

Sign up to the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch this weekend

This weekend (24 – 26 January) RSPB invites everyone in the UK to spend an hour counting the birds in their gardens and local outdoor spaces by taking part in the world's biggest garden wildlife survey.

Last year the House Sparrow was most commonly spotted with Starlings and Blue Tits in second and third places.

Last year more than 40,000 people in Scotland took part counting more than 80,000 birds of nearly 50 species, once again highlighting the importance of gardens for the nation's wildlife. There were around 600,000 participants across the UK as a whole, counting a grand total of 9.5 million birds. And for the RSPB, this provides an annual snapshot of how garden birds in the UK are faring.

Weather plays an important role in how birds survive by impacting their behaviour and numbers. Whilst birds are adapted to cope with cold weather, lower temperatures can make it harder to find food, impacting their longevity and having a knock-on effect on population numbers. Small birds such as Wrens and Long-tailed Tits can be particularly affected, and the RSPB says it will be interesting to see whether the recent cold temperatures and snow cover across the UK have impacted these species.

With milder weather there might be an increase in the number

of winter migrants. Fieldfare and Redwing are two large and vibrant thrushes that visit the UK throughout the winter months, flying great distances from Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. They arrive to take advantage of the fair weather and can be spotted feeding on the berries of hawthorn and rowan trees. Edinburgh is popular for Waxwings although they are usually autumn visitors.

Anne McCall, RSPB Scotland Director said: "Big Garden Birdwatch is always a highlight in the January calendar. It's a fantastic excuse to down tools and really connect with the wildlife around you. Nothing beats catching a glimpse of one of our precious garden birds to brighten up the day.

"By taking part in the Birdwatch, you'll be joining thousands of other nature lovers across Scotland in helping us understand how garden birds are doing. With the nature and climate emergency threatening even our most familiar birds, every count matters.

"I'd encourage everyone to get involved – it's fun, it's free and it's for everyone. You don't need a garden to take part so whether you're wrapping up to join pals in your local park or cosying up to do your birdwatch from your living room window, we can't think of a better way to spend an hour than relaxing with birds and nature whilst helping our precious yet fragile wildlife."

Beccy Speight, RSPB chief executive, said: "The weather can sometimes be harsh on our wildlife, especially our small garden birds. Now that the snow and icy conditions have passed, we hope everyone can take part in the Birdwatch to help determine how our birds are faring and see if the weather has impacted their numbers.

"Many of the amazing garden birds people will be counting this weekend are in decline. There are 38 million fewer birds in our skies than half a century ago, and despite being one of

the most numerous birds since the Big Garden Birdwatch started in 1979, the average count of House Sparrows spotted in gardens has dropped by a staggering 60%."

The RSPB cautions against feeding birds. A spokesperson said: "We know people love feeding the birds in their gardens and some species really do benefit from us putting out extra food for them, especially in winter. However, there is increasing evidence of negative effects in other birds, such as the spread of disease among finches.

"Following simple hygiene measures in gardens where food and water are offered can help keep our birds healthy. This includes routine cleaning of feeding stations and bird baths, moving feeding stations around the garden to prevent build-up of food or droppings on the ground and monitoring the food supply to ensure it meets demand."

Since starting in 1979, Big Garden Birdwatch has since become a much-loved annual citizen science event, that gives the RSPB a valuable snapshot of how our garden birds are doing in the UK. Over that time, 195 million birds have been counted and nearly 12.1 million hours spent watching and counting garden birds.

To take part in Big Garden Birdwatch visit www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch

Big Garden Birdwatch

24-26 January 2025



Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, adult male on his “song post” – a wild rose stem, on a Devon farm. England. May 2008. PHOTO courtesy of RSPB



Wren Troglodytes troglodytes, perched on an old tree stump, Co. Durham, February PHOTO courtesy of RSPB



Young woman undertaking the RSPB's annual Big Garden Birdwatch in a public park, Brighton, January 2023