



!Friends of City Gardens

Big Garden Birdwatch in the City 25/26 January 2020



Starling St Paul's Churchyard

2021 was the 14th year volunteers have counted birds in City gardens as part of the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch. Because of the COVID pandemic, counting was carried out by individuals in their own family bubbles and for the first time there was no group walk. Fourteen years of data provides a useful comparative resource to look at trends in the relative numbers of different species through time. This year 15 species were observed. This is a reduction from 2020 and is probably the result of very cold weather over the count weekend that may have deterred both birds and observers! The individual bird count was also down from 214 to 134 this year.

Results (see Table 1)

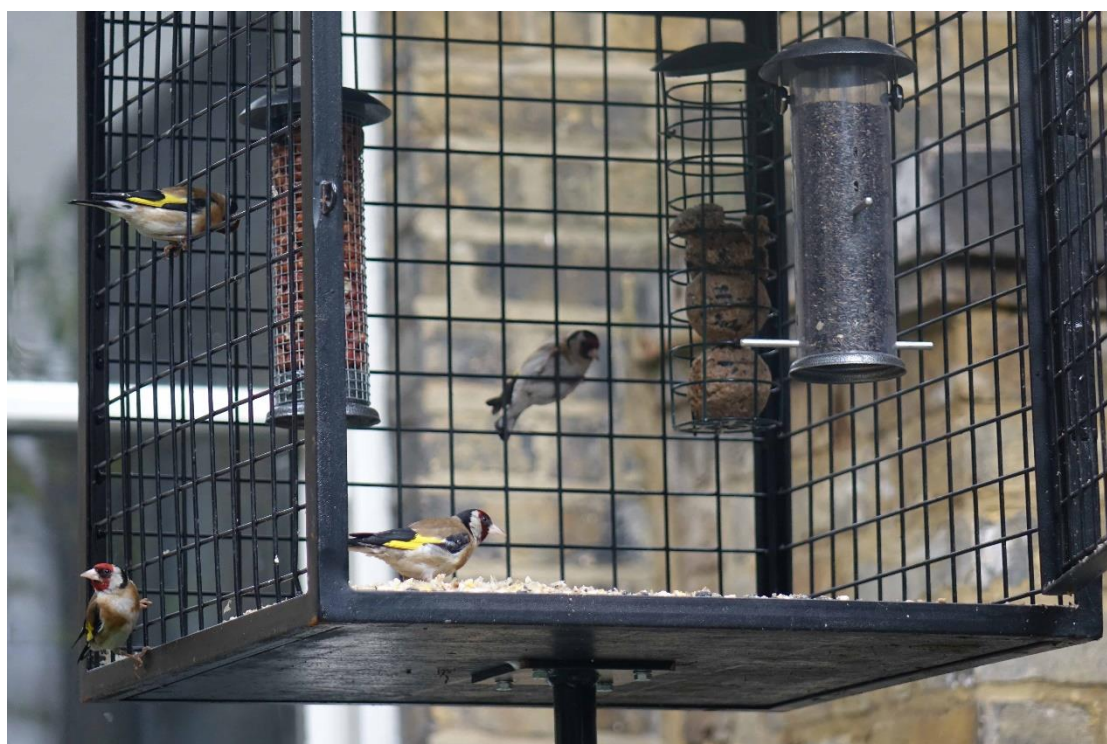
The number observations of nearly all species was down apart from the Corvids - both Magpies and Carrion Crow numbers were higher in 2021. The Blue tit was the most numerous species present (22% of observations, 29 individuals in total), but numbers were significantly lower than in 2020. In the UK there are about 3.4 million breeding pairs of Blue tits. This compares with 6 million pairs of Blackbirds. Usually we observe about the same numbers of these species each year but the number of Blackbirds was down relatively more in 2021 with only 11 individuals (8% of total) counted. Encouragingly, House sparrows were observed in six gardens (up from 2 sites in 2020). This seems to confirm that House sparrows are at last recolonising gardens in the City after their numbers in London fell by 71% between 1995 and 2019.

The 2020/21 winter was very mild, and this may explain the absence of foreign migrants such as the Redwing or Fieldfare, which have been seen in previous years.

Table 1: 2016 - 2021 Birdwatch results

Note: Counts for 2021 include 22 gardens, 2020 23 gardens, 2019 18 gardens, 2018 18 gardens, 2017 19 gardens and 2016 16 gardens.

| | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Blackbird | 11 | 40 | 29 | 21 | 33 | 17 |
| Blue tit | 29 | 40 | 32 | 16 | 33 | 18 |
| Carrion crow | 13 | 9 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| Chaffinch | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| Dunnock | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 17 | 3 |
| Goldfinch | 19 | 29 | 30 | 37 | 29 | 16 |
| Great tit | 14 | 20 | 6 | 16 | 14 | 12 |
| Greenfinch | 1 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| House sparrow | 8 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| Jay | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Magpie | 14 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 7 | 8 |
| Robin | 7 | 13 | 17 | 8 | 14 | 11 |
| Starling | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Wagtail, Grey | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| Wagtail, Pied | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Woodpigeon | 7 | 28 | 15 | 24 | 18 | 23 |
| Wren | 3 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| Others | 3 | 10 | 0 | 9 | 3 | 0 |
| Total species | 15 | 18 | 11 | 18 | 17 | 14 |
| Total individuals | 134 | 214 | 150 | 155 | 191 | 126 |



Goldfinches in the feeding cage Church Entry

Table 2: Observations from each garden 2019 – 2021** Gardens with feeders*

| | 2021 species | 2021 birds | 2020 species | 2020 birds | 2019 species | 2019 birds |
|-----------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| Barbican – Wildlife garden* | 7 | 15 | 9 | 24 | 7 | 15 |
| Barbican - Speed House | 1 | 2 | 7 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| Barbican - Thomas More* | 9 | 16 | 7 | 18 | 6 | 24 |
| Bunhill* | 7 | 22 | 9 | 14 | 8 | 27 |
| Christchurch Greyfriars | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| Church Entry* | 4 | 7 | 5 | 12 | 1 | 1 |
| Cleary* | 9 | 19 | 5 | 10 | 3 | 3 |
| Finsbury Circus | 2 | 2 | 4 | 9 | 5 | 12 |
| Golden Lane Estate | 12 | 19 | 8 | 18 | NA | NA |
| Noble Street | 1 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 3 |
| Portsoken* | 0 | 0 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 7 |
| Postman's Park* | 2 | 3 | 6 | 14 | 6 | 17 |
| Smithfield Rotunda* | 0 | 0 | 4 | 9 | 3 | 5 |
| St Andrew Holborn | 3 | 5 | 3 | 7 | NA | NA |
| St Bartholomew the Great* | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | NA | NA |
| St Botolph Bishopsgate* | 1 | 2 | 5 | 14 | 4 | 6 |
| St Dunstan in the East* | 4 | 6 | 4 | 7 | 6 | 9 |
| St Mary Aldermanbury* | 5 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 6 |
| St Mary Staining | 3 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Seething lane/St Olave's | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | NA | NA |
| St Paul's Cathedral* | 3 | 9 | 7 | 17 | 6 | 9 |
| 25 Cannon St | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | NA | NA |
| Total | 15 | 141 | 18 | 214 | 11 | 150 |

Table 3: Water birds - observed on the Barbican Lakes 2016 - 2021

| | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 |
|--------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Black-headed gull | 11 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Coot | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Mallard | 6 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 4 |
| Moorhen | 5 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 7 |
| Total species | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 |
| Total individuals | 22 | 6 | 10 | 5 | 10 | 17 |

Recommendations:

Regular year-round feeding: consistent feeding throughout the year is essential to supplement natural food, which is often in short supply in City gardens. Although many birds feed their young exclusively on fresh insects in the breeding season, adult birds rely on supplementary feeding. FoCG have now taken over feeding in 12 public gardens throughout the City. We have 11 rodent-proof feeding cages that eliminate spillage and are gradually replacing the conventional squirrel buster feeders that allow spillage on the ground. We have also installed rodent-proof feed bins in most gardens with feeders to ensure feed is kept in good condition.

Regular cleaning of feeders: this is very important for bird health. FoCG provide cleaning materials in each feed bin and regularly remove and deep clean feeders.

Water: Clean water for drinking and bathing is essential. FoCG have installed and maintain bird baths in Bunhill Fields and maintain a new bird bath in St Bartholomew the Great Churchyard. We will also trial the use of poultry-style drinking water dispensers that can be hung on trees.

Cover: dense cover providing a link from ground level to shrub layer and tree canopy is essential to enable birds to travel safely through vertical and horizontal spaces without risk of predation. Cover should comprise a mix of evergreen shrubs, climbers like ivy, and seed producing or berry bearing plants that provide forage in the winter months. Herbaceous perennials should not be cut back until late spring to provide forage and cover. The objective 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 Biodiversity Action Plan 2021 - 2026.

Log piles: these boost invertebrate populations and are essential in all SINCs and as many other gardens as possible. In 2021 FoCG installed log piles in Bunhill, St Bartholomew the Great and plan to install the long delayed log piles in Postman's Park.

Nest boxes: it is important to maintain and increase the number of nest boxes each year to provide nesting sites for crevice and hole nesting birds such as tits.

Other surveys

As well as the annual Big Garden Birdwatch at the end of January, birds in the City are monitored throughout the year. Because of COVID, the Summer Breeding Bird Survey did not take place in 2020 but we plan to resume observations in 2021. Previous breeding bird surveys have recorded 53 species with up to 27 nesting in the City. FoCG have recently set up a specific monitoring project of birds in Bunhill Fields and everyone is invited to contribute their sightings.

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.