

The Big Garden Birdwatch



This year nearly 530,000 people took part in the Big Garden Birdwatch, organised by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) on 30/31 January 2010.

People are asked to spend an hour watching the birds in their garden during the last weekend in January and report the maximum number of each species at any one time during that hour. In 2010 they counted eight and a half million birds.

Initial results have been published and are given as overall results, separated by country and by county. The results use the average number of birds from each species per garden and the percentage of gardens where each species was recorded to track population changes.

A number of people around the parish participate in this project and eight have sent me their records for this year. Some regular contributors were away over the survey weekend.

The eight observers I have information for recorded 334 birds of 25 species. That is an average of 42 birds and 14 species per garden. The range was 20–61 birds and 10–20 species per garden. Nothing very rare was recorded but six species were not in the national top 20: moorhen (2 gardens), pied wagtail (4), blackcap (1), redwing (1), rook (1), bullfinch (1). The one species in the national top 20 and not recorded here was feral pigeon.

Only five species were recorded by all observers (house-sparrow, blue tit, blackbird, wood pigeon and robin); starling, chaffinch and dunnock just failed. Some people bemoaned the absence during the count of species they regularly see, but that is always the way with such surveys; perhaps most notable was that nobody saw a great spotted woodpecker.

It's a small sample, but perhaps worth comparing with the national and county figures.

Nationally, species are ranked according to the average number of birds per garden counted. Thus this year house sparrow was number one, with 3.77 per garden, and goldfinch number 10 with 1.29 per garden. Doing the same thing with our records, greenfinch, goldfinch and rook ranked higher than national; collared dove, magpie and woodpigeon lower. In 2009, long-tailed tit crept into the top 10 nationally. It slipped to 12 this year, but was recorded in half the Plumpton gardens.

For the most part the number of each species per garden was pretty similar to the national and county average, but we did much better for house sparrow, chaffinch and blue tit.

Well, I don't quite know what that means; perhaps not very much at the moment, but in a few years time we may be able to compare rates of change and may have a clearer idea of which species of conservation concern are doing well in Plumpton and which we feel we should try to help a bit.

Tony Hutson
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