



### Big Garden Birdwatch in the City - January 2024

2024 is the 17th 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 21 different species (excluding feral pigeons) and 232 individual birds.

We would like to thank the fourteen volunteers who counted in 22 different City gardens.

#### Results

- **Increase in total number of species.** The total number of species observed was 21 (excluding feral pigeon). This has shown a steady increase over the years. The biodiversity enhancements in Bunhill Fields appear to be encouraging more woodland species, such as Jay and Greater Spotted Woodpecker that are now often observed during the year and are probably breeding. There has also been an increase in the number of species of waterbird observed in gardens.
- **Further increase in Great tit numbers.** Great tits continued to out number Blue tits and are now the most numerous species observed over the count (22% of all birds counted). Great tits can be double the weight of Blue tits and their wing span can be six to eight centimeters wider. This means Great tits can brood young more successfully in wet or cold weather. Blue tits were adversely affected by the hot dry summer in 2022, reducing the abundance of insect prey to feed their young and a wet spring and summer in 2023 may also have reduced breeding success, contributing to another poor breeding season for these small birds. 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 2022, with Great tits now outnumbering Blue tits by 2:1 (see Fig.5). The 2023 nest box cleaning survey also revealed an almost 2:1 ratio of successful nests in favour of Great tits.
- **Decline in Goldfinch.** Goldfinch numbers have seen a decline from a high in 2018, confirming observations of the lack of Goldfinches on feeders throughout 2023.
- **Decline in other finches.** Other finches are also 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. It now seems likely that Goldfinch numbers are also being affected by this disease.
- **Ring-necked parakeets** were observed for the first time in the 2023 count. They have been regular visitors to Bunhill Fields over the past couple of years and have bred there since 2022, taking over Greater spotted woodpecker nest holes. A pair of Greater Spotted Woodpeckers were observed in the count this year in Bunhill Fields and the male has been heard drumming so it seems likely that they are continuing to breed in Bunhill.
- **House sparrow** observations were substantially lower this year but have been observed throughout the year in several gardens and have a well established base

in Fortune Park.

- **No winter visitor species** were recorded this year. Although 2023/4 was expected to see large numbers of winter migrants.
- **Importance of feeders.** Gardens with feeders, not surprisingly, hosted more species and more individual birds. We now feed regularly in 11 gardens.
- **Differences with national patterns of abundance.** Nationally, the RSPB report that the top three species in the 2024 Birdwatch (as at 8 February) were House sparrows (14%), followed by Blue tits (11%) and Starlings (9%). In the City the top three species were Great tit (22%), Blue tit (14%) and Robin (11%). We have never recorded Starlings during the Birdwatch but large mixed flocks of adults and juveniles can be seen on the grass in St Paul's and Finsbury Circus after the breeding season.

### Fig 1: Birdwatch results 2019 - 2024

*Note: Count for 2024 includes 22 gardens; 2023, 2022, 2021 and 2020 includes 23 gardens; and in 2019 18 gardens.*

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
Blackbird	22	20	15	11	40	29
Blue tit	33	34	30	29	40	32
Carrion crow	11	21	19	13	9	6
Chaffinch	1	0	0	0	1	0
Coal tit	0	5	3	1	1	0
Dunnock	12	5	9	4	3	3
Goldfinch	14	19	36	19	29	30
Great tit	52	34	29	14	20	6
Greater spotted woodpecker	2	1	1	0	0	0
Greenfinch	0	0	0	1	0	4
House sparrow	2	14	9	8	8	0
Jay	2	1	0	0	0	0
Magpie	11	17	11	14	7	7
Ring-necked parakeet	3	2	0	0	0	0
Robin	25	11	15	7	13	17
Starling	0	0	0	1	0	0
Wagtail, Grey	0	0	1	0	0	0
Woodpigeon	15	22	18	7	28	15
Wren	6	4	4	3	6	1
Others	21	11	2	2	9	0
<b>Total species</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Total individuals</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>150</b>

**Fig 2: Observations from each garden 2022 – 2024**

*\* Gardens with feeders*

	2024	2024	2023	2023	2022	2022
	species	birds	species	birds	species	birds
Barbican – Wildlife Garden*	9	17	8	27	6	14
Barbican - Speed House	6	13	5	9	4	6
Barbican - Thomas More*	18	39	13	23	8	21
Bunhill*	10	30	9	24	9	19
Christchurch Greyfriars	1	1	5	9	4	5
Church Entry*	4	12	6	14	5	9
Cleary*	8	16	7	12	8	17
Finsbury Circus	NA	NA	5	9	5	13
Golden Lane Estate	6	15	4	12	5	9
Middlesex Street Estate	5	7	5	13	5	7
Noble Street	2	2	1	1	2	2
Portsoken	0	0	0	0	6	9
Postman's Park*	6	11	6	9	6	12
Smithfield Rotunda*	8	12	11	16	5	10
St Andrew Holborn	1	1	2	7	6	7
St Bartholomew the Great*	6	11	6	11	4	3
St Botolph Bishopsgate*	4	9	5	10	8	17
St Dunstan in the East*	4	5	4	7	7	3
St Mary Aldermanbury	3	6	1	1	2	2
St Mary Staining	0	0	0	0	0	0
Seething lane/St Olave's	6	11	1	2	0	0
St Paul's Cathedral*	5	12	3	5	4	5
25 Cannon St	2	2	0	0	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>202</b>

**Fig 3: Water birds - observed on the Barbican Lakes 2019 - 2024**

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
Black-headed gull	2	7	1	11	1	3
Coot	3	3	3	0	1	1
Mallard	13	22	13	6	2	3
Moorhen	4	5	3	5	2	3
<b>Total species</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Total individuals</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>

We record all the results of the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch 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. See Nest box Cleaning Reports <https://friendsofcitygardens.org.uk/biodiversity-surveys/>.

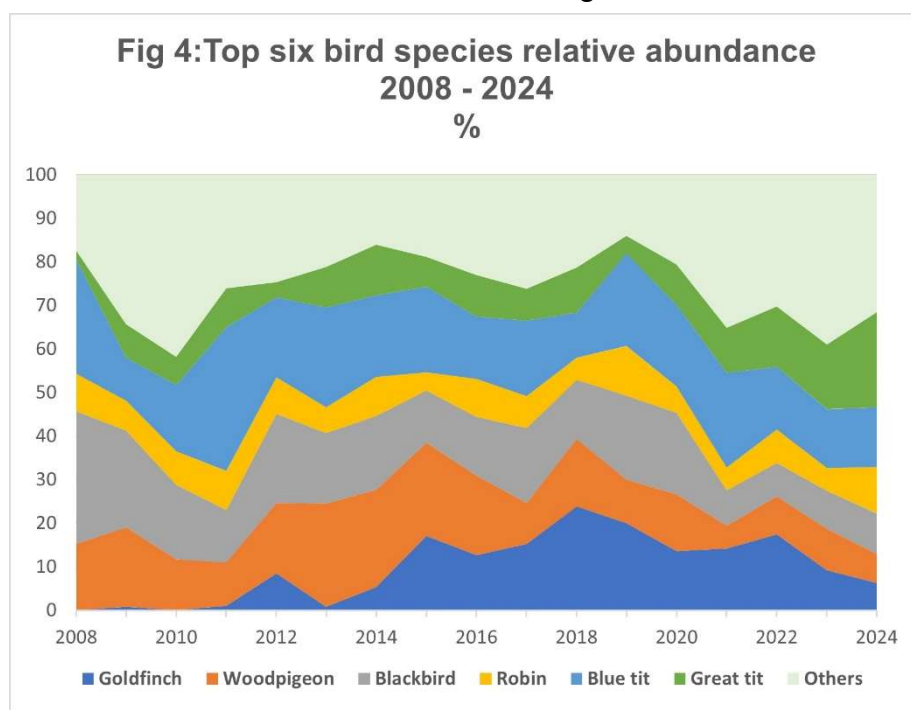
**How the relative abundance of the top six bird species has changed over the last seventeen years**

Fig 4 shows the relative abundance (observations of one species as a percentage of

the total number of observations for that species by year). The top six bird species based on their relative abundance over the last seventeen years are (highest to lowest): Blue tit, Blackbird, Wood pigeon, Great tit, Goldfinch and Robin.

The observed numbers of these six birds amount on average to about 75% of the total birds observed, but there are quite large differences year on year. This explains the profile – with lows in 2010 when they accounted for only 58% of the total and highs such as 2019 when they made up 86% of the total.

Fig 4 shows the relative rise of Goldfinch numbers to a peak in 2018 and their recent decline. The steady relative decline of Blackbirds over the period is also interesting to note with it appearing to accelerate in the last four years. The BTO’s Breeding Bird Survey Report 2022 notes that Blackbirds in London have declined 41% since 2011 compared with 6% for England as a whole. The decline may be the result of trichomoniasis, the same infection that is affecting finches.



The steady increase in Great tits in relation to Blue tits since 2021 is also clear (Fig 5).

