety of food types such as bird-seed mixtures, fat-balls, mealworms (adored by robins), fresh coconut or even mild grated cheese which is favoured by dunnocks. The greater the variety of food the greater will be the variety of birds you attract to your garden. Who knows you might even be rewarded by a visit from the brambling – a colourful winter visitor from Siberia and Scandinavia.

“Please avoid putting out mouldy or dessicated food, cooked porridge oats, milk or fat from cooking as these can be harmful to birds. And remember to put out a shallow bowl of water to enable our birdlife to access water in frozen conditions.

“On a more positive note, it’s not all bad for Scotland’s wildlife right now. Moles and voles and other underground creatures could be finding this weather quite cosy, as the snow will act as a layer of insulation and protects them from predators.

“Winter can also be a great time of year to see and hear wildlife. Look out for the tracks and signs in the snow and try and identify who made them, listen for Tawny owls as they start their noisy courtship, and if you get the chance visit a coastal or inland water wildlife reserve like Loch of the Lowes near Perthshire or our Montrose Basin Visitor Centre in Angus to see spectacular numbers of geese, ducks and swans.

 [The Scottish Wildlife Trust is a national charity made up of local representatives working on the ground to protect wildlife across the whole of Scotland. Scottish Wildlife Trust staff located in small communities across Scotland have also been reporting their observations of how Scotland’s wildlife is coping with the big freeze.](#)

Robert Potter, Reserves Manager North East for the Scottish Wildlife Trust, said: “In the Scottish countryside spreading from Angus and Perthshire to the Highlands, care should be taken on outlying roads not only for your own safety but for the safety of wildlife. Many animals will be driven out of the hills, and nearer to towns, in their search for food during the current weather, and therefore you are more likely to come across them on roads. Some are even attracted to the salt we put on our roads”

Speaking on behalf of Saving Scotland’s Red Squirrels, a

partnership project led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, Tayside Project Officer Ken Neil said: "Red squirrels in Perthshire and Angus will be finding it difficult to keep well fed during this tremendous snowfall. So, if you are lucky enough to have them as visitors to your garden, please help make sure that they have plenty to eat. Peanuts (not salted or dry-roasted), hazelnuts or a branded squirrel mix will be welcome additions to put out with the bird food."

Donna Mathieson, People and Wildlife Officer for the Scottish Wildlife Trust, added: "Kids in Scotland have had a whale of a time this week spending days off school sledging, building snowmen and having lots of fun. The animals in our garden, however, haven't got it so easy. If you would like to help out wildlife on your 'snow days', why not fill up your bird feeder, or if you don't have one, make one from an old water bottle! You can also get messy in the kitchen and make your own "bird cake" by mixing suet or lard with seeds, cheese, and dried fruit."

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