

Summer Garden Bird Survey 2013

A comparison of this year's summer birds with last year's reveals a few changes but one has to allow for observer bias and much better weather.

This year's total is five more than 2012 with 57 species seen using the garden for feeding, or potentially so, and the average number of species per week going up from 20 to 24. The better weather of course meant more time spent in the garden so this may account for some of the difference. The feeding regime was much the same in both years with some food occasionally put out on the bird table - whenever there were left-overs - and many birds coming to share the food put out for the chickens each day and to root around in the compost.

The majority of birds, however, are simply using the wide range of shrubs and other habitats in which the garden abounds. The top ten species in each year was the same with two exceptions. Both years featured Jackdaw, Blackbird, Wren, Blue Tit, Wood Pigeon, Robin, Dunnock, Magpie and Great Tit, but Goldcrest slipped out of the top ten in 2013 to be replaced by Collared Dove. Goldcrest was indeed the only species to show a major decline. Or is it my hearing starting to go?

Swifts were present for three weeks fewer than last year due to a later arrival and an earlier departure but this is proportionately quite significant as the birds stay only for a few weeks anyway : sixteen weeks in 2012 and thirteen in 2013. Other migrants such as Swallow, Blackcap, Chiffchaff and House Martin appeared stable, at least in timing if not in numbers.

Several species showed what might be real increases; including Long-tailed Tit, Coal Tit, Buzzard, Song Thrush, Goldfinch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch and Red Kite. New birds in 2013 were Raven, seen flying low over the garden on two occasions, and sightings on single dates of Treecreeper, Redwing, Moorhen, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Grey Wagtail, Spotted Flycatcher and Lesser Blackbacked and Black headed Gulls. The latter two species are included because they were feeding on flying ants as they emerged from the garden on 16th August. A Migrant Hawker dragonfly and several wasps and Blue Tits were also joining in the feeding frenzy.

It was especially satisfying to see Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Spotted Flycatcher again as both were once regular visitors to the garden which have become extremely scarce in recent years. The woodpecker was a

female which visited one of our ancient apple trees in the walled garden on 6th September, and the two Spotted Flycatchers were almost certainly passage birds which were hunting for insects in the trees overhanging the stream on the edge of the property on 18th September. The Redwing crept in because of the late spring, several birds fossicking through the leaf litter at the end of the garden on 24th March. Siskin too lingered for longer than usual, increasing their weekly occurrences from one in 2012 to six in 2013. The Grey Wagtail was an early autumn arrival on 26th September, our moss-covered roofs providing it with a habitat not so far removed from its more usual mountain and streamside terrain.

Br. John