

# Garden Birds

## Why do Birds Matter?

Birds aren't just there to look pretty; they help the environment too. They help plant life by scattering seeds. They eat insects which helps control insect growth and some birds, like magpies and crows, eat dead animals. This gets rid of the rotting animals which could cause diseases.



## Numbers of Common Garden Birds



There has been a significant drop in the number of starlings in the last few years. Some people think this is because farming has made it more difficult for them to find crane fly larvae - their favourite food.

In this year's **Big Garden Birdwatch**, house sparrows were the most widely spotted bird in the UK. Over the past decade, there has been an increase in house sparrows reported, although their numbers are still much lower than they were in the 1970s. This could be because of cats or air pollution as more cars are being used.

There has also been a rise in some less well-known birds, like fieldfares. One reason for seeing more fieldfares in gardens seems to be that the cold weather has made them leave the countryside and look for food in gardens.

## Migration

Some birds leave the UK during the winter months because it is too cold for them. They go somewhere where it is warmer. When it starts to get warmer in the UK, they come back. This is called migration.

- Swifts and swallows migrate to Africa.



**RSPB:** The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds - a charity that protects British birds.



**Big Garden Birdwatch** A yearly event where people tell the RSPB which birds they see. The information is gathered to see if there are any changes in bird populations.

- They can fly 200 miles every day.
- Many die from starvation, exhaustion and storms.

At the beginning of 2019, there were more sightings of goldfinches and redwings. A warmer winter meant more of these tiny birds survived.

### British Birds



#### Robins:

- have a bright red breast;
- are very aggressive and will defend their territory;
- sing all year round;
- can be seen in British gardens all year round.

#### Magpies:

- have a loud, chattering cackle;
- can be easily seen with their black and white feathers;
- hunt for leftover food and dead animals;
- are important insect controllers.



#### Blue Tits:

- have bright yellow and blue feathers;
- lay eggs between the end of April and May;
- male and female blue tits look the same;
- in winter, family flocks join up with other blue tits to find food together.

## Questions

1. How do birds help plants?
2. What is the RSPB?
3. Name three birds whose numbers have increased in the last year.
4. Where do swifts and swallows go during the winter?
5. **There has been a significant drop in the number of starlings in the last few years.**  
In this sentence, the word significant is closest in meaning to:
  - (a) Slow
  - (b) Noticeable
  - (c) Small
  - (d) Unimportant
6. Write true or false for the following statements:
  - (a) Magpies have a loud, chattering cackle.
  - (b) Robins have a bright blue breast.
  - (c) Blue tits have bright yellow and blue feathers.
  - (d) Male and female blue tits look different.