

Brent Birders Garden Bird Survey (BBGBS) 2018/19 REPORT

The BBGBS was launched in October 2018 as a supplement to the on-going Parish Bird Survey (SBPBS), which now attempts to cover 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 in the parish.
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. A total of 30 people participated over the October – April period, but not necessarily in every month, so that the monthly participation ranged 22 to 30, the majority of whom were already participants in the Parish Bird Survey.

The gardens

All but one of the 30 gardens were within the South Brent Parish Bird Survey area and located in 10 different 1-km squares (Tables 1 and 2). About a quarter were large (more than half an acre), half had ponds, all were bordered by trees and in all but three the birds were fed. Fifteen of the gardens were within the four 1-km squares comprising South Brent village, the remaining 10 being scattered in more rural situations (hamlets). Several participants did not continue with the survey after December, so that the number of gardens involved was only 23 from January to April.

Table 1. THE GARDENS			
	OCT- DEC	JAN- APR	OCT- APR
Number of gardens	30	23	30
Number of 1-km squares	10	9	10
Number of large gardens	7	7	7
Number of gardens with pond	15	15	15
Number of gardens with trees	30	23	30
Number of gardens with feeding	27	22	27
Total no. of species	51	59	61
Max. no. species per garden	45	50	52
Average no. species per garden	23	26	26

Table 2. OVERALL NUMBER OF GARDENS PER SQUARE	
Square	No.
18 (SX 6859) Pennaton	1
21 (SX 6862) Didworthy	2
24 (SX 6959) Village	4
25 (SX 6960) Village & Aish	6
26 (SX 6961) Lutton	1
31 (SX 7059) Village	4
32 (SX 7060) Village	6
36 (SX 7158) Avonwick	4
44 (SX 7261) White Oxen	1
– (SX 7157) Avonwick	1

Number of species

The total number of species recorded during the whole period was 61, and the number of species per month ranged from 45 in February to 54 in April (Table 3). The overall maximum number of species recorded from any one garden was 52, and the average (mean) per garden was 26.4. The number of species was slightly higher during the January–April period than during October–December.

The species recorded

Most of the species recorded are listed in Table 3, ranked in terms of the number of gardens in which they occurred overall, i.e., in the whole October–April period. Other species, occurring in only a single garden and not typical garden species were **Canada Goose**, **Great and Lesser Black-backed Gulls**, **Hobby**, **Mallard**, **Peregrine**, **Red Kite** and **Sand Martin**. Some of these were just passing through, but the **Peregrine** took a swipe at a flock of domestic pigeons, and the **Hobby** was a bird which, amazingly, returns each autumn to the site from which it was released after rehabilitation in 2014 and is still happy to take day-old chicks, in spite of its annual travels to Africa in between.

Table 3. THE NUMBER OF GARDENS RECORDING EACH SPECIES (ranked overall) AND OVERALL MAXIMUM COUNTS PER GARDEN FOR EACH SPECIES (MAX)

	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	OVERALL	MAX	
<i>Number of gardens</i>	27	29	30	23	23	22	23	30		
Blackbird	26	27	29	23	24	20	23	30	9	Blackbird
Blue Tit	27	28	29	22	23	21	22	29	15	Blue Tit
Jackdaw	23	27	25	21	22	19	21	29	80	Jackdaw
Magpie	23	21	24	20	20	18	20	29	18	Magpie
Robin	27	27	29	20	22	20	21	29	6	Robin
Wren	18	19	21	15	19	14	18	29	5	Wren
Chaffinch	21	26	26	21	23	19	20	28	30	Chaffinch
Woodpigeon	18	26	25	21	23	20	20	28	16	Woodpigeon
Coal Tit	22	25	26	21	18	16	18	27	10	Coal Tit
Great Tit	25	25	24	21	21	19	22	27	9	Great Tit
House Sparrow	19	22	22	16	20	17	21	27	25	House Sparrow
Collared Dove	20	21	21	17	18	16	19	26	9	Collared Dove
Dunnock	21	22	24	20	21	17	19	26	5	Dunnock
Long-tailed Tit	11	11	13	18	20	14	11	26	20	Long-tailed Tit
Goldfinch	19	22	20	17	16	15	19	25	30	Goldfinch
G S Woodpecker	8	15	19	12	15	13	15	24	2	G S Woodpecker
Nuthatch	13	19	18	16	15	13	13	24	4	Nuthatch
Pied Wagtail	8	12	17	9	15	9	12	23	70	Pied Wagtail
Bullfinch	6	8	9	9	11	8	12	21	5	Bullfinch
Greenfinch	8	7	8	10	9	8	12	21	8	Greenfinch
Song Thrush	6	11	16	8	8	6	12	21	2	Song Thrush
Starling	12	13	17	12	8	10	9	19	200	Starling
Jay	9	12	11	10	11	9	8	17	3	Jay
Rook	11	8	11	9	12	11	11	17	6	Rook
Blackcap	4	2	5	5	6	2	8	16	2	Blackcap
Carrion Crow	6	9	7	6	6	7	9	14	7	Carrion Crow
Sparrowhawk	6	4	4	4	2	4	2	14	3	Sparrowhawk
Tawny Owl	7	3	5	6	7	4	4	12	6	Tawny Owl
Siskin	1	3	4	6	7	5	9	11	8	Siskin
Chiffchaff	3	1	-	-	-	2	6	9	1	Chiffchaff
Herring Gull	5	6	7	8	6	4	7	9	20	Herring Gull
Mistle Thrush	6	5	3	3	7	4	3	9	3	Mistle Thrush
Treecreeper	2	4	4	2	6	4	3	9	1	Treecreeper
Green Woodpecker	3	7	3	3	4	2	2	8	1	Green Woodpecker
Pheasant	3	1	3	3	5	3	2	7	2	Pheasant
Redwing	2	5	6	2	3	1	1	7	35	Redwing
Buzzard	3	5	4	4	5	5	4	6	9	Buzzard
Goldcrest	1	2	2	1	-	1	2	6	1	Goldcrest
Grey Heron	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	6	1	Grey Heron
Marsh Tit	4	3	3	4	4	2	4	6	2	Marsh Tit
Swallow	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	5	4	Swallow
Yellowhammer	1	2	1	1	4	1	-	5	5	Yellowhammer
Brambling	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	4	2	Brambling
Fieldfare	-	3	1	-	2	-	-	3	8	Fieldfare
Grey Wagtail	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	3	2	Grey Wagtail
House Martin	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	6	House Martin
Little Owl	1	-	2	1	-	-	-	2	2	Little Owl
Raven	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	4	Raven
Reed Bunting	-	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	Reed Bunting
Stock Dove	1	-	1	1	-	1	1	2	3	Stock Dove
Barn Owl	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	Barn Owl
Lesser Redpoll	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	Lesser Redpoll
Meadow Pipit	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	22	Meadow Pipit
<i>No. of other species</i>	1	-	1	1	2	3	6	8		
TOTAL NO. SPECIES	46	46	46	47	45	49	54	61		

Among the species listed in Table 3, only **Blackbird** was recorded in all 30 gardens, but a further five species - **Blue Tit**, **Jackdaw**, **Magpie**, **Robin** and **Wren** - occurred in all but one. Twenty-five species occurred in at least half the gardens. There were no real surprises in this list, nor in the species that were less frequently encountered, but the following were of particular interest:

- **Barn Owl.** Not a typical garden bird, but one visited a garden on the edge of the Village (Hillside) where there was a captive Barn Owl, on several occasions in early April.
- **Blackcap.** Wintering (Nov–Mar) birds occurred in several gardens in all Village squares, plus Aish and Avonwick, and then became more widespread as migrants arrived in April.
- **Brambling.** Only recorded in one Village square, Aish, Avonwick and Didworthy.
- **Greenfinch.** Occurrence in 21 gardens 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 both Village and outlying hamlets.
- **Lesser Redpoll.** A rare garden visitor and very localised in South Brent parish (mostly just below the Avon Dam from April to July). One occurred in April at White Oxen, following another there in August 2016.
- **Marsh Tit.** Mostly in the hamlets, recorded from Aish, Didworthy, Pennaton and White Oxen gardens, but only one in the Village.
- **Meadow Pipit.** Not a typical garden bird, and most likely in those adjacent to fields and in cold weather. Only recorded from one Village garden
- **Reed Bunting.** An uncommon garden species but recorded in two gardens in the Village (Hillside).
- **Stock Dove.** Frequent in the countryside and often associated with farm buildings, but normally avoids gardens; however, recorded in two gardens during the survey, in the Village (Hillside) and at Didworthy.
- **Yellowhammer.** An uncommon garden species but recorded five gardens, in the Village (Hillside), Aish, Didworthy and Avonwick.

Maximum counts

The maximum counts recorded in any of the gardens are shown in Table 3. The highest counts of all were of gatherings of roosting birds including **Starling** (200 in the Village (Clobells) and 100 at Pennaton), **Jackdaw** (80 at Avonwick) and **Pied Wagtail** (70 in the Village (Hillside)). 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 three Village gardens and around 20 at both Aish and Pennaton; **Chaffinch** with 30 in a Village garden and 25 at Didworthy; and **House Sparrow** with >20 in the Village and Avonwick. There were counts >10 for six other species, perhaps the most surprising being the gatherings of 18 **Magpies** in a Village (Hillside) garden and 22 **Meadow Pipits** in the same garden.

Monthly differences

Up until February, between 45 and 47 species were recorded each month, followed by a slight increase in March and a larger jump to 54 in April, only partly due to the arrival of some summer visitors (Table 1). In terms of individual species, most showed little change in the number of gardens in which they were recorded from month to month, but this needs to take into account the fact that fewer gardens were involved in the survey in early 2019 (23) than in late 2018 (30). [Results might be clearer if expressed as %s but I couldn't be arsed.] Some of the more obvious variations include:

- **Brambling.** Only recorded in November suggesting autumn migrants rather than wintering birds.
- **Blackcap.** Mostly in April, coinciding with the arrival of summer visitors, though present in a few gardens all winter.
- **Bullfinch, Greenfinch and Siskin.** Mostly in April, possibly linked to natural food supplies running out. Same could perhaps apply to **Lesser Redpoll**, only recorded in April.
- **Chiffchaff.** Absent in December, January and February, indicating that those in gardens are departing and arriving summer visitors rather than wintering birds.
- **House Martin and Swallow.** Only occurred in April as arriving summer visitors.
- **Long-tailed Tit, Treecreeper and Yellowhammer.** Peaks in January and/or February.
- **Song Thrush and Starling.** Peaks in December.

Differences between gardens

As well as broad similarities in the species found in different gardens, there were also differences, and it could be argued that no two gardens are the same. With information on only 30 gardens, however, exploring these differences is difficult. On top of that only limited information was collected on each garden: location; size (but only on whether more or less than half an acre, and only seven fell into the 'large' category); presence/absence of a pond (but a pond was not defined); presence/absence of trees (but all had trees!); and whether the birds were fed (in all but three gardens they were). As a result, only location merits analysis, and even here, there are not enough gardens to compare squares, so a simple division into Village and Hamlets provides an opportunity to explore whether gardens in the more rural locations of Aish, Avonwick, Didworthy, Lutton, Pennaton and White Oxen (combined) show any differences when compared with

those in the Village. The results, shown in Table 4, do indicate some clear differences, not all easily explained but broadly agreeing with casual observations and what might be expected.

Table 4. NUMBER OF GARDENS FOR SPECIES SHOWING THE LARGEST DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VILLAGE AND HAMLETS

	VILLAGE	HAMLETS
<i>Number of gardens</i>	16	14
Species occurring more in Village		
Blackcap	11	5
Bullfinch	14	7
Chiffchaff	7	2
Goldcrest	5	1
Greenfinch	14	7
Herring Gull	8	1
House Sparrow	16	11
Reed Bunting	2	-
Rook	12	5
Sparrowhawk	10	4
Starling	14	5
Species occurring more in Hamlets		
Brambling	1	3
Green Woodpecker	2	6
Marsh Tit	1	5
Pheasant	1	6
Yellowhammer	1	4

Discussion

The survey has not resulted in a large increase in participation in South Brent bird surveys. However, although all conclusions are tentative because of the small number of gardens involved, the fact that they were not randomly selected and because no statistical analysis has been carried out, the survey has added to our knowledge of the distribution and occurrence of garden birds in the parish. If enough people can be persuaded to participate next winter and beyond, the BBGBS could become an effective way of monitoring parish birds, in addition to the SBPBS.

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Peter Reay

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