

20 YEARS

of Manx BirdLife
Garden Birdwatch

Bea-feie Son dy Chooilley Imbagh



AN ASSESSMENT AND COMPILATION OF MORE THAN 20 YEARS OF CITIZEN SCIENCE ON THE ISLE OF MAN

Alexandra King

Ever since the Manx BirdLife Garden Birdwatch was founded by Chris Sharpe in 1999, the dedication of the Manx public has provided us with over 20 years of data on our Manx Birds. This has allowed us to follow the changes in our garden communities, and has seen the loss of Yellowhammer, and the growing populations of species such as Great Spotted Woodpecker. This report summarises these findings, as well as providing information for those wanting to create a better environment for their garden birds. We would also like to say a big thank you to those who have used their time to record their garden birds, have donated to Manx BirdLife, or have shown an interest in supporting their garden birds. The data from 1999 has been omitted from this analysis as it was a pilot period.



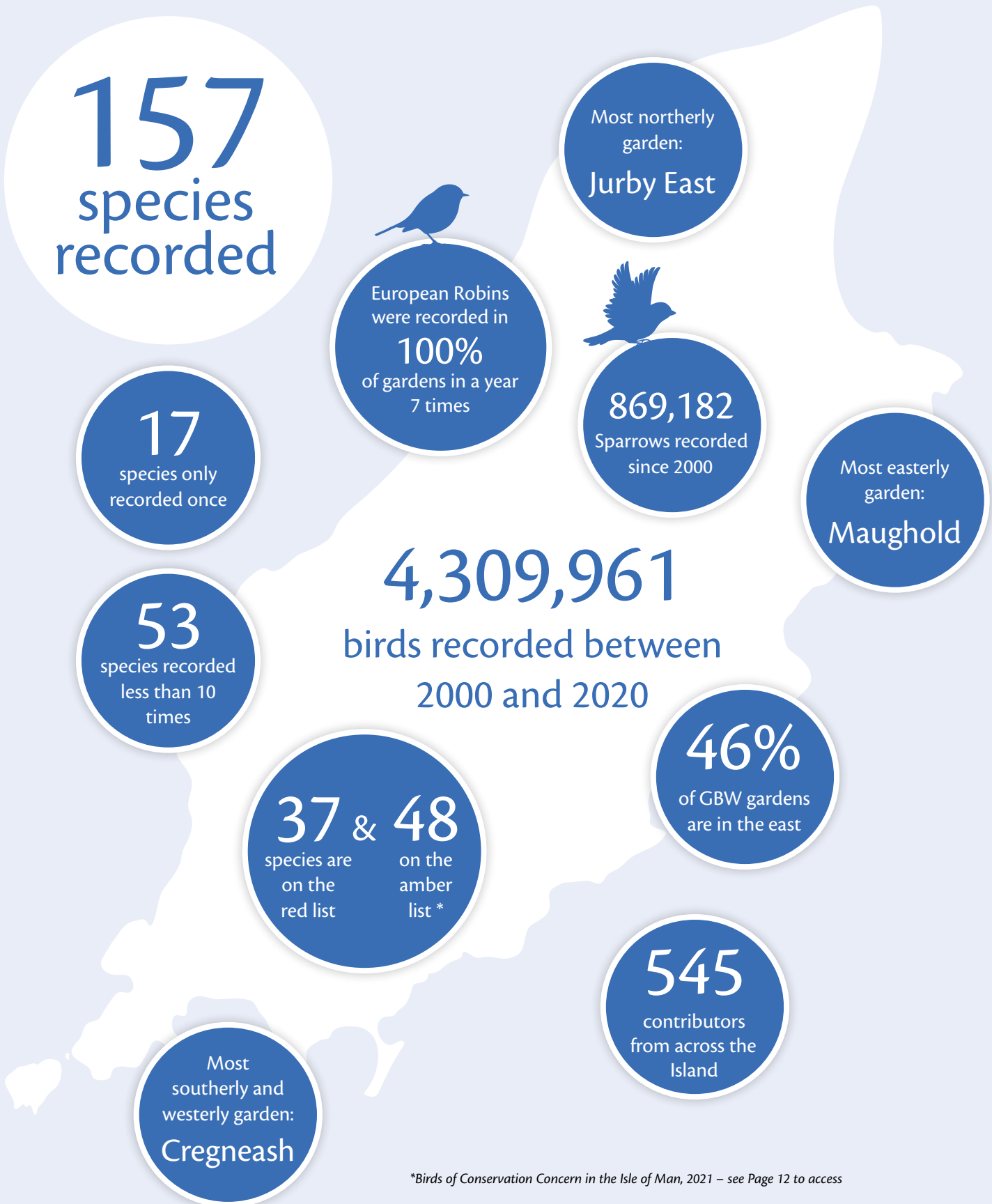
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This analysis has been completed and written by Alexandra King, Manx BirdLife Volunteer Ecologist. Alexandra has spent the year 2022-23 volunteering with Manx BirdLife following her graduation from Swansea University with a BSc in Biology and is now studying a Masters by Research in Ecology at Lancaster University. She hopes to continue her work with birds and her focus on Manx ecology.

Garden Birdwatch statistics

Understanding the relevance of the location of bird sightings is an important factor when studying our garden birds. Having contributors from areas across the Island allows us to develop a clearer picture of the state of our garden bird populations.



Which species are the most commonly recorded?

THE TOP 10

The top 10 most common species recorded in the Garden Birdwatch has shown considerable change between the years 2000 and 2020. House Sparrow remained at number 1, being consistently the highest recorded species by a wide margin.



House Sparrow,
Passer Domesticus



Tree Sparrow,
Passer Montanus

Whilst House Sparrows are the most commonly recorded garden bird, Tree Sparrows are listed as birds of conservation concern on the Isle of Man. The easiest way to tell them apart is by the markings on their head. Tree Sparrows have a solid brown head and neck, while House Sparrows have a grey patch on the top of their head.

Chaffinches, Blackbirds, Blue Tits, Great Tits, Robins, and Collared Doves all saw a decrease in observations over the 20-year period, however Greenfinches had the greatest decline, falling from 4th to 19th place. Similar decreases in observations have been seen across Great Britain in recent years and are likely due to the emergence of the disease finch trichomonosis.

However, Starlings, Jackdaws, Rooks, and Feral Pigeons saw increases in the number of observations, with the biggest surge being seen in Goldfinches, moving from 24th to 3rd place. This is thought to be related to their change in food source as Nyjer seeds and sunflower hearts have become more available in gardens.

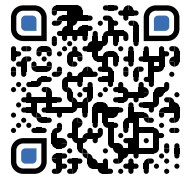
Overall, the most common species were House Sparrows, Chaffinches, Starlings, Jackdaws, Greenfinches, Blackbirds, Blue Tits, Rooks, Goldfinches, and Great Tits.

The top ten birds made up 73% of total birds per garden in 2000, and this remained the same in 2020.

To help prevent the spread of trichomonosis in your garden, it is important to regularly clean and disinfect birdfeeders and birdbaths.

More information is available on this topic on our website:

ManxBirdLife.im/garden-bird-disease-on-the-rise-again/



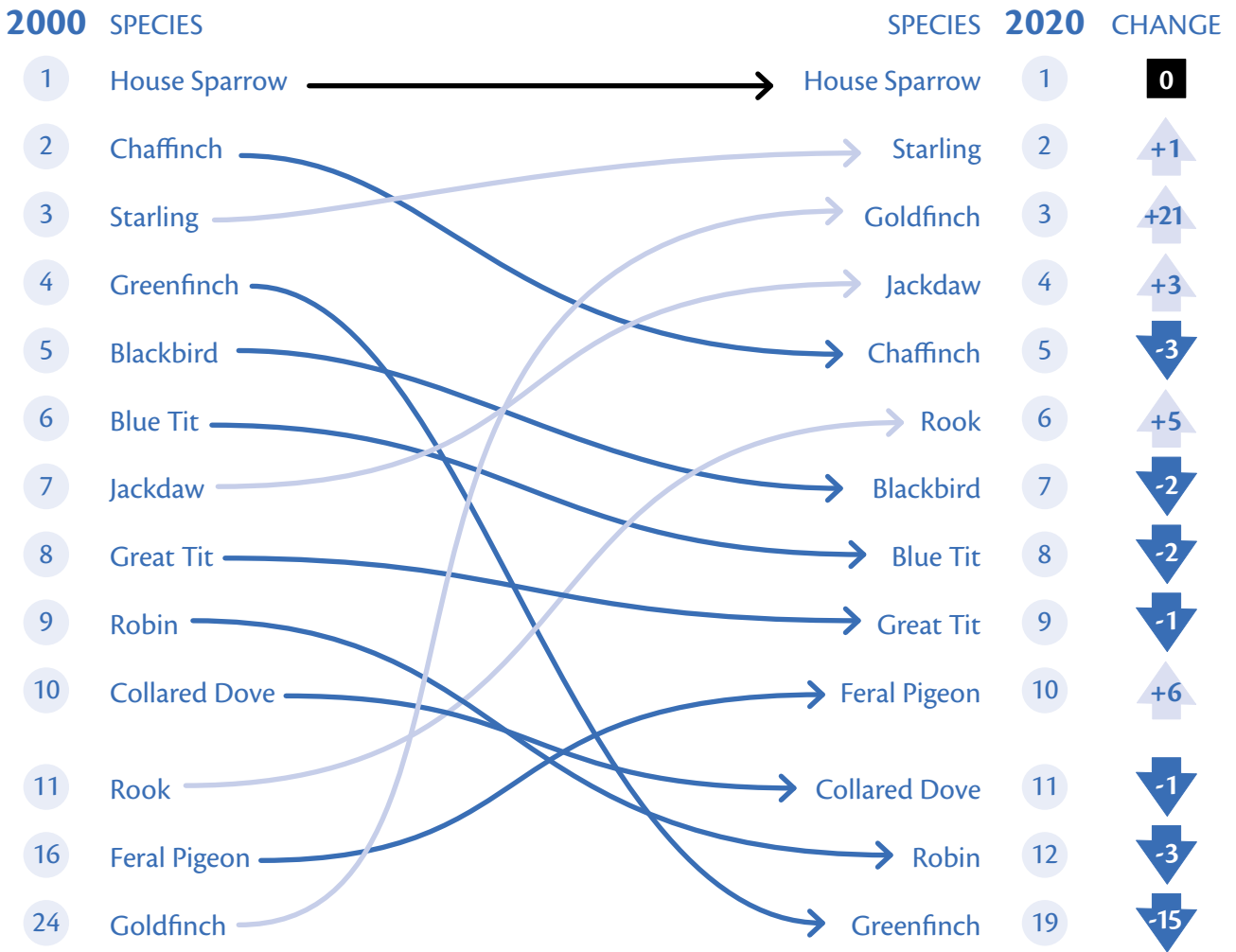


Figure 1: The top 10 most common species in the Garden Birdwatch in 2000 as compared to their rank positions in 2020. Dark blue arrows indicate decrease in rank position, light blue indicates increase in rank position, and black indicates no change.

In comparison to the results of British Trust of Ornithology (BTO) 25-year analysis of their Garden Birdwatch between 1995 and 2019, the composition of the top ten garden birds is quite different. Unlike MBL, on the BTO's list, Chaffinch is not present, neither is Starling, Jackdaw, Greenfinch, or Rook. The biggest difference in top ten species between BTO and MBL is the top position, which for BTO was Blue Tit in 1995 and 2019, and for MBL has remained the House Sparrow.

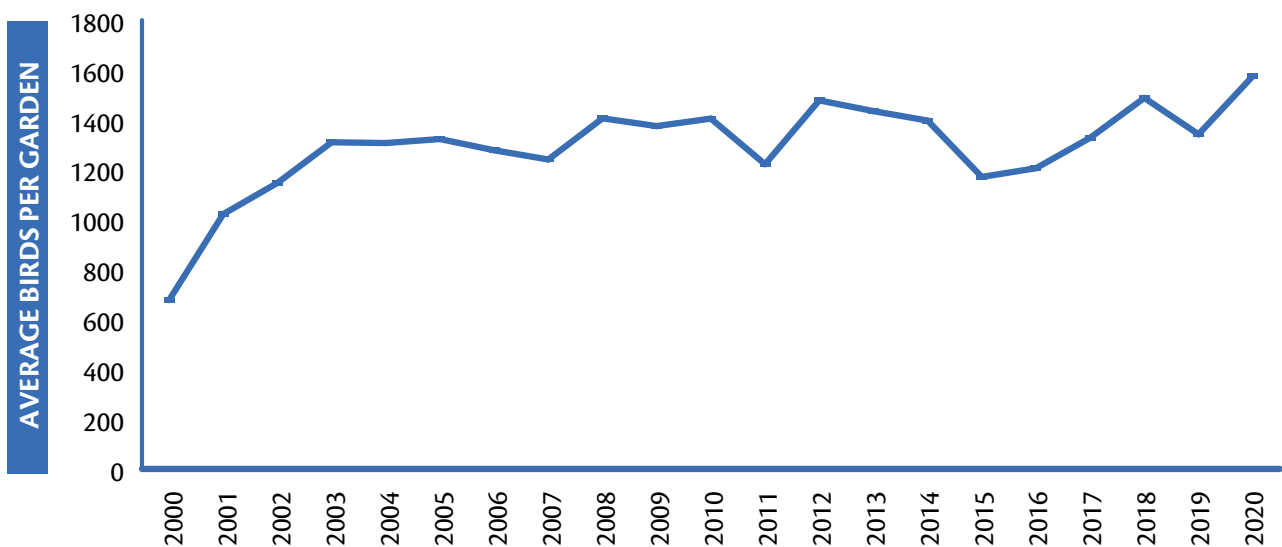


Figure 2: The average number of the top ten garden birds recorded per garden between 2000 and 2020.

Yearly and seasonal changes

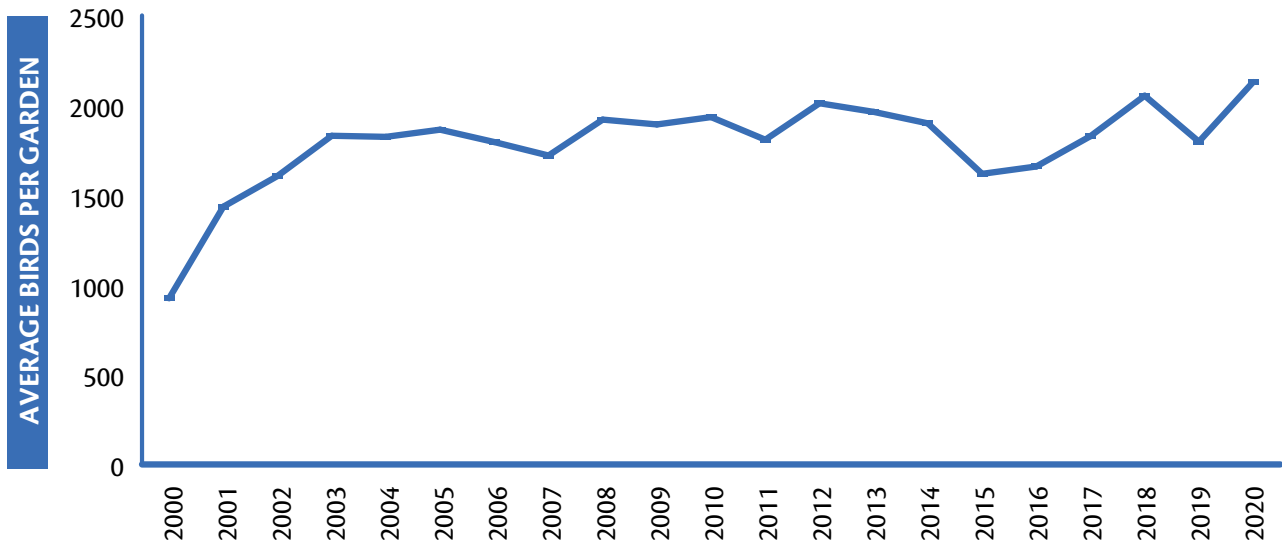


Figure 3: The average number of **birds recorded per garden** in the GBW from 2000 to 2020.

Yearly progression

Since 2000, the overall average number of birds recorded yearly per garden has gradually increased, from 925 in 2000, to 2129 in 2020. This may be related to an overall increase in bird feeder usage in gardens over the last 40 years, as some species who have adapted to utilise this food source have increased in urban areas, while other species who do not use feeders as regularly remain unchanged.

Similarly, over the past twenty years the average number of top ten species reported in each garden in a year has increased from 677 to 1575. This involved a sharp increase from 2000 to 2003, and a gradual increase in the years following. The peak in 2020 may be related to the increased time spent watching our gardens birds that year.

How do our garden bird populations vary with the seasons?

The number of our different garden bird species vary throughout the year, depending on species migration patterns, breeding periods, and the movements between habitats.

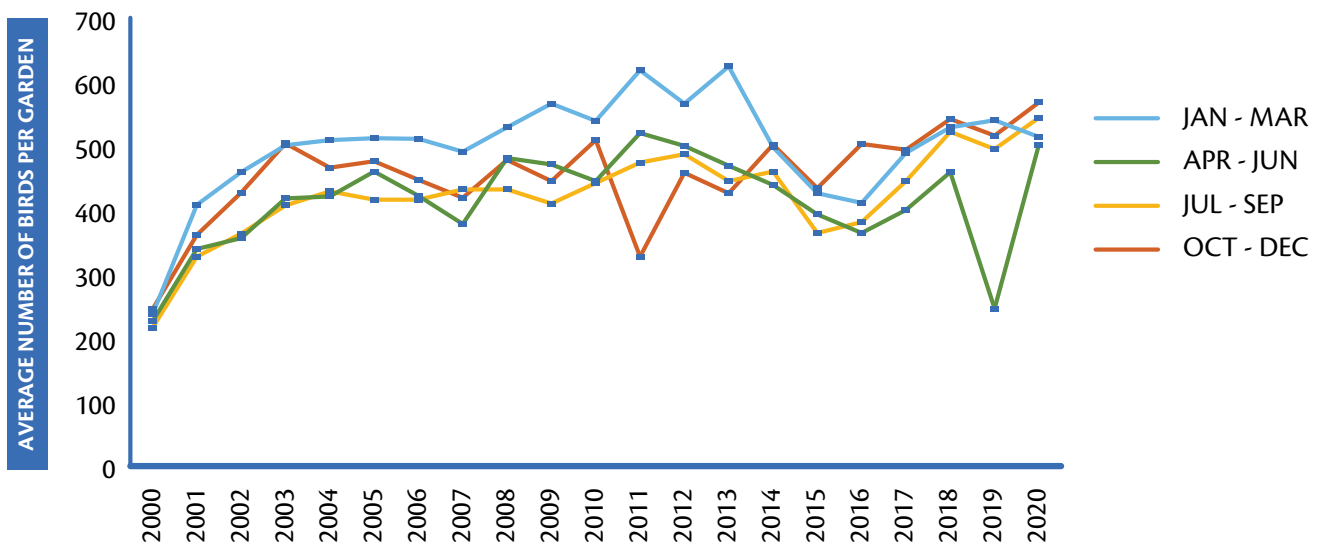


Figure 4: The average number of **birds recorded per garden in the GBW from 2000 to 2020, during the four quarters of the year**. These periods are January to March, April to June, July to September, and October to December.

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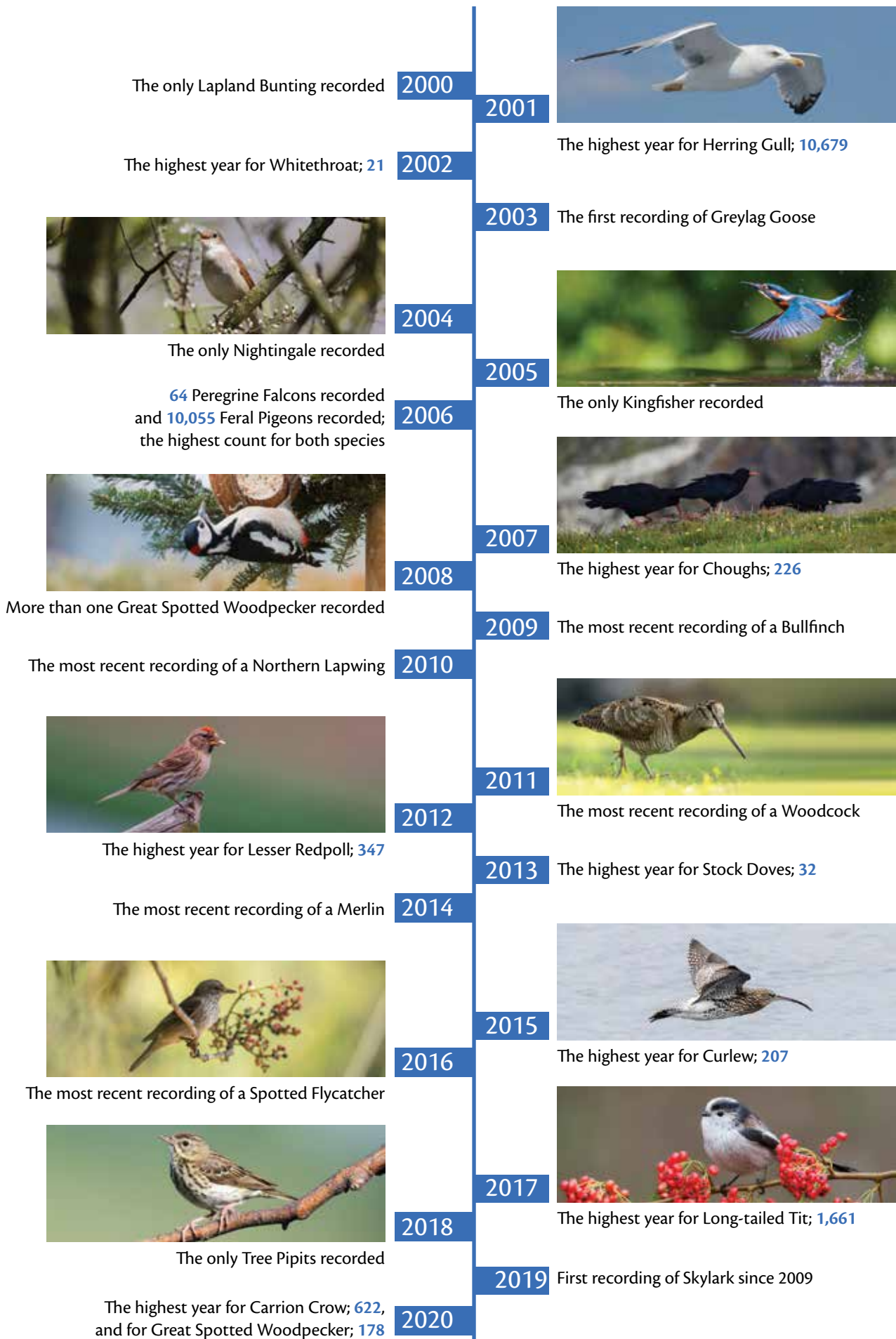


Table 1: The best month to see each of our garden bird species. This was determined by combining the total counts of each species per month per year. The highest total month was deemed the most likely to see that species.

MONTH	BIRDS
January	Chaffinch · Starling · Blackbird · Blue Tit · Rook · Great Tit · Robin · Dunnock Woodpigeon · Song Thrush · Long-tailed Tit · Wren · Siskin · Pied Wagtail Tree Sparrow · Grey Wagtail · Blackcap · Moorhen · Treecreeper · Brambling Hen Harrier · Common Redpoll · Northern Lapwing · Ringed Plover · Whooper Swan
February	Bohemian Waxwing · Raven · Great Spotted Woodpecker
March	Grey Heron · Meadow Pipit · Hybrid Crow · Curlew Sandpiper · Jack Snipe
April	Willow Warbler · Chiffchaff · Lesser Redpoll · Reed Bunting
May	Hooded Crow · Mallard · Greylag Goose · Whitethroat
June	Skylark · Sand Martin · Stock Dove
July	Jackdaw · Greenfinch · Collared Dove · Herring Gull · Magpie · Swift Stonechat · Greater Canada Goose
August	House Sparrow · Barn Swallow · House Martin · Sparrowhawk Linnet · Spotted Flycatcher
September	Black-headed Gull · Northern Gannet
October	Goldfinch · Redwing · Goldcrest · Kestrel · Black-headed Gull · Rock Dove
November	Feral Pigeon · Coal Tit · Fieldfare · Curlew · Great Cormorant · Peregrine Falcon
December	Mistle Thrush · Carrion Crow · Red-billed Chough · Oystercatcher Purple Sandpiper · Sanderling

There is a concentration of birds being seen in gardens in the late autumn and winter months, as this is when birds prioritise feeding to maintain themselves until spring. There are also less natural food sources for the birds at this time of year which is why they frequent gardens more readily. In spring, many birds are finding mates, building nests, and sitting on eggs, so they may not be as frequently seen. In summer, fledglings leave the nest, and adults must spend their time collecting food for themselves and their offspring, so the number of birds seen in the garden increases once more.

Garden Birdwatch Timeline 2000 - 2020



Species focus

Eagles, Kites, Hawks, and Falcons

Whilst birds of prey aren't typically regular garden visitors, monitoring their behaviour through the GBW can give us an insight into their food sources, and their presence in more densely populated areas. Sparrowhawks are the most recorded bird of prey in the GBW, as their diet consists of small birds typical of a garden, and they are seen across Great Britain in both urban and rural areas. Since 2000, Sparrowhawks have seen an increase from a mean count of 1.45 per garden to 5.35 in 2020. In contrast, Hen Harriers, which are not usually considered to be a garden bird, have declined over this period from 0.43 to 0.16. Kestrels have also shown a decline in GBW gardens; despite increasing in gardens in 2004, counts fell to 0 per garden in 2020.

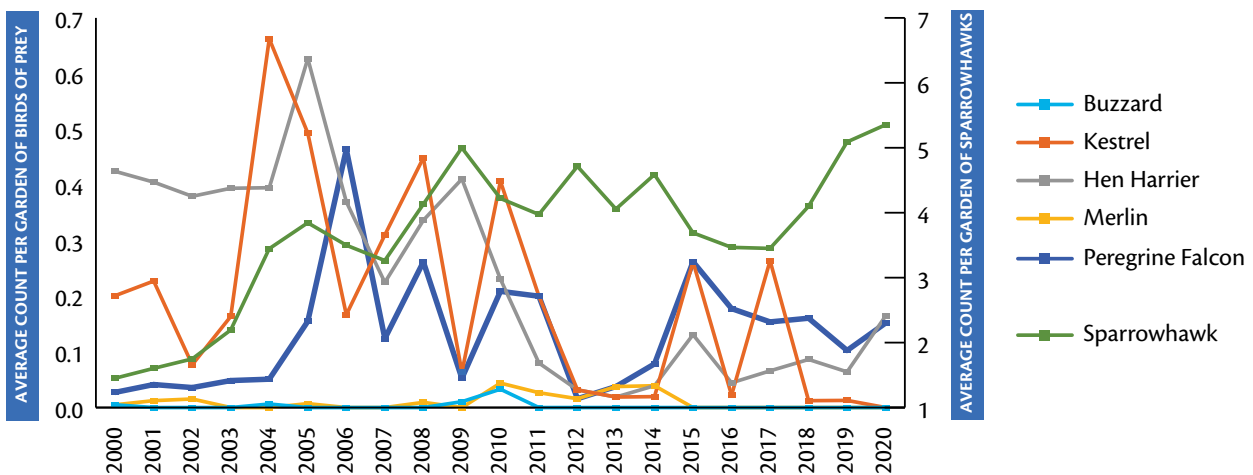


Figure 5: The average count per garden of birds of prey in the Garden Birdwatch between 2000 and 2020. Sparrowhawk average is shown on a secondary axis, to better demonstrate population changes across species.

Crows: Carrion, Hooded, and Hybrid

While the Isle of Man has typically only seen Hooded Crows in the past, in recent years Carrion Crows have been spreading further North, and this has been reflected in the GBW. Another result of this is the hybridisation of these species, and while numbers of Carrion Crows are currently low in comparison to Hooded Crows, we expect to see a further increase in their population in the future. In 2020, all three species showed an increase in average count per garden, but it is unclear what led to this increase.

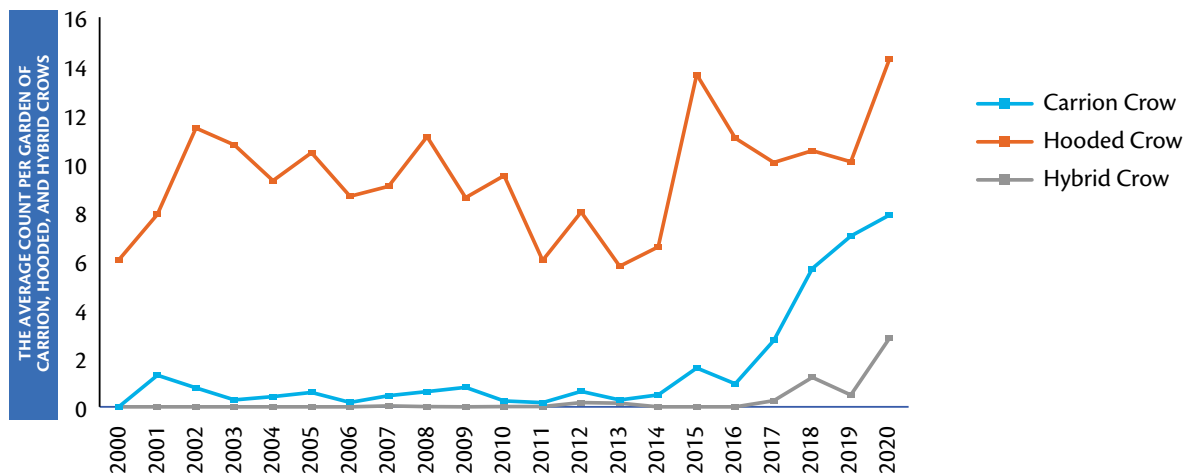


Figure 6: The average count per garden of Carrion, Hooded, and Hybrid Crows in the Garden Birdwatch between 2000 and 2020.

How can we continue to support our garden birds?

As their normal habitat and food sources are slowly being lost, it is important that if we are able, that we encourage birds to stay in our gardens. We can do this through food provisions, suitable areas for nesting or nest boxes, and increasing the availability of water and plants where they can hide and find natural food sources. In our January 2023 Garden Questionnaire, we asked our GBW supporters what they do for birds in their gardens.

FOOD

From the responses, we found that a large majority of GBW gardens already provide food for garden birds. Sunflower seeds, Nyjer seeds, fresh, unsalted peanuts and net free fat balls are excellent fat sources for garden birds and can provide a high number of calories, which is especially important during the winter months. Meal worms or wax worms provide protein and minerals that are important for muscles, and fresh fruit such as apples, pears, and berries provide carbohydrates.

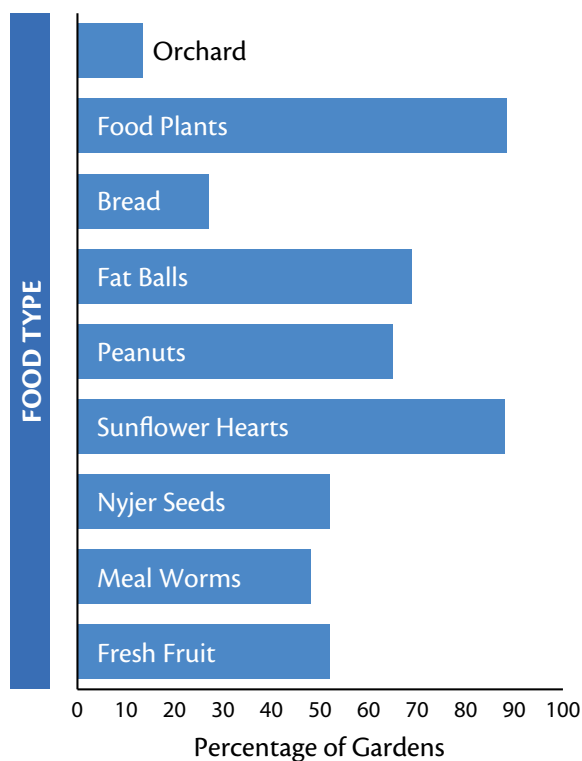


Figure 7: The percentage of GBW gardens that supply food types on feeders or grown in the garden, including food plants, orchards, seeds, meal worms, fruit, fat balls and bread. This data was collected in our GARDEN QUESTIONNAIRE 2023.

WATER

Most gardeners also recorded providing bird baths in some form, and almost half also included a freshwater pond. The provision of water for garden birds is important for birds to stay hydrated and to clean their feathers. If you provide a source of fresh water, it is important that it is changed regularly, and the container cleaned to prevent the transmission of disease between your garden's birds.

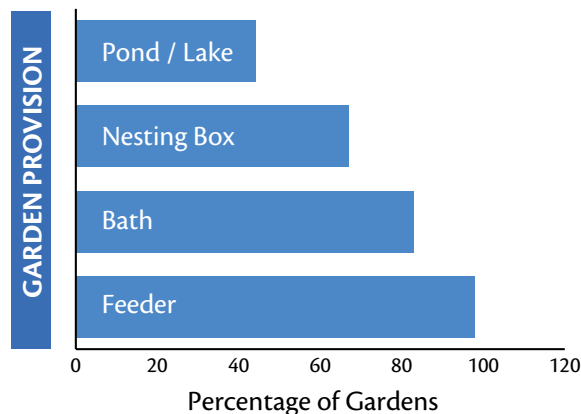


Figure 8: The percentage of GBW gardens that supply different provisions for birds including ponds or lakes, nest boxes, bird baths, and feeders. This data was collected in our garden questionnaire 2023

NEST BOXES AND NESTING MATERIALS

Nest boxes and nesting materials provide shelter for, and aid in nest building for garden birds during their breeding and incubation times. A range of nesting materials can be used by garden birds, and we recommend supplying natural fibre such as sheep's wool, as long as they have not been chemically treated in any way including flea and tick treatments, and plant matter such as mosses, grasses, and straw, or cut up leaves. If you have House Martins, Song Thrushes or Blackbirds in your garden, an area of wet mud such as a puddle or the edge of a pond is ideal. When providing these materials, it is best to leave them nearby the nests, and above the ground in hanging baskets or on bushes.

Nest boxes provide protection from weather and predators, but it is important to get the right nest box for your garden bird species.

Table 2: Recommended nest type, and size specification, and location for garden bird species

SPECIES	NEST TYPE	ENTRY SIZE	LOCATION
Blue Tits	Box	25mm holes	2-4 metres up a tree or wall
Great Tits	Box	28mm	2-4 metres up a tree or wall
Robins and Wrens	Box	Open top half at the front	Less than 2 metres off the ground and hidden in vegetation
Sparrows	Box	32mm	High up under the eaves, spaced out on the side of a building
Starlings	Box	45mm	High up under the eaves, spaced out on the side of a building
House Martins	Cup made from sawdust and cement, attached to a piece of wood	25mm semi-circle hole	High up under the eaves, keep other species' nest boxes away from House Martins' nests
Swallows	Cup made from sawdust and cement, attached to a piece of wood	An opening 50mm high and 70mm wide to enter the building	High up inside a dark out-building, on a ledge or beam
Swifts	Box	65mm by 30mm entrance hole at the front of one end	High up under the eaves, with an unobstructed flight path and out of direct sunlight

If you are interested in viewing nest activity, we recommend installing a nest box camera when the box is empty, rather than disturbing the birds when they are actively nesting or incubating.

For more information on nest boxes, we recommend visiting the RSPB's website www.RSPB.org.uk the British Trust for Ornithology www.bto.org or The Wildlife Trusts www.wildlifetrusts.org



Since the founding of the Manx BirdLife Garden Birdwatch, species composition in our gardens has changed, and species have come and gone. Overall, the average number of birds in our gardens has increased, and House Sparrows have remained our most common garden bird.

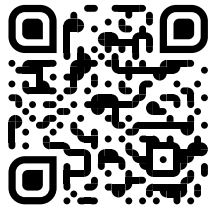
It is vital that we continue to monitor garden bird populations to understand the spread of diseases, changes in migration schedules, and to understand the effects that the changing climate and the changes to our local environments have on our birds.

As a citizen science project, the Manx BirdLife Garden Birdwatch depends on the contributions of the Manx people. It is helpful to have people with all kinds of gardens, and from different locations including different areas of the Island, and rural, coastal, and urban environments.

We welcome any new participants, whether you are a seasoned birdwatcher or a beginner looking to give it a go. If you are already a participant, why not get your friends involved? For more information about the scheme, and to register, please email enquiries@manxbirdlife.im

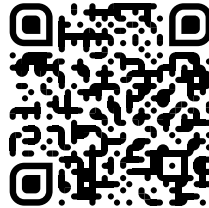
MORE INFORMATION ON THE TOPICS DISCUSSED IN THIS PUBLICATION CAN BE FOUND AT:

Birds of Conservation Concern
in the Isle of Man 2021



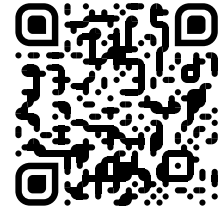
ManxBirdLife.im/bocciom/

More information on signing up for
the Manx BirdLife Garden Birdwatch



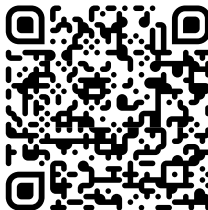
[ManxBirdLife.im/sightings/
garden-birdwatch](https://ManxBirdLife.im/sightings/garden-birdwatch)

Manx Bird List



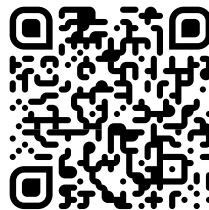
[ManxBirdLife.im/Manx-birds/
manx-bird-list/](https://ManxBirdLife.im/Manx-birds/manx-bird-list/)

Codes of conduct for
birdwatchers and photographers



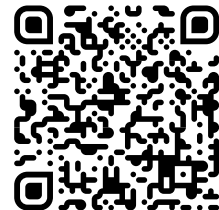
[ManxBirdLife.im/Manx-birds/
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Finch Trichomonosis



[ManxBirdLife.im/garden-bird-
disease-on-the-rise-again/](https://ManxBirdLife.im/garden-bird-disease-on-the-rise-again/)

Injured, sick or
orphaned wild birds



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