

## Helping Birds in Our Gardens

The RSPB's head of monitoring conservation science "The relentless decline of farmland bird populations in the UK continues; the latest government statistics show the Farmland Bird Index down by 55 percent since 1970". More than half the woodland bird species monitored by the British Trust for Ornithology are also showing declines.

### **Feeding your birds**

Providing supplementary foods for birds has positive effects, improving overwinter survival in a number of species, for example. Black sunflower seeds, sunflower hearts, good quality peanuts (don't offer whole during the breeding season to avoid nestlings choking), seed mixes, windfall apples and mealworms. Supplying mealworms can improve the hatching and fledging success of birds in built up areas; they are expensive but a natural supply of insects can be provided through wildlife gardening.

To reduce the risks of disease, food contamination and poor nutrition, follow these [best practice guidelines to garden bird feeding](#) – including offering a variety of foods from trusted sources in different locations around the garden, feeding little and often so that food isn't exposed to the elements for long periods, and ensuring that feeders are cleaned and moved regularly to avoid an accumulation of waste food or bird droppings.

### **Wildlife gardening – spare a square metre or more?**

This will encourage birds, the insects they feed on and other wildlife to use your garden & bring joy.

- Plant flowers that **encourage insects** and will control "pests" naturally.
- Plant **native trees and hedges** and let your hedges flower and fruit. Allow nature to make the most of this food source by not cutting back until late winter.
- Inaction! Don't "weed" everything and leave areas to allow wild flowers to establish and self-seed, feeding birds and other wildlife along the way. Allow your garden to become a **home for nature**.
- Actions such as not mowing part / all of the lawn, leaving dandelions, daisies and clover to flower and leaving piles of dead wood, all help.

### **Water**

- Provide a clean supply of water for birds and other wildlife. Use something with a rough surface, sloping sides and a stone in the middle, eg a plant saucer. Or buy one from a garden centre or the RSPB.
- Consider a pond, however small, and enjoy all the wildlife that will use it. See RSPB or BTO websites above for advice.

### **Nest sites and boxes**

Natural nest sites for birds such as holes in trees or old buildings are disappearing fast. Providing nesting sites for breeding birds in your garden gives you the fascinating experience of watching a key part of the lifecycle of birds happening close at hand. Read the BTO's advice on what to look for when choosing a nest box and where to site it, or follow their plans to make one yourself: <https://www.bto.org/putting-nest-boxes-birds>

### **Hazards**

Don't: site nest boxes facing south or east; feed fat balls in netting (birds' feet may become caught); let fruit netting become a potential trap for birds (left loose); light bonfires or trim long grass without checking for wildlife. Do: put ramps out of or covers over water butts and similar water containers in which birds, bats and insects might otherwise drown.

More Information from: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/how-you-can-help-birds/>  
<https://www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/providing-birds>