

## Bringing birds to your garden . . .



Coal Tit, by Jill Pakenham

The modern approach to garden bird feeding is to use a range of foods that meet the nutritional requirements of a wide range of species over the course of the year.

### Does feeding birds help them?

There is a wealth of evidence demonstrating that the provision of suitable foods can make a difference to birds. Bird feeding has been shown to increase overwinter survival and productivity in a range of species.

Although much of this work has been on populations living in habitats other than gardens, the same principles apply. Most of the birds using gardens are limited by food availability, something that may be particularly apparent both during the breeding season and in winter. The provision of foods that mirror what would normally be found in fields, woods and hedgerows, allows you to positively influence the productivity and survival of a wide range of different bird species.

Research shows that birds make decisions about what foods to take and when. In years when natural seed crops are poor, we see increased use of bird tables and hanging feeders.



Wren, by John Harding

### Summer feeding?

Garden birds may struggle to find enough food to feed both themselves and their chicks, suggesting that summer feeding might be important. The chicks of most garden birds are fed caterpillars and other invertebrates, foods they require in order to develop properly. Adult birds, however, can utilise supplementary sunflower seeds and peanut granules themselves, freeing up precious invertebrate food for the chicks.

Although adult birds are able to differentiate between different types of food, and to select appropriate foods for their young, some studies have found that they will also deliver food provided at local bird tables to the nest. The evidence suggests, in Great Tits and Blue Tits at least, that the parent birds may feed their chicks on supplementary foods when favoured foods are in short supply. This means that consideration needs to be given to the foods provided. Live foods (mealworms) are an obvious choice, but whole loose peanuts are best avoided.

Although more work is needed to establish how summer feeding influences productivity, there is no doubt that it has the potential to benefit species that are normally less productive in garden habitats because of the lower availability of 'natural' foods. Year-round feeding with appropriate foods has the potential to support the different requirements of garden birds throughout the course of the year. More scientific work is needed, however, to further increase our understanding of the effects that feeding wild birds has on their wider populations.

## Bird-friendly garden guide . . . Which foods to provide for birds



Great Tit, by Jill Pakenham

Many garden birdwatchers provide sunflower hearts, mixed seed and peanuts as their staple foods and these are well used by sparrows, tits and finches. There are also other foods, e.g. sultanas, that are good for ground-feeding Blackbirds, while pinhead oats are ideal for fine-billed Dunnocks. Finely grated cheese and windfall apples are also useful, as are the various fat-based products, best provided free of any netting.

### Our recommendations



Mike Toms

#### Black sunflowers

Thinner shelled than the traditional striped sunflower seeds, they are well-used by Greenfinches and tits.



Mike Toms

#### Sunflower hearts

A favourite with garden birds because there is no shell to remove. Best provided in a hanging feeder.



Mike Toms

#### Seed mixes

Lots of different mixes available. Those with a low grain content are best but do cost a little more to purchase.



Mike Toms

#### Nyger seed

Suited to small-billed Goldfinch, Siskin and Lesser Redpoll, these fine seeds need their own special feeder.



#### Peanuts

Peanuts are high in the oils and proteins needed by birds and have been used for many years. Always buy good quality peanuts from a reputable source. They are best provided in a mesh feeder and put out in small quantities, so that they are not left out too long uneaten.

Provide natural foods, like berries and caterpillars, by managing your garden for wildlife. More details are available in our other leaflets or online at [www.bto.org/gbw](http://www.bto.org/gbw)

### Live foods

Live foods, like mealworms, are an increasingly popular food for birds. They are often provided throughout the year, but particularly so during the breeding season. Mealworms are not worms at all but rather the larval stage of a beetle. It is the larvae of the Yellow Mealworm *Tenebrio molitor* that are used widely as food for wild birds. Another less common but similar species, the Dark Mealworm *Tenebrio obscura* is sometimes used, the larvae being somewhat smaller in size. Mealworms are a particular favourite with Robins, Starlings and Blackbirds.



Colin Ryall

Great Spotted Woodpeckers can be attracted to hanging feeders containing peanuts or fat-based products, like these 'snack balls'.

Great Spotted Woodpecker, by Jill Pakenham



## What is Garden BirdWatch?

Garden BirdWatch is a great way to understand and help the birds and other wildlife on your doorstep. Join our community and share your interest in garden wildlife. Garden BirdWatch is organised by the BTO.

[www.bto.org/gbw](http://www.bto.org/gbw) [gbw@bto.org](mailto:gbw@bto.org) 01842-750050

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Please return this form to **Freepost RTJK-ABCB-UUEL, GBW, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, IP24 2PU** or join online at [www.bto.org/gbw](http://www.bto.org/gbw)

### Details of person(s) joining

Name: .....

Address: .....

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Your annual contribution of £17.00 helps to fund Garden BirdWatch, the analysis of your results and our wider work on garden birds.

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**When you join** Garden BirdWatch you will be joining an established community of 'citizen scientists', people with a shared interest in their gardens and the wildlife that they contain. You will also discover new and exciting things about the behaviour of birds and other species using your garden.

**A great gift** for the bird lover, Garden BirdWatch is a present with a difference and is something that lasts the whole year. If you would like to make your gift even more special then order one of our smart gift boxes (£19.95). Call us for details (01842-750050) or order online ([www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)).

**Get engaged** with your garden by becoming a BTO Garden BirdWatcher and enjoy lots of benefits.



*'Garden BirdWatch is a great way to understand and help the birds and other wildlife on your doorstep. Please help by making your garden count.'*

**Chris Packham,**  
BTO Vice-President



#### The Garden BirdWatch benefits



- A welcome pack.
- A quarterly magazine packed with interesting articles.
- Access to Garden BirdWatch Online.
- Recording forms and instructions.
- Chances to share your experiences with like-minded individuals.
- Access to the BTO's team of garden wildlife experts.
- The opportunity to contribute valuable information that can be used to help conserve birds and other wildlife.

#### Bird friendly feeding guide . . . Where and how to feed birds

Supplementary food can be provided in many ways, depending upon the type of food being used and the species for which it is intended. Try to provide a number of foods across a range of different feeding opportunities.

##### Hanging feeders and bird tables

Hanging feeders are a great way of providing seed, either as part of a mix or on its own. Select a feeder that is well made, keeps the seed inside dry and which can be taken apart easily for cleaning. The more feeding ports that a feeder has, the more birds can feed simultaneously, but do balance this against how much food the feeder can hold so you don't find yourself filling it up all of the time.

Metal feeders are best, though more expensive than plastic ones, as they are less easily damaged by squirrels. Some feeders now come with a FeedSafe™ coating, that inhibits the growth of bacteria and which may help to reduce the risk of disease transmission between feeding birds.

Simple bird tables often work best. Look for one that is robust, has drainage in case it rains, and which can be cleaned easily. Try to match the amount of food put out with the numbers of birds coming in. Brush the table down in the evening to remove uneaten food and any droppings. This also reduces the attractiveness of your garden to rats.

##### Placement and cover

It is better to have a number of smaller feeders dotted around the garden than a single large feeder. Not only does this allow birds to feed under less competitive conditions, it also allows



Reed Bunting at black sunflower seeds, by John Harding

you to provide different foods in each feeder. Feeders should be positioned close to a bush or shrub, something that places cover within easy reach if a predator should appear. Avoid placing feeders near low cover, where cats may hide, or near to an occupied nest box. To reduce the risk of birds flying into your windows, try to place feeders a little way back from your property.

##### Water in the garden

Seed-eating birds need access to clean water, which can be provided in a bird bath or garden pond. Bird baths should be cleaned regularly and you should never use antifreeze in water for birds.

##### Ground feeding and good practice

Some birds, such as Robins and Dunnocks, are generally more comfortable feeding on the ground than on hanging feeders or tables. Providing a small amount of food on the ground, perhaps within a 'Feeder Guardian' (a cage that prevents larger birds from accessing the food), can be particularly beneficial. Small seeds, dried mealworms and grated cheese are suitable for fine-billed birds like Robins.

Moving your hanging feeders and ground-feeding station around is good practice. This reduces the chances of birds picking up diseases from ground that has been contaminated by the droppings of other individuals. It also makes it more difficult for predators to predict where the birds will be feeding on a particular day.

Sunflower hearts attract a range of different birds, particularly when presented in a hanging feeder with modern perches, allowing the birds to sit face on to the feeder if they wish.



Greenfinch and Goldfinches, by Jill Pakenham

#### About the BTO

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) is a Registered Charity (No 216652 – England & Wales, No SC039193 – Scotland) dedicated to monitoring wild birds. We work with birdwatchers and scientists to produce unbiased information that is at the heart of bird conservation. Find out more about us at [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org) or write to us at: BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU.



A BTO Garden BirdWatch Guide

## FEEDING & ATTRACTING GARDEN BIRDS . . .

