



Malmesbury and District Natural History Society

Big Garden Birdwatch Review

2026

This year was Malmesbury and District Natural History Society's 2nd annual Bird count. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who took part and share some of the findings with you. We can now compare 2024 and 2025 with 2026...

	2024	2025	2026
Number of records	225	663	706
Number of species	26	35	36
Number of contributors	13	26	28

Top 10	2024	2025	2026
1	Blue Tit (39)	Starling (84)	Blue Tit (103)
2	House Sparrow (31)	Blue Tit (74)	Wood Pigeon (75)
3	Wood Pigeon (22)	House Sparrow (69)	Great Tit (56)
4	Starling (20)	Rook (60)	Blackbird (51)
5	Long-tailed Tit (19)	Wood Pigeon (56)	House Sparrow (47)
6	Jackdaw (16)	Blackbird (43)	Robin (41)
7	Robin (14)	Great Tit (39)	Magpie (38)
8	Magpie (13)	Jackdaw (35)	Goldfinch & Starling (37)
9	Crow (11)	Long-tailed Tit & Robin (33)	Long-tailed Tit (39)
10	Goldfinch (9)	Magpie (30)	Chaffinch (28)

Noteworthy records in 2026

Unsurprisingly the Blue Tits have taken first place again this year after the Starling total was boosted in 2025 by a large group skewing the numbers. All but 2 gardens had Blue Tits, with a maximum of 8, and most had Great Tits. This is probably due to the prevalence of feeders, which encourage the tits (to the detriment of some of the other species which are competing for other food sources in the garden).



Chaffinch

It's nice to see the Chaffinch making an appearance for the first time this year. They have suffered in recent years from Trichomonosis, a disease which causes their throats to swell and make swallowing so difficult that they starve as a result. Anecdotally I have noticed more in our woodlands while bird ringing so hopefully they are starting to make a comeback.

Birds rising up the charts this year include Great Tits and Blackbirds. Great Tits are prone to Avian Pox which causes growths and lacerations on their heads and legs. Please stop feeding for 2 to 3 weeks and clean the feeders thoroughly if you see this on the birds in your garden.

Feeders, unless very scrupulously cleaned, also provide sources of disease which has had a massive effect on Greenfinch populations in particular. It is important to provide other, more natural, sources of food within the garden.

Blackbirds are now suffering from a mosquito-born disease called Usutu virus which is spreading across the country from the southeast and London. Symptoms include lethargy, weakness, loss of coordination and seizures. If you see a Blackbird demonstrating these symptoms please inform [Garden Wildlife Health](#) so that we can track where the disease has reached.

It is commonly believed that male Blackbirds with black beaks in winter are those from the population of Northern Europe, but in fact all males in their first winter have black beaks. More are present in the winter due to migration from colder areas.

It is worrying though to see the House Sparrow gradually dropping down the list. As a percentage of the total records they were 14% in 2024, 10% in 2025 and now 6.5% in 2026. Not so long ago they were a common sight but their numbers have declined so dramatically that they are now a Red Listed bird.

The main causes of their decline are lack of food and loss of habitat. It is likely that most (if not all) of the people contributing to this survey feed the birds in their gardens so the best thing you can do in addition is to put up some nest boxes for them.



House Sparrow nest box

House Sparrows like to live in the roofs of houses but modern homes don't tend to have the 'gaps' in them that older properties do and those houses often close the 'gaps' when roof repairs are carried out. Putting up some nest boxes can help with that!

On the face of it, the Wood Pigeon does not look like a species destined for success. It is large and clumsy and would make a good meal for any predator. Despite occasional losses, probably due to foxes or sometimes Sparrowhawks it is thriving, probably largely due to its ability to breed throughout the year.

The Robin is notable for the fact that it often sings during the winter, a rather more subdued version of the spring song.

Goldfinches, once an uncommon species, continue to thrive in the UK, increasing numbers appearing in the survey. It is rare nowadays to see large flocks, although occasionally a field of thistles will attract a large number in the autumn.

Long-tailed Tit is another species which continues to do well. If you have suitable dense bushy cover you have a good chance of getting them to nest, which they do very early in the year, generally the first part of March.

Only one garden had Blackcap this year. The birds which we see in winter are generally from central and northern Europe, having migrated west rather than south, a fairly recent habit.

Great Spotted Woodpecker was present in 6 gardens, no doubt due to feeding. This species is doing well, whereas its smaller relative the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker is in severe decline and faces extinction in the UK.

After the end of March consider giving your feeders a rest until October. Aim to provide a good environment for insects over the warmer weather and this will bring in the birds. Don't use chemical sprays against insects - you are just harming the birds.

New species for 2026

- Marsh Tit – this rare Red Listed bird was spotted during the survey in a garden in Minety. It may be an unusual bird but there is a good population locally so it is worth looking out for this species in case there are more living in our area than we are currently aware of.
- Chiffchaff – while this warbler has traditionally been a migrant, some birds have recently taken to overwintering in the UK. This may be a result of increasing climate change.
- Black-headed and Herring Gull – these highly adaptable birds can be seen almost anywhere in the UK taking advantage of the way humans live. It's actually a surprise they have not been seen on the survey before now!
- Moorhen – it is likely that these birds will become more common on the survey as the numbers of people submitting records increases. There are so many waterways and lakes in the area that they are rather common locally.



Marsh Tit

- Red Kite – these elegant fliers have increased in numbers rapidly in recent years. However, one of the rules of the survey is to only count birds that actually land on your property and these birds are most often seen in flight. Therefore, there will be many more Red Kites seen around than will appear in these statistics.

Species present in 2024 but absent in 2025

Given the dramatic increase in record numbers for 2025 it is a pity that there are some birds recorded last year but missing from our count in 2025. These birds were:

- Bullfinch – a strikingly coloured bird which enjoys seeds, it is surprising that none were reported during last year’s or this year’s surveys.
- Buzzard – like the Red Kite, these birds are most often seen in flight. Therefore, they may be spotting occasionally during our surveys but will not be recorded as frequently as they are actually seen.
- Green Woodpecker – more often heard than seen, this lover of ants is seen and heard quite often in our area. No doubt it will be recorded again in the future.
- Grey Wagtail – the Grey Wagtail was missing in 2025 and again this year. It is unlikely to be recorded by anyone unless they actually live next to a river or other water source so probably won’t appear in the statistics very often.
- Mistle Thrush – sometimes confused with the Song Thrush this is a far rarer bird. It is not surprising that it is missing from the statistics this year even though it appeared in 2025.
- Siskin – it is surprising that there were no Siskins reported in this year's survey. They are regularly reported on feeders in Malmesbury. Hopefully, they will be recorded again in 2027.
- Sparrowhawk – this bird hunting species appears in many gardens attracted by the activities around our bird feeders. However, they are not that common and, when we are only recording for 1 hour, it is not surprising that they did not happen to visit during the survey.

Here is the complete list:

Species	2025	2026
Blackbird	43	51
Blackcap	2	1
Black-headed Gull	0	3
Blue Tit	74	103
Bullfinch	0	0
Buzzard	1	0

Chaffinch	10	28
Chiffchaff	0	1
Cole Tit	5	6
Collared Dove	11	21
Carrion Crow	13	19
Dunnock	12	20
Fieldfare	2	2
Gt Spotted Woodpecker	4	6
Great Tit	39	56
Greenfinch	1	9
Green Woodpecker	0	0
Grey Wagtail	0	0
Goldfinch	25	37
Herring Gull	0	3
House Sparrow	69	47
Jackdaw	35	26
Jay	4	3
Long-tailed Tit	33	29
Magpie	30	38
Mistle Thrush	1	0
Marsh Tit	0	1
Moorhen	0	1
Nuthatch	1	4
Pheasant	5	1
Pied Wagtail	0	4
Red Kite	0	1
Redwing	0	11
Robin	33	41
Rook	60	3
Siskin	2	0
Song Thrush	1	8
Sparrowhawk	1	0
Starling	84	37
Woodpigeon	56	75
Wren	5	9
TOTAL	662	706

New species in 2025 are highlighted in GREEN.

New species in 2026 are highlighted in RED.