

Brent Birders Garden Bird Survey (BBGBS)

OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2018 REPORT

Brent Birders

The BBGBS was launched in October 2018 as a supplement to the on-going Brent Bird Survey (BBS), which now covers the whole parish in January and May each year. The Garden Bird Survey has two aims:

1. To encourage more people to get involved in recording birds, and then perhaps other wildlife groups.
2. To find out more about the birds using houses and gardens in the parish.

The survey was promoted through the Brent Birders mailing list, the Sustainable South Brent (SSB) mailing list, the South Brent Parish Newsletter and by personal contact. However, only 25 people participated, or at least sent in October – December records, and these were almost all existing BBS participants. The level of participation was disappointing but will hopefully improve, and the data at least enable some conclusions to be drawn about the birds occurring in South Brent parish gardens in late 2018.

The gardens

All but one of the 25 gardens provided records for each month, and they were located in nine different 1-km squares (Table 1). About a quarter were large (more than half an acre), about half had ponds and all were bordered by trees and provided with bird food. Fifteen of the gardens were in one of the four 1-km squares comprising South Brent village, the remaining 10 being scattered in more rural situations (Table 2). Further analysis could perhaps compare rural and village gardens, but there are not yet enough data to compare the results from different squares.

| Table 1. THE GARDENS | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| | OCT | NOV | DEC | OVERALL |
| Number of gardens | 24 | 24 | 25 | 25 |
| Number of 1-km squares | 8 | 8 | 9 | 9 |
| Number of large gardens | 5 | 5 | 6 | 6 |
| Number of gardens with pond | 13 | 13 | 14 | 14 |
| Number of gardens with trees | 24 | 24 | 25 | 25 |
| Number of gardens with feeding | 24 | 24 | 25 | 25 |
| Total no. of species | 46 | 46 | 46 | 51 |
| Max. no. species per garden | 39 | 36 | 41 | 45 |
| Average no. species per garden | 17 | 19 | 20 | 23 |

| Table 2. NO. OF GARDENS PER SQUARE | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Square | No. |
| 18 (SX 6859) Pennaton | 1 |
| 21 (SX 6862) Didworthy | 2 |
| 24 (SX 6959) Village | 2 |
| 25 (SX 6960) Village & Aish | 5 |
| 31 (SX 7059) Village | 4 |
| 32 (SX 7060) Village | 6 |
| 36 (SX 7158) Avonwick | 3 |
| 44 (SX 7261) White Oxen | 1 |
| – (SX 7157) Avonwick | 1 |

Number of species

The total number of species recorded during the three-month period was 51, and 46 were recorded in each month (Table 1). The overall maximum number of species recorded from any one garden was 45, with the monthly maximum of 41 occurring in December. The average (mean) number of species per garden increased from 17 in October to 20 in December, and the overall average number was 23.

The species recorded

The species recorded are shown in Table 3, ranked in terms of the number of gardens in which they occurred overall, i.e., in the whole October – December period. (Species in red are those additional to the list provided on the recording form.). **Blackbird**, **Blue Tit** and **Great Tit** occurred in all 25 gardens, and a further 17 species occurred in at least half (more than 12) the gardens. At the other extreme, five species occurred in only one garden, and it happened to be the same garden for all five.

| Table 3. NUMBER OF GARDENS | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| RECORDING EACH SPECIES (ranked) | | | | |
| | OCT | NOV | DEC | Overall |
| Blackbird | 23 | 22 | 24 | 25 |
| Blue Tit | 24 | 24 | 25 | 25 |
| Great Tit | 23 | 23 | 23 | 25 |
| Coal Tit | 21 | 23 | 23 | 24 |
| Jackdaw | 21 | 23 | 22 | 24 |
| Magpie | 20 | 18 | 22 | 24 |
| Robin | 24 | 23 | 25 | 24 |
| Chaffinch | 19 | 23 | 23 | 23 |
| Wren | 16 | 16 | 18 | 23 |
| Dunnock | 18 | 19 | 21 | 22 |
| Woodpigeon | 15 | 21 | 20 | 22 |
| Collared Dove | 18 | 18 | 20 | 21 |
| Goldfinch | 17 | 20 | 18 | 21 |
| House Sparrow | 18 | 19 | 20 | 20 |
| G S Woodpecker | 7 | 15 | 16 | 18 |
| Nuthatch | 12 | 15 | 16 | 18 |
| Pied Wagtail | 6 | 10 | 15 | 16 |
| Song Thrush | 5 | 9 | 13 | 16 |
| Starling | 12 | 12 | 15 | 16 |
| Long-tailed Tit | 9 | 8 | 11 | 13 |
| Bullfinch | 4 | 6 | 9 | 12 |
| Jay | 6 | 10 | 10 | 12 |
| Greenfinch | 7 | 6 | 7 | 11 |
| Rook | 9 | 6 | 9 | 11 |
| Sparrowhawk | 6 | 4 | 4 | 11 |
| Carrion Crow | 5 | 6 | 5 | 8 |

| Table 3. (cont.) NUMBER OF GARDENS | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| RECORDING EACH SPECIES (ranked) | | | | |
| | OCT | NOV | DEC | Overall |
| Mistle Thrush | 5 | 4 | 2 | 7 |
| Redwing | 2 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Blackcap | 3 | 1 | 4 | 6 |
| Herring Gull | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Siskin | 1 | 3 | 4 | 6 |
| Tawny Owl | 5 | 3 | 5 | 6 |
| Buzzard | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| Goldcrest | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Green Woodpecker | 3 | 5 | 3 | 5 |
| Marsh Tit | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| Treecreeper | 1 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| Brambling | | 4 | | 4 |
| Chiffchaff | 3 | 1 | | 3 |
| Grey Heron | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Grey Wagtail | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Fieldfare | | 2 | | 2 |
| Little Owl | 1 | | 2 | 2 |
| Pheasant | 2 | | 2 | 2 |
| Yellowhammer | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Raven | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Reed Bunting | | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Hobby | 1 | | | 1 |
| Stock Dove | 1 | | 1 | 1 |
| Peregrine | | | 1 | 1 |
| Meadow Pipit | | 1 | | 1 |

There were no real surprises among the species recorded. Of those in red, **Raven** and **Grey Wagtail** should have been included in the original list as occasional garden visitors, and **Stock Dove** and **Meadow Pipit** occurred in a garden area adjacent to open fields. **Peregrine** and **Hobby** were recorded from this garden too, the former taking a swipe at a flock of domestic pigeons, and the latter a bird which, amazingly, returns each autumn to the site from which it was released after rehabilitation in 2014. Of the other species, it was particularly welcome to have records of the following less common garden species:

- **Blackcap.** Village (Brakefield, Centre, Plymouth Rd and Hillside) and Aish.
- **Brambling.** Village (Brakefield), Aish, Avonwick and Didworthy.
- **Marsh Tit.** Village (Exeter Rd), Aish, Didworthy, Pennaton and White Oxen.
- **Reed Bunting.** Village (Hillside).
- **Yellowhammer.** Village (Hillside) and Didworthy.

Also, **Greenfinch** was recorded from just under half the gardens. This is encouraging in view of the recent declines in this species recorded both nationally and during the SBPBS. Although probably still at a low ebb, small numbers were recorded from gardens in three of the four Village squares, and at Aish, Avonwick and Didworthy.

Maximum counts

The maximum counts recorded in any of the gardens during the October – December period are shown in Table 4. The highest counts of all were for **Starling** and **Jackdaw** and these were gatherings of roosting birds in the Village (Plymouth Rd) and Avonwick (Black Hall) respectively. There were also several gardens with counts >10 for feeding birds for these species and counts of >30 **Starlings** came from five Village gardens. The highest counts of feeding birds in other species were for: **Goldfinch** with around 30 in two Village gardens (Hillside and Pool Park) and around 20 at both Aish and Pennaton; **Chaffinch** with 25 at Didworthy; and **House Sparrow** with >20 in the Village (Plymouth Rd) and Avonwick. There were counts >10 for six other species, perhaps the most surprising being a gathering of 18 **Magpies** in a Village (Hillside) garden.

| Table 4. MAXIMUM COUNTS FOR EACH SPECIES (ranked) | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-------------|
| | OCT | NOV | DEC | OCT- DEC |
| Starling | 60 | 200 | 40 | 200 |
| Jackdaw | 40 | 40 | 80 | 80 |
| Goldfinch | 30 | 30 | 25 | 30 |
| House Sparrow | 25 | 25 | 25 | 25 |
| Pied Wagtail | 14 | 20 | 12 | 20 |
| Magpie | 7 | 4 | 18 | 18 |
| Chaffinch | 11 | 16 | 12 | 16 |
| Blue Tit | 15 | 12 | 14 | 15 |
| Coal Tit | 4 | 6 | 10 | 10 |
| Herring Gull | 10 | 4 | 6 | 10 |
| Redwing | 7 | 10 | 4 | 10 |
| Blackbird | 9 | 6 | 5 | 9 |
| Collared Dove | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| Fieldfare | | 8 | | 8 |
| Great Tit | 4 | 8 | 7 | 8 |
| Greenfinch | 4 | 6 | 8 | 8 |
| Carrion Crow | 3 | 7 | 2 | 7 |
| Long-tailed Tit | 7 | 7 | 6 | 7 |
| Rook | 6 | 5 | 5 | 6 |
| Tawny Owl | 6 | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Woodpigeon | 4 | 6 | 4 | 6 |
| Robin | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| Siskin | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| Wren | 5 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Yellowhammer | 1 | 2 | 5 | 5 |
| Bullfinch | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 |

| Table 4. (cont.) MAXIMUM COUNTS FOR EACH SPECIES (ranked) | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-------------|
| | OCT | NOV | DEC | OCT- DEC |
| Nuthatch | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| Dunnock | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Jay | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Mistle Thrush | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Raven | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Stock Dove | 3 | | 2 | 3 |
| Brambling | | 2 | | 2 |
| G S Woodpecker | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Little Owl | 1 | | 2 | 2 |
| Marsh Tit | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Reed Bunting | | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Song Thrush | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Sparrowhawk | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Blackcap | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Buzzard | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Chiffchaff | 1 | 1 | | 1 |
| Goldcrest | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Green Woodpecker | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Grey Heron | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Grey Wagtail | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Hobby | 1 | | | 1 |
| Meadow Pipit | | 1 | | 1 |
| Peregrine | | | 1 | 1 |
| Pheasant | 1 | | 1 | 1 |
| Treecreeper | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Monthly differences

In Table 1, there would be slight differences in rank order if the three months were looked at separately, but the results from each month show similar sequences of species. For several species, there was a steady increase in the number of gardens a species was recorded in over the three months, or at least a higher number in November and December than in October. Examples include **Bullfinch**, **Song Thrush** and **Great Spotted Woodpecker**. In most cases, this may represent an increase in the use of gardens, but in the case of the **Song Thrush** it is probably mainly due to the species becoming more conspicuous once they start singing in late November. The restriction of **Brambling** to November suggests that this species is, at least in 2018, more of an autumn passage migrant to South Brent than a winter visitor. The lack of **Chiffchaff** records in December, in contrast to the occurrence of **Blackcap** in four gardens, confirms that for these two species of warbler that overwinter in small numbers, gardens were more important for **Blackcaps** (although, as visitors to garden feeders, more likely to be seen). Both species occurred, as autumn migrants, in three gardens in October.

Discussion

The survey has not resulted in any large increase in participation in South Brent bird surveys, but the monthly focus on gardens has certainly added to our knowledge of some species – assuming that the birds were all identified correctly! New participants in particular need to be aware of the differences between such species as **Brambling** and **Chaffinch**, **Blackcap** and **Marsh Tit** and **Mistle Thrush** and **Fieldfare**, especially if seen only briefly, at distance and/or in poor light.

Results from the January – April period, and perhaps from an extension of the survey into the breeding season, should reveal yet more information, and if people can be persuaded to repeat the survey in future years, it will provide a very valuable additional tool for monitoring birds in the local area.

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