



Garden



Detectives

Discovering birds on your doorstep



Garden Birds



A variety of other species



Swift Gabhlán gaoithe 18 cm

A highly aerial summer visitor, never seen either perched on branches or wires or standing on the ground. Most often seen high in the sky chasing insects, when its dark plumage, forked tail, fast flight and long, sickle-shaped wings are distinctive. Nests under roofs, in wall cracks, etc. Its screaming call is a characteristic sound of warm summer evenings.



House Martin Gabhlán binne 15 cm

A member of the swallow family, this summer visitor is best known for its habit of building mud nests under the eaves of houses. Slightly smaller than a Swallow, strikingly dark blue-black above and white below, with a distinctive white rump patch.

Female



Male

House Sparrow Gealbhan binne 15 cm

A familiar streaky brown garden visitor, the male has a large black 'bib', dark brown head with a grey crown, pale grey underparts and a small white bar on each wing. The female is a duller beige colour overall, with a streaky brown back and a paler beige stripe just above the eye.



Swallow Fáinleog 19 cm

A summer visitor from southern Africa, often nesting inside barns and sheds. Glossy blue-black above, with a red throat, blue-black breast-band and white underparts. Tail is deeply forked, with adults having long tail streamers. Can be confused with Swift, to which it is completely unrelated.



Dunnock Donnóg 14 cm

A shy, skulking bird, often seen hopping about under the bird table or at the edge of flower beds. It has dark streaks on its brown body, pink legs and a slight bluish-grey cast to the face. Its scratchy song is sometimes said to resemble the sound made by an unrolled shopping trolley wheel.

! Did you Know?

Whilst we now know that Swallows migrate down to Africa for the winter, it used to be believed that they hibernated in mud at the bottom of ponds and lakes!

Garden Birds



Thrushes & Starling

Song Thrush Smólach ceoil 23 cm

One of our best songsters, its most striking feature is its distinctly spotted breast. Slightly smaller than a Blackbird and significantly smaller than the similar Mistle Thrush, from which it can also be distinguished by its warmer brown colour, smaller spots and orange underwings. Enjoys eating snails, which it breaks open on habitually-used flat stones known as 'thrush anvils'.



Fieldfare Sacán 26 cm

Large thrush that visits us during the winter, when flocks can frequently be seen foraging on large lawns and parks, often in the company of Redwings. Similar to Mistle Thrush, but with fewer spots below and a striking grey head and rump.



Blackbird Lon dubh 25 cm

Our most common thrush. The male is all black with a bright yellow bill, the female is browner with a duller coloured bill. Often hops around on lawns in search of worms.



Starling Druid 20 cm

Often seen in flocks on garden lawns or at bird tables. Noisy, all-dark birds with long pointed bills. Frequently mimics the songs and calls of other birds. Large flocks heading to roost often resemble wisps of smoke as they twist and turn in the evening sky.

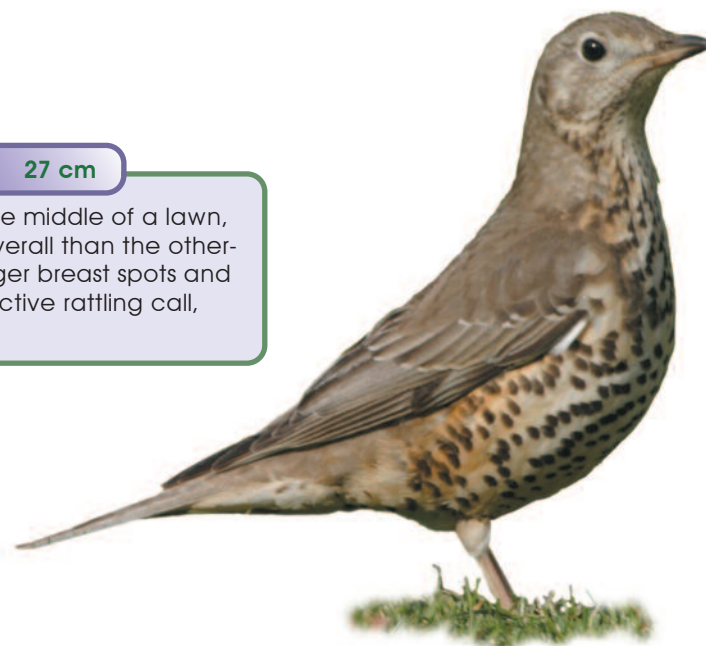


Redwing Deargán sneachta 22 cm

Our smallest thrush and, like the Fieldfare, only occurring here in winter. Not unlike a Song Thrush in appearance, but darker brown above, with a bold white stripe over each eye and a blood-red patch on its flanks and under its wings. Eats worms and berries.

Mistle Thrush Liatráisc 27 cm

Most often noticed feeding in the middle of a lawn, this thrush is larger and greyer overall than the otherwise similar Song Thrush, with larger breast spots and whiter underwings. It has a distinctive rattling call, usually given in flight.

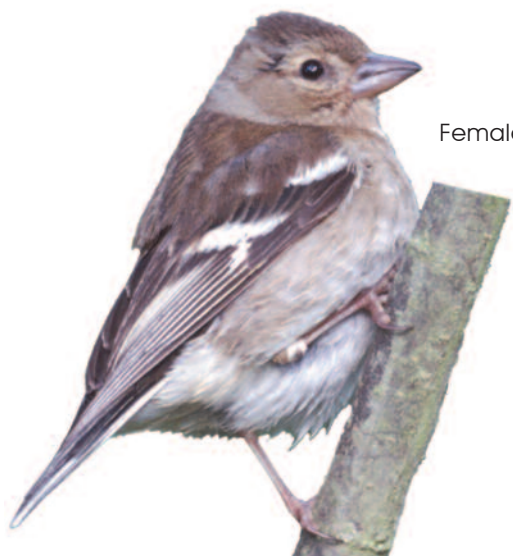


! Did you Know?

Once a very common bird across the country, in recent years the Song Thrush has declined by up to 75% in some areas. This is bad news for gardeners: Song Thrushes are more effective at controlling snail numbers than any slug pellets.



Finches



Female



Male

Chaffinch **Rí rua** **15 cm**

One of our commonest garden birds, this striking finch often feeds on the ground beneath bird tables. The male is blue on the crown and the back of the neck, with a pinkish-red face and breast and two prominent white wingbars, while the female is a dull brown colour, darker above than below, again with two white wingbars.



Female

Male

Greenfinch **Glasán darach** **15 cm**

Common visitor to peanut feeders. Males are bright green with yellow wing stripes, females are a dull olive colour. Often seen in small feeding flocks.

Redpoll **Deargéadan** **13 cm**

While this small finch breeds in birch and conifer forests, it sometimes comes to garden peanut feeders in winter. Streaky brown all over, with paler underparts, a bright red forehead and a tiny, stubby yellow bill. Breeding plumaged males also show a red-dish-pink wash on the breast.



Siskin **Siscín** **12 cm**

A small green finch with black streaks. Male has black cap and small black 'bib', while the female has a streaked head and is browner overall. Usually only visits gardens during the winter months, where it happily uses peanut feeders.



Female

Brambling **Breachán** **15 cm**

A scarce and localised winter visitor from Scandinavia, this finch is closely related to the Chaffinch, which it very much resembles in overall shape. It is a streakier brown, with yellow beak, greyer head and orange tone overall, especially on the breast. Males can have very dark blackish heads. Sometimes visits garden feeders along with Chaffinches.



Goldfinch **Lasair choille** **13 cm**

Very colourful, with a red and black face and black and yellow wings. Often seen on peanut feeders, this species also loves feeding on teasel and thistle heads.

! Did you Know?

All of our finches have short, stubby bills that are designed to enable them to crush and eat hard seeds. They still need to feed insects to their chicks, however, as these are higher in protein and are vital if the young birds are to grow properly.

Garden Birds



Tits & pigeons



Long-tailed Tit **Meantán earrfhada** **14cm**

A tiny black, pink and white fluffball with an almost absurdly long tail. Almost always seen in highly mobile family flocks, constantly calling to each other. Usually forages in well wooded parks and gardens, but will also come to peanut feeders.



Female



Male

Great Tit **Meantán mór** **14 cm**

The largest member of the tit family. It has a black head with white cheeks. The underparts are bright yellow with a wide black stripe (wider in males than in females).



Collared Dove **Fearán baicdhubh** **33 cm**

Quite a small, elegant long-tailed dove, mostly greyish-beige in colour with a prominent black half-collar around its neck. In flight, tail shows much white near the tip. Feeds on the ground, looking for seeds and grain.

Blue Tit **Meantán gorm** **14 cm**

Smaller than the Great Tit, and a frequent visitor to peanut feeders. It has a blue cap with white cheeks and yellow underparts. Young birds are more yellowish overall.



Woodpigeon **Colm coille** **41 cm**

Our largest pigeon, instantly recognisable by the white patch on each side of its neck (missing in young birds) and the broad white band visible on each wing when in flight. Often seen foraging on open lawns.



Coal Tit **Meantán dubh** **11 cm**

The smallest of the tit family, it is mainly black and grey with slightly off-white cheek patches. One feature that distinguishes the Coal Tit instantly from our other tit species is the white patch at the back of its neck.

! Did you Know?

Long-tailed Tits build perhaps the most unusual nest of any Irish garden bird. It is a hollow dome-shaped construction made of moss and lichen and lined with feathers, all bound together with spider webs. This produces a highly flexible nest that can stretch as the young birds grow.

Garden Birds



Crows & Sparrowhawk



Jay Scréachóg 34 cm

A member of the crow family, though you might not guess this from its appearance. Dark brownish-pink overall, with light blue patches on each wing, a black tail and a contrasting white patch on its rump. Shy and secretive, it is strongly associated with oak trees. Best located by its harsh call.



Sparrowhawk Spioróg 30-40 cm

By far the most frequent bird of prey occurring in gardens, this short-winged hawk sits in trees or dense cover waiting to ambush smaller birds. Male blue-grey above, with rufous wash on cheek and breast. Female greyer overall, and often much larger than the male.



Hooded Crow Caróg liath 49 cm

Slightly larger than a Rook, from which it can easily be distinguished by its 'two-tone' black and grey plumage. Noisy and aggressive, this species is usually dominant over other crow species.



Rook Rúcach 47 cm

A very common large, all black crow, often seen in flocks. Most common on farmland and along road-sides, but will also visit gardens. Adults can be separated from other crow species by the contrasting bare patch of pale skin at the base of the bill.

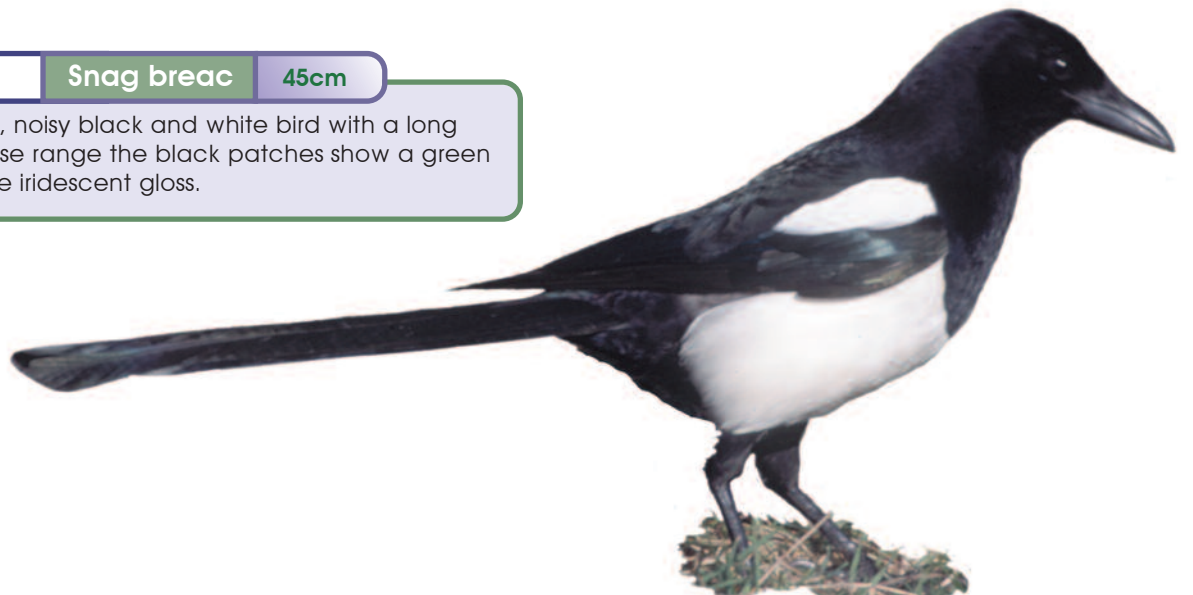


Jackdaw Cág 33 cm

Our smallest crow, frequently seen alongside Rooks. On close inspection it appears very dark grey rather than black, and it has a noticeably paler silver-grey patch at the back of its head and neck. Often nests in chimneys.

Magpie Snag breac 45cm

Distinctive, noisy black and white bird with a long tail. At close range the black patches show a green and purple iridescent gloss.



! Did you Know?

Members of the Crow family are amongst the most intelligent birds in the world, and used to be popular pets due to their ability to mimic human speech, rather like parrots are today.

Garden Birds



Robin, Wren & others



Robin Spideog 14 cm

One of our most familiar and easily identifiable birds, with its brightly coloured red breast. Males and females look the same, but on young birds recently out of the nest the red on the breast is replaced by thrush-like dark spotting.



Tree creeper Snag 13cm

Likes mature trees, particularly conifers. Fairly secretive, almost always seen creeping mouse-like up tree trunks (the only Irish bird to do this) using its stiff tail as a prop, its mottled brown plumage camouflaging it perfectly. Underparts are whitish, and the longish bill is curved slightly downwards.



Wren Dreoilín 12 cm

The Wren is one of our smallest species, as well as being the most widespread. Identified by brown barred plumage and short tail, usually held cocked.

Bullfinch Corcrán coille 16 cm

A chunky, compact finch with a plump body, and thick 'bullish' neck. Usually seen in pairs, the male is grey above with a stunning red breast, black cap, wings and tail, with a white wing bar and rump patch. On females, the red is replaced by greyish-brown. Eats flower buds and seeds.

Male



Female



Waxwing Síodeiteach 20cm

A scarce and unpredictable winter visitor from Scandinavia, its flamboyant colouring and extravagant crest render it unmistakable. Particularly attracted to red berries, especially those of Rowan and Cotoneaster. General shape and flight action are reminiscent of Starling.

! Did you Know?

The male Wren has to work very hard during the spring. He builds up to a dozen different nests, and the female chooses her favourite, which she then lines with feathers.

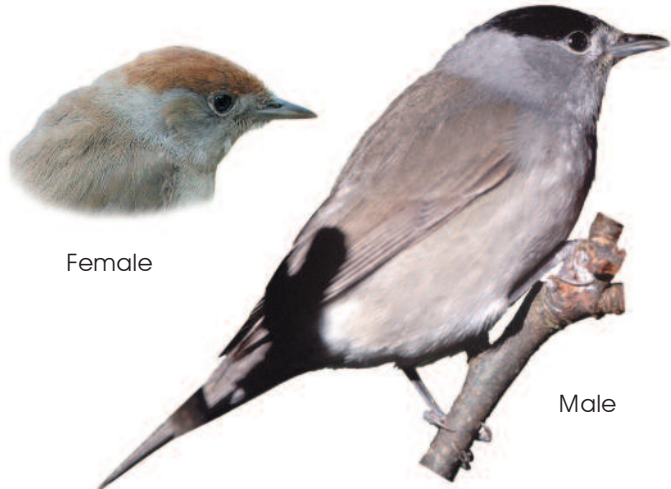
Garden Birds



Warblers & Pied Wagtail

Blackcap Caipín dubh 13 cm

A member of the warbler family, the male is grey with a jet black cap. The female is slightly browner and has a reddish-brown cap. One of the finest singers of all Irish birds.



Female

Male



Chiffchaff Tiuf-teaf 11 cm

Most common in summer, though increasing numbers do overwinter. A small brownish warbler, very similar to a Willow Warbler but with shorter wings and darker legs. Very active and restless, though easily overlooked. Song very distinctive: a rhythmic 'chiff, chaff, chiff, chaff' from which it gets its name.

Goldcrest Cíorbhuí 9 cm

Our smallest bird, most common around conifers. Olive-green above and off-white below, with a large dark eye and a striking yellow patch on the crown (more orange in males), bordered with black. Very active, but easily overlooked due to its tiny size. Song and calls extremely high-pitched.



Pied Wagtail Glasóg shráide 18 cm

Familiar and confiding, this is our commonest wagtail. Strikingly black and white (females and young birds are greyer), with a very long tail which, as its name suggests, it constantly bobs up and down. Often seen searching for insects on concrete, asphalt and lawns.



Willow Warbler Ceolaire sailí 11 cm

A summer visitor from Africa, light brown and yellow in colour. Generally unobtrusive as it forages for insects in leafy deciduous trees. Very hard to separate from Chiffchaff, though on average a little brighter and generally with paler legs; descending melodic song, however, is very different.

! Did you Know?

It is only in recent years that Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs have begun to spend the winter in Ireland – previously they were only summer visitors. Could this be an early sign of global warming?



Building a nestbox

A great way to attract birds into your garden is to provide them with safe places to nest. Modern houses have few holes or crevices for nesting, and old trees, which may have suitable holes, are often felled. Nestboxes provide the ideal solution and make excellent substitutes for natural nest sites for hole-nesting birds. They can be designed to suit the requirements of a range of different species, but the most popular are the ones which have an entrance hole suitable for the members of the tit family.

Building a nestbox

For the usual front-hole type of box use a plank about 150mm wide and 15mm thick: see the diagram, which shows the sizes of each section to be cut. A strip of leather or rubber makes an ideal hinge for the lid, which should then be fastened down with a catch or clasp. When constructing the box, use screws instead of nails if you can. Wood preservative applied each autumn will prolong the life of the box.

By altering the size of the entrance hole you cut you can determine which species will be most likely to use the box. The following is a guideline to which size holes certain species generally prefer (hole size given in mm): Blue Tit & Coal Tit (25mm), Great Tit & Tree Sparrow (28mm), House Sparrow (32mm), Starling (45mm).

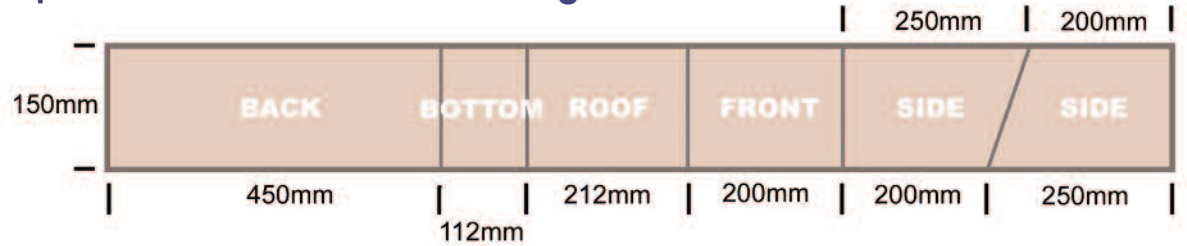
Make the same box with the upper half of the front taken away altogether for Robins, Pied Wagtails and Wrens. Spotted Flycatchers prefer a somewhat shallower open-fronted box.

Some other species will use specifically designed nestboxes or platforms, including Swift, Swallow, Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Kestrel, Barn Owl, Jackdaw and Treecreeper; for further details of how to construct boxes suitable for these birds please contact BirdWatch Ireland.

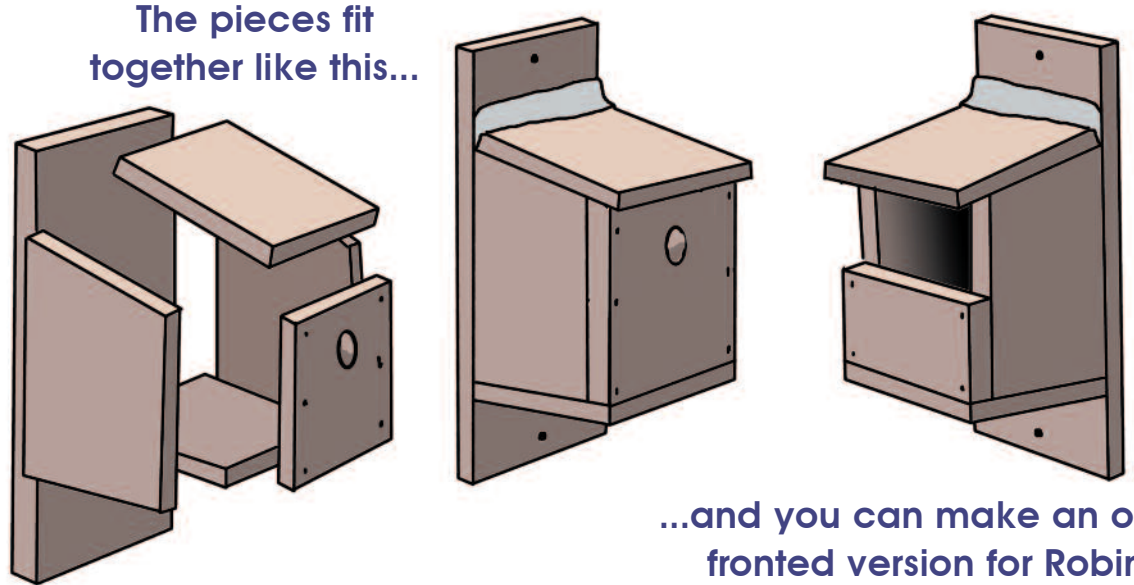
When & where to put up your nestbox

Put your nestbox up well before the start of the breeding season, as many birds begin searching out nest sites from February onwards. Don't be too disappointed if the box isn't used for the first year or

Cut a piece of wood to the following dimensions



The pieces fit together like this...



...and you can make an open-fronted version for Robins, Wrens & Spotted Flycatcher

two. Ideally it should be located at least 2m from the ground (preferably 3-5m) to ensure that cats and curious people can't disturb it or look inside. Affix it to a wall, fence or tree trunk in a quiet area, away from your bird table if possible. It is best to angle the box forward slightly and to keep it away from the wall or tree by using a strip of wood. Unless the site is very sheltered, the box should be fixed facing between north and south-east to avoid the hot sun and the wettest winds.

In all but the largest gardens only one box of each type is likely to be used, perhaps one by tits and one by Robins. On the other hand, two nestboxes quite close together are sometimes occupied at the same time if they are both at the edge of a territory.

Care of your nestbox

The box can be opened from the end of October and cleaned out. Empty out old nest material and any unhatched eggs and clean the inside of the box with boiling water (which should kill most parasites that may be lying in wait, ready to infest next year's brood). In cases of severe parasite infestation it may be necessary to use one of the less harmful insecticides, such as pyrethrum powder, but this should be avoided unless thought absolutely necessary.

A small handful of wood shavings placed in the box may encourage some birds to roost in it during the cold winter nights. Don't use straw as this will get damp and turn mouldy in the box over the course of the winter.

Providing a safe environment for nesting birds

If birds take up residence in your nestbox you should resist the temptation to keep having a quick peep, as this could result in the parents abandoning the nest. Instead, watch the comings and goings of the birds from the safe distance of your kitchen window: they will behave more naturally and you will enjoy and learn more this way. Attacks by predators can also sometimes cause parent birds to desert their eggs or chicks. Nestboxes can be afforded some protection against predators by fixing a metal plate around the entrance hole. Alternatively, bundles of gorse tied round the tree above and below the box offer protection from most mammalian predators. Do not put a perch on the nestbox; it is of no use to the nesting birds and simply gives predators easier access to the eggs or chicks inside.



Planting for birds 1

by Jane Powers, Irish Times Gardening Correspondent



Jane Powers

Fruiting shrubs and small trees

By planting or encouraging berry-bearing and fruiting shrubs in your garden you can attract Blackbirds, thrushes, Robins, and even Blackcaps and scarce Waxwings.

The following shrubs are good; try to choose a selection that will provide birds with a succession of fruit from July until spring:

- **Barberry** *Berberis aggregata*, *B. gagnepainii* and *B. thunbergii* are all suitable. For smaller gardens, *B. wilsoniae* is ideal. *B. darwinii* has evergreen, holly-like leaves and orange flowers. Its fruits ripen in July and are enjoyed by birds in dry weather.
- **Bramble** *Rubus fruticosus** The fruits are eaten by Blackbirds, warblers and other birds, especially in dry weather, and the seeds are eaten by Bullfinches and Greenfinches.
- **Cotoneasters** *Cotoneaster horizontalis*, a spreading, low-growing bush for banks and walls; *C. franchetii* (red fruit, semi-evergreen, 6'-8'); *C. bullatus* (large cherrylike fruit, arching branches, 6-8'); *C. frigidus* (fast-growing, 10'); *C. 'Hybridus Pendulus'* (weeping, 8'); and *C. 'Coral Beauty'* (orange-red fruit, evergreen, 6') are recommended. Particularly popular with thrushes and Waxwings.
- **Crab Apples** *Malus* 'Golden Hornet', 'John Downie' and *M. 'Red Sentinel'* are good choices. *M.*

*sylvestris** is our native species. Always a favourite with Blackcaps, and also attracts several members of the thrush family.

- **Elder** *Sambucus nigra** produces black berries which are enjoyed by many different birds.
- **Firethorn** *Pyracantha* produces masses of white flowers in May and a handsome show of berries in autumn/early winter when they are very popular with birds. *Pyracantha* is best grown against a wall or fence. *P. 'Orange Glow'* (with orange berries), *P. 'Red Column'* (with brilliant red berries), and *P. rogersiana* & *P. rogersiana 'Flava'* (with bright red and yellow fruits, respectively) are recommended.
- **Hawthorn** *Crataegus monogyna** It is best to plant the wild form.
- **Holly** *Ilex aquifolium** For berries, plant female trees of the normal wild form, but for good fruiting there should be a male tree nearby. Trees defended by territorial Mistle Thrushes may hold their fruit until the spring.
- **June-berry** *Amelanchier lamarckii*. A small tree that produces white blossom in spring and is best grown on light, acid soils. The blue-black fruits ripen in July and are especially popular in dry weather both with thrushes and with Blackcaps and other warblers.
- **Rose** *Rosa canina** and *R. glauca* are among the species which fruit freely and attract Greenfinches, which take seeds from the hips.
- **Rowan/Mountain Ash** *Sorbus aucuparia** (the normal red-berried form). Attracts winter thrushes such as Redwings and Fieldfares; also a favourite of Waxwings. Non-native, but similar *Sorbus* species which are free-fruiting include *S. commixta*, *S. intermedia*, and *S. sargentiana*.
- **Spindle** *Euonymus europaeus** Robins are particularly fond of the fruit of this native shrub.
- **Whitebeam** *Sorbus aria** Small tree with silvery undersides to the leaves. It produces white flowers in May and red berries in autumn.

Herbaceous plants

Remember to leave spent flower heads on herbaceous plants until spring, both to set seed and to provide cover for over-wintering insects. The following bear fruits/seeds that are attractive to garden birds:

- **Artichoke** *Cynara scolymus* (perennial); finches pull apart the old flower heads to find seeds and insects. A good bee plant.
- **Cornflower** *Centaurea cyanus* (annual).
- **Evening Primrose** *Oenothera* species (mostly biennials).
- **Forget-me-not** *Myosotis sylvatica* (a short-lived perennial); Bullfinches eat the seeds.
- **Honesty** *Lunaria annua* (a biennial with silvery fruits useful for winter decoration); a favourite with Bullfinches.
- **Sunflower** *Helianthus annuus* (annual); the classic source of food for finches.



Bullfinch feeding on a Mountain Ash

- **Teasel** *Dipsacus fullonum* (biennial) has a beautiful winter skeleton; the seed heads are extremely popular with Goldfinches.
- **Wallflower** *Erysimum cheiri* (a short-lived perennial). Leave it to set seed.

The fruits/seeds of common weeds such as Chickweed, Coltsfoot, Dandelion, Groundsel and Sowthistle are favoured by Goldfinches, Linnets and Greenfinches, and Nettle is popular with Bullfinches. They also harbour insect food for birds.

The flowers of Golden-rod *Solidago* species (in autumn) and Hemp Agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum** (in July) are also attractive to insects which, in turn, are food for birds.

Note: * denotes native to Ireland.



Planting for birds 2

by Jane Powers, Irish Times Gardening Correspondent

Trees

Alder and Birch are attractive native trees and are amongst the best to plant for birds, as they provide both seed in winter and insects in the breeding season, though other native trees are also good:

- **Alder** *Alnus glutinosa** or non-native *A. incana* and *A. cordata* are suitable for damp or wet sites. The female 'cones' attract Siskins, Goldfinches and Redpolls in winter. Alders also produce long, hanging catkins in early spring.
- **Birch** *Betula pendula** The female catkins of this species attract Redpolls in autumn, and the silvery bark is attractive throughout the year. Birch grows best on well-drained sites.
- **Goat willow** *Salix caprea** and *S. daphnoides* produce catkins in the early spring; attracting insects eaten by birds. Willow leaves, particularly those of goat willow, are eaten by many kinds of caterpillar.
- **Oak** *Quercus robur** supports a rich variety of insects, including many caterpillars which provide food for young tits and other birds. The acorns are eaten by Woodpigeons, Jays and grey squirrels.
- **Beech** *Fagus sylvatica* (not native to Ireland, though long established) supports fewer species of insects than Oak, but the 'mast' (nuts) are eaten by tits, Chaffinches and Bramblings. Oak and Beech grow into big trees and are only suitable for large gardens.

Providing cover

Gardens can be made more attractive to birds by providing cover for them to nest and roost. Evergreens are valuable in this respect in winter and early spring (Blackbirds and Song Thrushes start nesting in March). Clipping helps to provide dense cover but tends to inhibit flowering and fruiting. Thick cover, near the house, reduces nest predation by Magpies. Many birds will nest in garden shrubs and hedges; these include Blackbird, Song Thrush, Dunnock, Long-tailed Tit, Blackcap, Chaffinch, Bullfinch and Linnet. Goldfinches tend to nest in the branches of fruit trees and tall, but fairly open, bushes.

Birds that tend to favour evergreen coniferous trees for nesting include Collared Dove, Goldcrest,

Redpoll and Greenfinch. Birds which nest in climbers on a wall or tree include Wren, Blackbird and House Sparrow. Spotted Flycatchers need a ledge or an old nest in the climber.

Shrubs and hedges

- **Barberry** *Berberis* species (e.g., *B. thunbergii*) have spiny branches and produces bright red fruit and foliage in autumn.
- **Firethorn** *Pyracantha* (e.g., *P. rogersiana*) can be grown as a hedge or against a wall. It produces red or yellow berries.
- **Forsythia** (e.g., 'Lynwood Variety') produces yellow flowers in April, though Bullfinches are partial to the buds. Can be planted as a hedge.
- **Hawthorn** *Crataegus monogyna** can be clipped to provide a hedge or bush for cover, but should be left unclipped for the berries to develop.
- **Holly** *Ilex aquifolium** can be grown as a bush or a hedge.

Conifers

- **Western Red Cedar** *Thuja plicata* forms a fast-growing hedge.



Yew berries

- **Yew** *Taxus baccata** is a slow growing and shade tolerant hedge or tree, but for dense cover, it needs to be clipped every few years. The female trees have sticky red fruit which birds like to eat: Please note these berries are poisonous to humans.



Blackbirds feed for worms on lawns

Climbers

- **Honeysuckle** *Lonicera periclymenum** 'Belgica' flowers in early summer and its fruits attract warblers as well as thrushes and Bullfinches. *L. periclymenum* 'Serotina' flowers in late summer and produces red fruits in September.
- **Ivy** *Hedera helix** The normal wild form is best, climbing up trees and walls. The fruit is eaten in late winter and early spring by Woodpigeons, thrushes, Robins and Blackcaps. Ivy provides cover for nests and its flowers are attractive to insects in autumn.
- **Virginia Creeper** *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*, *P. henryana* and *P. tricuspidata* are vigorous climbers for walls and trees. The vine-like leaves turn brilliant red in autumn.
- **Wisteria** *W. sinensis* needs to be trained onto a wall. To encourage the trusses of lilac flowers which appear from May to June, the current year's side growth should be cut back to 6" in early August.

Lawns and rockeries

Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, Robins and Starlings will spend much time, especially in spring, on mown lawns in search of earthworms and other invertebrates. If the lawn can be kept moist in summer, worms continue to be available. The lawn is also a source of small flies for Dunnocks, Pied Wagtails, Chaffinches and even Blue Tits. A rockery may also harbour snails that provide food for Song Thrushes in dry summer weather.

Note: * denotes native to Ireland.

Text by Jane Powers, Irish Times Gardening Correspondent. Special thanks to Elmer Doon of Sunhill Nurseries, Farmley, Co. Kilkenny

Garden Birds



Feeding wild birds

Nuts

Peanuts are the most popular food for garden birds and attract a wide range of species. When feeding during the spring and summer ensure all peanuts are fed from a mesh peanut feeder, as whole peanuts can be harmful to young birds.

Seeds

Sunflower seed is a highly nutritious and popular food for birds, especially the tits and finches. The 'black-shell' variety tends to be more popular with birds than the 'striped shell' type, but both will be eaten. 'Mixed Wildbird Seed' is very popular with pigeons and doves, but other garden birds tend to avoid it as they find it hard to digest.

Fats

Don't waste any fat! It's a nutritious food for garden birds. Lumps of suet may be hung out, and meat trimmings, bacon rinds and table scraps will also be eaten gratefully. The large 'Fat Balls' which can be bought in pet shops often prove highly popular - you can also make your own home-made version by pouring melted fat over bread or cake scraps in a yogurt carton mould to make 'bird cake'. This can be made even more nutritious if some seeds, nuts, oatmeal, grated cheese or dried fruits are added.



Goldfinches favour black sunflower seeds, but will also eat peanuts and other seeds.

Fruit

Often overlooked, fruit will attract several species of bird which may not otherwise visit your garden. Apples and pears cut in half and placed on the ground will attract Blackbirds and Song Thrushes, and in particularly hard weather they might bring in Redwings and Fieldfares. Spearling cut apples onto the ends of branches will also attract Blackcaps. Smaller fruit such as grapes will also be taken. A coconut sawn in half and hung upside down from the branch of a tree is welcomed and much enjoyed by the tits.

Other foods

Stale bread, biscuits and cake are often available in the kitchen and can make great bird food, though modern processed bread is not suitable for wild birds and should be avoided where possible. Grated wholemeal bread should be moistened slightly, as this makes it easier for the birds to swallow. Moist bread is also less likely to blow away or be taken off in pieces by the larger, more aggressive birds. Maize flakes, oat flakes and even puppy meal are other valuable food sources. In very cold weather, cheese scattered on the ground beneath bushes should attract wrens and help them through difficult conditions, and left-over mashed potato is a great favourite with Blackcaps.

Can I feed all year round?

Although birds need our help most during winter, feeding between the months of April and October can also be helpful, as there is a great demand on natural resources due to the increase in hungry mouths to feed. If feeding during the summer, only put out peanuts in a fine mesh container so that parent birds cannot take large pieces that might cause young chicks to choke, and avoid fats completely. Safe foods to use at this time of year include sunflower seeds, pinhead oatmeal, sultanas, raisins, currants and mealworms.

Rules of Feeding

1. Feed regularly: don't put out lots of feeders and then forget to refill them. Birds can become dependant on a food source during harsh weather.



Robin, on peanut feeder

2. Only use fresh peanuts and seed. Do not feed mouldy, wrinkled or wizened peanuts or seed.
3. Ensure fresh water is always available for drinking and bathing. An upturned dustbin lid with a stone in it is often all that is required. Be sure to remove the ice in cold weather so that birds can drink.
4. Birds often feed on the ground below a feeder. Make sure that there is no shrubbery nearby that could conceal a cat, and try to keep all feeders at least 5-6 feet above the ground.
5. Remember to wash all feeders and to change the water in the bird bath on a regular basis.

! Did you Know?

You should try to position all your feeders and bird tables in places where it is difficult for cats and other predators to get at them. Relatively open sites are best, so that the birds can see any predators approaching.



Bird tables

Bird tables can make an attractive and interesting addition to even the smallest of gardens. Here are some tips on how to get the best out of them.

When should a bird table be used?

Bird tables are usually left in position all year round, but feeding birds is most important during the winter months, as that is when birds need it most and natural food is scarcest. Although unnatural foods are not good for nestlings, adult birds are usually careful about what they give their chicks, and can use the food to give themselves additional energy to feed their young.

Where should it be?

Ideally you should position your bird table in a reasonably open area, either fixed to the top of a post, or hanging from a branch or bracket. This will make it easier for you to observe and will also reduce the risk of cats or other predators sneaking up on the feeding birds. Don't put your table within easy



Try placing apples on the bird table, or on nearby branches, to attract Blackcaps



There are many different designs of bird table.

reach of a fence or tree from which a cat can leap, but place it near a bush which gives birds somewhere to 'queue up' for a place on the table, or to dash if disturbed.

By the way, a garden is not essential - a feeding tray may even attract birds to a windowsill on a block of flats!

Should there be a roof?

A table with a roof gives extra places for seed feeders or nut bags, but an open one is really just as good.

How can I make one?

Use a piece of exterior quality plywood or some similar board which will not split in wet weather, about 30 x 50cm and 1 to 1.5 cm thick. Fit some strips of wood about 1 or 2 cm high along each side to form a rim around the edge, leaving a gap at each corner to make it easier to sweep clean and to let water drain out.

To hang a table, use small screw-in eyes or hooks at each corner. Attach equal lengths of nylon cord or

light metal chain to each hook and tie together in the centre, or, better still, make a loop at either end across a horizontal branch. This stops the table from spinning round.

A table on a post is easier to position, but you need to drive the post firmly into the ground to prevent the table toppling over. Use two or four small metal angle brackets at the top of the post to fix the tray, or small blocks of wood which can be screwed to the post from the side and then to the tray from underneath.

A few nails or hooks in the edges of the table will be useful for hanging nut bags or wire baskets for kitchen scraps. Treat the whole table with wood preservative if possible; creosote is fine if it is allowed to dry thoroughly before the table is erected. Clean the table regularly to prevent any risk of disease to the birds. Also, move it from time to time, as droppings will accumulate underneath.



Garden Birds



The Garden BirdWatch Survey

The Garden BirdWatch Survey, which runs each winter for a period of 12 weeks beginning on the 1st December, is BirdWatch Ireland's most popular project. Over 1,000 participants from every county in Ireland take part, and the information we receive from them contributes to our knowledge of how Ireland's garden birds are faring. It also allows us to pick out trends in population size, as well as weather related movements and migration patterns from year to year.



Blue Tit: the most frequently recorded tit species in Irish gardens

Species	% Gardens 2003/04	Rank 2003/04	Rank 2002/03	Rank 2001/02
Blackbird	99	1	1	3
Robin	99	2	1	1
Blue Tit	99	3	3	1
Chaffinch	95	4	4	4
Great Tit	94	5	7	5
Magpie	93	6	5	6
Greenfinch	91	7	6	7
Coal Tit	90	8	8	8
Song Thrush	84	9	9	11
Wren	84	10	10	10
House Sparrow	83	11	11	12
Dunnock	80	12	12	9
Goldfinch	78	13	13	15
Starling	77	14	15	14
Jackdaw	71	15	14	13
Woodpigeon	64	16	18	17
Rook	62	17	16	16
Collared Dove	59	18	19	18
Siskin	57	19	17	20
Blackcap	52	20	20	19

If you would like to take part in the survey this winter, please visit our website www.birdwatchireland.ie, where both the survey form and all the instructions are available for download.

A table showing the top 20 garden birds across Ireland during the winter of 2003/2004, as recorded by Garden BirdWatch Survey participants.

Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below and we'll send a form straight out to you

About BirdWatch Ireland

BirdWatch Ireland is the largest independent conservation organisation in Ireland. Our aim is the conservation of wild birds and their natural habitats. Established in 1968, we currently have over 10,000 members and supporters and a local network of over 20 branches nationwide. We own or manage an increasing number of reserves which protect threatened habitats and the birds that rely on them.

Members receive a quarterly magazine, 'Wings', full of information about birds and other wildlife. BirdWatch Ireland also publishes the journal 'Irish Birds' on an annual basis. Birdfood, feeders, books and other sales goods are available from BirdWatch Ireland head office in Newcastle, Co. Wicklow, via our on-line store at www.birdwatchireland.ie, or alternatively through our local branches; sales catalogues



are available upon request. Full details of annual membership and the work that we do are available from:

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Rockingham House
Newcastle
Co. Wicklow
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E-mail: info@birdwatchireland.org
Website: www.birdwatchireland.ie



About ENFO

ENFO is a public service which provides easy access to wide-ranging and authoritative information on the environment. It was established in 1990 by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and its aim is to foster increased environmental awareness and thereby facilitate a broad partnership in efforts to promote sustainable development, including protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations. For further information, contact :-

ENFO, 17 Andrew's Street, Dublin 2.
Tel: 01 888 2001 or 1890 200 191 (calls at local rate)
Website: www.enfo.ie E-mail: info@enfo.ie

! Did you Know?

Some species that we always used to think of as common, such as House Sparrows and Song Thrushes, have shown evidence of alarming declines across the country in recent years. We hope that the Garden BirdWatch Survey will help us to discover the reasons for this.