

Wildlife during Lockdown (part 2)



Well here we all are, another month gone, another month in Lockdown. Or are we? Perhaps we're in a state of heightened 'alertness'. It's very difficult to know. Alertness should be an excellent state in which to observe wildlife, particularly if you have monitoring and recording in mind. Like last month, we have contributions from Committee members on how they have been spending their time under house arrest. Highlights for me this month have been hearing cuckoos and the almost constant serenading of song thrushes without the background noise of too many cars. We had hoped that less man-made disturbance might encourage house martins to return after many years, but sadly nothing... yet. And if you want some help with identification, this is a link to the FSC field guides site

<https://www.field-studies-council.org/product-category/publications/>

David Phillips

Many people take part in the annual Big Garden Birdwatch scheme that takes place at the end of January each year. Have you found yourself watching the birds for longer during the Covid-19 restrictions and feeling a closer connection with the birds because you have more time to sit and stare? Did you know that the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) runs a weekly Garden Birdwatch scheme as a more in-depth citizen-science project, which has been running for 25 years. It normally costs £17 per annum to be a member of this scheme, but in trying to help people through the isolation period you can join the scheme for free. Contribute to our understanding of Britain's birds and get more pleasure from your garden today. For more information please go to <https://bto.org/our-science/projects/gbw>. You never know – you might get hooked for life!

Carole Nicholson

I, too, enrolled with the BTO's Garden BirdWatch, something I've been meaning to do for 25 years. Each week you report which species you have seen

(with the option for recording the maximum number for each species), and there are opportunities to record a range of other garden wildlife along the way. The BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) does all the number crunching, so one is just engaging in a bit of 'citizen science' along with getting some COVID-19 therapy. I've been very impressed with the wide range of 'citizen science' projects being offered by a wide range of wildlife organisations, from local organisations such as the Sussex Wildlife Trust and South Downs Biosphere Reserve project to national organisations for butterflies, birds, plants, etc.

One of my own little projects concerns the stock doves that have started coming to the garden. I have noted a maximum number of three, but began to notice variation in the little black patches near the ends of the wing. So, I started taking photographs and trying to work out how many individuals are visiting and how frequently each visits. At first I was beginning to think there was quite a lot of individuals, but then realised that the patches can vary depending on the side of the bird, whether its feathers are puffed up, if it's warm or cold, hungry or amorous; in the end there appears to be only the three or four individuals.

In the early days of confinement I did a bit of nest box maintenance and nest site creation with some good results with at least eight species of bird nesting around the garden. I also intended to do a bit more invertebrate stuff in the garden and got myself a new caterpillar guide, but haven't found too many yet to test myself with, and trying to pick up on a few groups of insects I used to work with many years ago, such as crane-flies, and finding that quite hard work. And I haven't got to setting up the light trap yet, but I will...

Despite the restrictions I have been able to get out to do a little of my regular survey and monitoring of very local sites. And because of the travel restrictions, I've had some other new experiences, such as attending an annual international bat meeting I go to, but this time from my desk via 'Zoom' for one item (on COVID-19 and bats!)

Tony Hutson