



Big Garden Birdwatch in the City January 2022



Peregrine falcon over St Paul's. Photo credit Guardian

2022 is the 15th year we have counted birds in City gardens as part of the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch. We have created a database that enables us to look at trends in the relative numbers of different species through time and compare results with what is going on at the national level. This year we counted 16 species (excluding feral pigeons) and nearly 200 individual birds.

We would like to thank Aleksei who organised the birdwatch and the band of 12 volunteers who counted in 22 different City gardens.

Results

- The number observations of nearly all species was higher this year than in 2021. The weather over the count weekend was mild and sunny and the spring weather this year has been warmer and drier than last year.
- Indications from last year were that Blue tits had a poor breeding season because of the cold, wet spring and this may account for the relatively low numbers we observed this year in comparison to Great tits. Nationally, there are roughly 1.5 times more Blue tits (3.6 million pairs) than Great tits. The relative numbers of these two species in previous years in the City have more or less complied with this ratio until this year when they are roughly equal.
- Goldfinches (17% of total observations) were the most numerous bird observed this year. Goldfinches are a common sight around bird feeders and are easy to spot with their distinctive calls and flocking behaviour. Their presence in the City is relatively recent with few observations until 2015 but steady growth in numbers since then. The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) recorded an 80% increase in Goldfinch numbers between 2002 and 2012, and this trend is continuing.

- Other finches are not faring so well. We have seen very few Chaffinch and Greenfinch over the last few years. Both these species have been affected by Trichomonosis, a disease spread by parasites.
- We recorded two new species this year – the Great Spotted Woodpecker in Bunhill Fields and a Long tailed tit in the Barbican Wildlife Garden. The woodpecker bred in Bunhill last summer and is continuing to defend its nest site against Ring-necked Parakeets this spring.
- No Ring-necked Parakeets were observed in the count this year but they are now regular visitors to Bunhill Fields.
- Probably because of the mild weather, we did not observe any winter visitors such as Redwing and Fieldfare that tend to remain on fields unless driven into towns and gardens by snow.
- Gardens with feeders, not surprisingly, hosted more species and more individual birds. We now feed regularly in 11 gardens.

Table 1: 2017 - 2022 Birdwatch results

Note: Count for 2022 includes 22 gardens, 2021 22 gardens, 2020 23 gardens, 2019 18 gardens, 2018 18 gardens and 2017 19 gardens.

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Blackbird	15	11	40	29	21	33
Blue tit	28	29	40	32	16	33
Carrion crow	19	13	9	6	7	7
Chaffinch	0	0	1	0	2	3
Coal tit	3	1	1	0	0	0
Dunnock	9	4	3	3	4	17
Goldfinch	34	19	29	30	37	29
Great tit	27	14	20	6	16	14
Greenfinch	0	1	0	4	4	0
House sparrow	9	8	8	0	0	3
Jay	0	0	0	0	1	2
Magpie	11	14	7	7	3	7
Robin	15	7	13	17	8	14
Starling	0	1	0	0	0	0
Wagtail, Grey	1	0	0	0	0	3
Woodpigeon	17	7	28	15	24	18
Wren	4	3	6	1	3	2
Others	3	2	9	0	9	6
Total species	16	15	18	11	18	17
Total individuals	195	134	214	150	155	191

Table 2: Observations from each garden 2020 – 2022** Gardens with feeders*

	2022 species	2022 birds	2021 species	2021 birds	2020 species	2020 birds
Barbican – Wildlife garden*	6	14	7	15	9	24
Barbican - Speed House	4	6	1	2	7	10
Barbican - Thomas More*	8	21	9	16	7	18
Bunhill*	9	19	7	22	9	14
Christchurch Greyfriars	4	5	0	0	2	2
Church Entry*	5	9	4	7	5	12
Cleary*	8	17	9	19	5	10
Finsbury Circus	5	13	2	2	4	9
Golden Lane Estate	5	9	12	19	8	18
Noble Street	2	2	1	2	5	6
Portsoken*	6	9	0	0	3	5
Postman's Park*	6	12	2	3	6	14
Smithfield Rotunda*	5	10	0	0	4	9
St Andrew Holborn	6	7	3	5	3	7
St Bartholomew the Great*	4	3	1	1	2	2
St Botolph Bishopsgate*	8	17	1	2	5	14
St Dunstan in the East*	7	3	4	6	4	7
St Mary Aldermanbury	2	2	5	6	4	8
St Mary Staining	0	0	3	4	1	1
Seething lane/St Olave's	0	0	1	1	2	3
St Paul's Cathedral*	4	5	3	9	7	17
25 Cannon St	NA	NA	0	0	2	4
Total	16	195	15	141	18	214

Table 3: Water birds - observed on the Barbican Lakes 2017 - 2022

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Black-headed gull	1	11	1	3	0	1
Coot	3	0	1	1	2	1
Mallard	13	6	2	3	5	0
Moorhen	3	5	2	3	2	3
Total species	4	3	4	4	3	5
Total individuals	20	22	6	10	5	10

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 now feed birds in nine public gardens throughout the City and two residential gardens. 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 keep feed in good condition.



Regular cleaning of feeders: this is 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 maintain bird baths in Bunhill Fields, St Bartholomew the Great Churchyard and Church Entry. We are also trialling 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 enables 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 City's Biodiversity Action Plan 2021 – 2026 sets out the objective of providing and managing specific habitats to encourage target species, such as the House sparrow and other garden birds.

Log piles and leaf compost bins: these boost invertebrate populations and should be installed in all SINC's and as many other gardens as possible. In Bunhill Fields we now compost all the leaf fall on site and produce mulch for use in other gardens.

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, we monitor birds in the City throughout the year. Because of COVID, the Summer Breeding Bird Survey has not taken place for the last two years, but we plan to resume observations in 2022. 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 with the BTO in Bunhill Fields and everyone is invited to contribute their sightings. So far we have recorded 23 species in Bunhill over the last 12 months.

We record all the results of the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch and the Summer Breeding Birds Survey on the GiGL (Greenspace Information for Great London) database. We also monitor breeding success each year when we clean all the bird boxes in the City and identify nests (see Nest box Cleaning Reports <https://friendsofcitygardens.org.uk/biodiversity-surveys/>).