



Friends of City Gardens

Big Garden Birdwatch in the City 30th/31st January 2016

This was the 9th year volunteers have counted birds in City gardens as part of the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch. The number of species observed was 14, up from 12 from last year; the number of individual birds was also up with 126 counted (146 including the Temple gardens, which was not previously included in the count). The increase in both species and absolute numbers is explained by the increase in sites from 12 to 16 different gardens (17 including the Temple).

Results

Woodpigeons again headed the list as the most common species, followed by Blue tits. The number of Goldfinches recorded this year continues to reflect the success of this species in the urban environment and a flock of 11 individuals was observed in the Barbican. The Summer Breeding Bird Survey 2015¹ also recorded this species as the second most commonly observed bird in the City with 67 observations from 40 sites. In contrast, no



Greenfinches were recorded for the fourth successive year. The Greenfinch was once a common breeding bird in the City but has not been recorded in the RSPB Birdwatches since 2012, although they were observed in the 2015 Summer Breeding Bird Survey. This decline in the population may be the result of trichomonosis, a disease caused by a parasite that has reduced Greenfinch populations throughout the UK. This emphasises the importance of maintaining good hygiene by regular disinfection of feeders.

Two relatively rare birds were also recorded this year - a pair of Coal tits in Barbican Fann Street and a pair of Grey Wagtails near the Golden Lane pond. Grey Wagtails are clearly breeding in the City with a number of sightings of pairs feeding young in the summer.

Concerns

The decline of the House sparrow has been noted in previous reports and is well documented. Only two individuals were spotted this year in the Barbican. There is still a small colony in Fortune Park on the northern border of the Barbican Estate and a flock of 12 were observed here on the 31st, although this observation is not included in these results.

¹ <http://www.friendsofcitygardens.org.uk/RoofTopBirds2015.pdf>

The 30th/31st January were wet and very windy this year which may partially account for lower number of sightings of some species than expected. However, garden birds need both cover and food to survive and breed successfully. In a number of gardens neither adequate cover nor feeders nor plants that are berry or seed bearing are present. It is particularly disappointing to see that this is still the case in gardens that have been designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation for a number of years.

It was also disappointing to see that where there were feeders they were often empty and looked in need of a clean. Most gardens still do not have bird baths and where they are present they were also not clean. There are a few exemplary gardens, namely St Dunstan's in the East and Barbican gardens Fann Street and Thomas More. The number of different species and total number of individual birds observed in these gardens is proof that where there is food, cover and water that birds thrive. We understand that since the Birdwatch City gardeners have been reminded to keep feeders clean and topped up and we hope that consistent feeding will now continue.

How we can improve

The issue of providing and managing specific habitats to encourage target species, such as the House sparrow and other garden birds, is addressed in the City's new Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) that will be launched in spring 2016. Specific habitat action plans will be developed for all the SLINC sites over the next five years. Dense cover from ground level to shrub layer and tree canopy is essential. This should comprise a mix of evergreen shrubs, climbers like ivy, and seed producing or berry bearing plants that provide forage in the winter months.

Table 1: 2012 - 2016 Birdwatch results

	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Woodpigeon	23	25	25	28	23
Blue tit	18	23	21	27	26
Goldfinch	16	20	6	1	12
Blackbird	17	14	19	19	29
Great tit	12	8	13	11	5
Carrion crow	7	6	3	7	8
Magpie	8	6	1	4	8
Robin	11	5	10	7	12
Dunnock	3	4	3	3	5
Chaffinch		2	3	3	2
Starling		1	1		
Greenfinch					6
House sparrow	2		3	1	3
Wren	4		2	1	3
Others	2	3	2	6	6
Total species	14	12	14	13	14
Total individuals	126	117	112	118	148

Note: 2016 includes counts from 17 gardens (2015 12 gardens). The figures for 2016 based on the 12 gardens counted in 2015 are 13 species and 116 individuals.

Other surveys

As well as the annual Big Garden Birdwatch at the end of January, birds are monitored throughout the year. The Summer Breeding Bird Survey, carried out in 2015, recorded 49 different species in the City, of which 28 were probably breeding. The Survey will be repeated this summer. All the results of the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch and the Summer Breeding Birds Survey are recorded on the GiGL (Greenspace Information for Great London) database. Breeding success is also monitored annually when the bird boxes in the City are cleaned. The results of the Nest Box survey are given below.

Nest box survey November 2015

All the nest boxes in City gardens were cleaned 19/20th November 2015. In total for the 2015 nesting season:

- 40 nest boxes were checked and cleaned in 14 gardens.
- 16 of the boxes had nests (40%) including four possibly partial and not completed - in comparison to 31% in the 2014 nesting season.
- The majority of nests were those of Great tits (66%) with the remainder Blue tits and one Wren nest.

Table 2: Nest boxes and number of nests for 2015 season

	2015		2014	
	No. boxes	No. nests	No. boxes	No. nests
Barbican - Fann Street	2	1	4	1
Barbican - Speed	1	1	1	1
Barbican - St Giles	2	2	2	1
Barbican - Thomas More	7	5	7	2
Barbican - Upper Podium Cromwell Tower	3	0	NA	NA
Bernard Morgan/Golden Lane	1	0	1	1
Bunhill Fields	6	2	5	1
Christchurch Greyfriars	NA	NA	13	1
Cleary Garden	2	1	2	1
Finsbury Circus	2	1	1	0
Postman's Park	3	1	3	1
St Botolph without Bishopsgate	1	<i>Not checked</i>	1	<i>Not checked</i>
St Dunstan's in the East	6	0	3	1
St Mary Aldermanbury	1	1	1	<i>Not checked</i>
St Paul's Cathedral	4	1	5	1
Total	41	16	49	12
Occupancy of checked boxes (excl. Christchurch Greyfriars)	40%		31%	

Water birds



Every year the water birds on the Barbican Lakes are counted during the Birdwatch weekend.

Moorhens, Coots and Mallards are consistently present - as is a Heron. Although it failed to put in an appearance this year, it is a regular visitor to the Lakeside. As are a pair of Grey Wagtails that breed in the Barbican and are regularly seen catching insects over the water.

Table 3: Water birds - observed on the Barbican Lakes 2012 - 2016

	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Blackheaded gull	3	2			13
Coot	3	6	3	5	5
Egyptian goose				2	2
Heron					1
Mallard	4	22	6	16	30
Moorhen	7	2	5	6	6
Total species	4	4	3	4	6
Total individuals	17	32	14	29	57