

## SDOS GARDEN BIRDS 2019

The number of members who send in records from their gardens in 2019 was slightly lower this year, at 24. I started to co-ordinate the SDOS Garden Bird Survey back in 2009 and remarkably, 16 of the participants in 2009 are still taking part in 2019, so special thanks are due to Reg Bradbury, Brian Clay, Jay Cooper, John Cooper, Martin Ford, Clive Hope, Laurie Keen, Cyril & Maureen Leeves, Sheila Marshall, John & Shena Maskell, Anthony Robinson, John & Jeanette Simpson, Gordon & Vera Tickler, Rae Titcomb, David Tomalin and Peter Whitcomb. Looking at the list from 2009, I note that several were members who have sadly now passed away, Stanley Allen, Mike Hall, Brian Metcalfe, Roy Sandison and Jim Steedman. Other regulars who have joined since then and have taken part for several years are Val Bentley, Tony Benton, Paula Blake, John Feest, Janet Paterson, Marion Taylor and Martin Wilson, while taking part for the first time in 2019 was Jayne Rudge. There were 22 forms returned for the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarters and 20 for the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

I spent a few happy hours putting the weekly totals onto a spreadsheet, which helps me make some sort of sense of the figures. It only takes one sighting of a species in one quarter to "count". The table below shows the 15 most frequently seen birds during the year, compared with the previous 3 years.

### Top 15 Species

Species	Average % of gardens used each quarter	Overall position				Maximum number seen at one time (Observer & week)	Average number seen per week all gardens
		2019	2018	2017	2016		
Blue Tit	100	1	1=	2=	4=	21 (Blake 14 & 21 Jul)	2.21
Blackbird	98.8	2=	4	4	1	10 (Blake 5 May & 22 Dec)	1.68
Woodpigeon	98.8	2=	1=	1	2	12 (Blake 22 Dec)	2.16
Magpie	97.6	4	6	7	9	6 (Keen 9 Jun & Marshall 2 Jun, 1 Sep)	1.04
Robin	96.6	5	3	2=	3	8 (Blake 5 May)	0.97
Great Tit	91.8	6	5	5	4=	11 (Blake 14 Jul, 22 Sep)	1.39
Dunnock	82.3	7	7	6	6	6 (Blake 8 Sep, Robinson 18 Aug)	0.95
Goldfinch	80.0	8	8	8	13	28 (Marshall 22 Dec)	1.96
House Sparrow	73.4	9	12	9	7=	49 (Maskell 10 Nov)	4.15
Starling	72.0	10	10	13	11	c60 (Jay Cooper 10 Mar)	3.32
Carrion Crow	71.9	11	9	10	12	5 (Keen 27 Oct)	0.51
Wren	67.3	12	13	11	10	5 (Blake 23 Jun)	0.47
Collared Dove	64.1	13	11	12	7=	6 (Blake 3 & 17 Nov)	0.46
Greenfinch	60.6	14	16	16	14	12 (Bentley 12 Nov)	0.72
Herring Gull	57.1	15	15	14	15	11 (Feest 30 Jun)	0.81

I thought it would be interesting to go back to 2009 to see if there have been any major changes in the order of species at the top of the list, but discovered that back then I had summarised the results separately for each quarter and only for the 10 species seen the most. However, back then Greenfinch figured in the top 10 in each quarter, averaging out at 86% of gardens during 2009 placing it just above Woodpigeon at 86.3%, whereas in 2019, Woodpigeon is 2<sup>nd</sup> equal, a leap from 7<sup>th</sup> in 2009, and Greenfinch languishes in 14<sup>th</sup>. The decline in the Greenfinch population due to the disease Trichomonosis is well documented, if not reflected in my own garden where the species is frequently the most numerous! The frequency with which Magpie is recorded has increased steadily since 2016; in only two of the four quarters of 2009 did it feature in the top 10.

There are only slight changes in order from 2018. As noted, Magpie stepped up a couple of places, probably not a welcome occurrence, Greenfinch showed a slight improvement, edging into 14th, and knocking Long-tailed Tit down into the “also rans”

The most numerous species recorded in 2019 was House Sparrow with a total of 4,634 birds recorded, with Starling a little way behind at 2,623.

### The “Also Rans”

Regularly recorded, but not in the top 15, were:

Species	Average % of gardens used			
	2019	2018	2017	2016
Long-tailed Tit	49%	62%	50%	37%
Chaffinch	47%	49%	53%	52%
Great Spotted Woodpecker	36%	41%	48%	38%
Chiffchaff	35%	24%	36%	26%
Song Thrush	34%	42%	39%	37%
Coal Tit	33%	35%	28%	20%
Goldcrest	33%	36%	35%	30%
Blackcap	33%	38%	32%	40%
Jay	32%	34%	31%	27%
Jackdaw	30%	28%	31%	18%
Sparrowhawk	28%	28%	22%	18%
Feral Pigeon	24%	27%	21%	21%

Very little change here from the previous year. Long-tailed Tit was back to roughly the level of 2017 after a rise in 2018, and Chiffchaff recovered from a low occurrence in 2018. It was a third year of decline for Chaffinch, and Song Thrush was at its lowest level since 2015.

### Some Garden Highlights

#### First Quarter

There were 41 different species recorded. The only Reed Bunting of the year was in my garden in early March, Laurie reported a male Firecrest in five different weeks, Brian, John & Shena and Janet were visited by Redwings, a single Grey Wagtail frequented Marion’s garden during January though was not seen again until November, and a real surprise for David was a Grey Heron perched on the ridge tiles of their house in Findon, especially as they have no pond! A Red-legged Partridge strutted around my garden briefly on 14<sup>th</sup> March. Wintering Blackcaps were seen in 10 gardens, with Brian, John & Shena and Rae seeing them regularly. The maximum seen was four (two pairs) by John & Shena in mid-February. Eleven gardens recorded Chiffchaffs – all were in March bar one, a single bird at Peter’s in mid-February. The surprise of the century though was at Paula’s in Henfield on 15<sup>th</sup> March, when she looked from her shed window towards her comprehensive bird feeding station and saw a female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker thereupon – she said she had never felt so frustrated not to have a camera to hand!

#### Second Quarter

Forty species this quarter, including a few Willow Warblers in April as they returned from their winter haunts, and were seen by Paula, John F, John & Shena, Marion and Peter. Two Garden Warblers were reported, one by John & Shena on two occasions, and another seen several times by John & Jeannette. The only Mistle Thrush sighting was by Paula, of a single bird during two consecutive weeks in April. John & Shena saw a Whitethroat, and Blackcaps were regular visitors to both Paula and Laurie, who reported six males on the 8th April.

#### Third Quarter

Down to 39 different species, but with youngsters around there were some good numbers of the more common ones. In the week of 14<sup>th</sup> July Paula counted 21 Blue Tits at her feeding station and John F reckoned that Starlings and House Sparrow numbers were about 50 apiece. During September Reg had up to 16 Goldfinches, while Laurie and John F tied for the most Long-tailed Tits counted - 19! Brian had two Willow Warblers in July, Reg saw a

Whitethroat in August and a Spotted Flycatcher visited Laurie's bird bath four times between 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> September.

#### **Fourth Quarter**

There were 43 different species between October and December. It was John Cs turn to have a Grey Heron, and mine to have a Firecrest. Once again Brian and John & Shena saw Redwings, with Brian recording three in mid-November and eight in the first week of December. The highest number of Starlings was 50 at John & Jeannette's in October, and it must have been quite a challenge for John & Shena to count 49 House Sparrows in November! December Blackcaps were seen by Brian, Clive, Laurie, John & Shena and Martin W.

#### **In Summary**

The gardens participating in the survey were distributed throughout the SDOS area. The locations were Brighton (2), Ferring (2), Findon (1), Goring (1), Henfield (2), High Salvington (2), Hove (1), Lancing (3), Rustington (1), Shoreham (6), Southwick (1), Steyning (1) and Worthing (1). The total of 51 different species recorded was two fewer than in 2018, though the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker is likely to be a first ever! Nine other species were seen in only one garden, Grey Wagtail, Mistle Thrush, Pheasant, Red-legged Partridge, Reed Bunting, Treecreeper, Moorhen, Spotted Flycatcher and Swift.

The BTO's national Garden Birdwatch results (*Bird Table Spring 2020*) are not quite identical to ours, with Great Tit in 5<sup>th</sup> place, while Magpie is down at 9<sup>th</sup> Jackdaw is 14<sup>th</sup> nationally, but 25<sup>th</sup> for SDOS, Coal Tit is in 12<sup>th</sup> place nationally but 21<sup>st</sup> for us; however, Herring Gull is 15<sup>th</sup> here, but right down at 33<sup>rd</sup> for the UK as a whole!

It has been 25 years since the BTO launched their Garden Birdwatch scheme, and their review of changes during this time brings home the losses of species such as Song Thrush and Greenfinch, which we have also seen, and increases in numbers of Wood Pigeons, Goldfinches and Nuthatches – though the latter species are hardly found south of the Downs, and hence only recorded in the gardens located in Findon, Henfield and High Salvington. And so near and yet so far – Peter saw a Black Redstart on a neighbour's roof on 20<sup>th</sup> October!

Many thanks to all those taking part in the SDOS Garden Birdwatch for their observations and comments.

**Val Bentley**