

Moffat & District
WILDLIFE CLUB

**RESULTS OF OUR
GARDEN BIRD SURVEY
2009**

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Garden Bird Survey 2009

The survey was intended to give a 'snapshot' of the birds to be seen in our gardens over the course of a year. Participants were asked to either 'tick off' birds seen or, better still, enter the maximum count of birds seen during a one week period each month throughout the year.

It was appreciated that one garden can differ dramatically from another, even one close by. It was also recognised that weather conditions could also play a part as many birds seem to avoid some gardens in poor weather while favouring another. The weather factor can, of course, vary considerably from year to year, influencing the type and amount of food available, the success or failure of breeding, etc.

Nevertheless, it was hoped that we would still obtain a fairly reasonable picture of the birds to be seen in our gardens throughout the district over the year 2009.

Disappointingly, the number of participants fell well short of what we had hoped. We accept some responsibility for this in that we did not advertise sufficiently and failed to regularly remind the membership at our meetings! The low number of returns does mean that the end results may not be particularly accurate.

Charting the actual maximum counts proved to be next to impossible with our resources. A general picture was therefore adopted. This was done by taking the number of 'reporting days' and whether a particular bird was seen or not and converting this to a percentage value. For example, if 6 gardens each reported sightings over 7 days, $6 \times 7 = 42$ reporting days. If a particular bird is seen in, say, 3 gardens on each of the seven days, this gives a total of 21 sighting days. Taking $21/42$ gives 50%. This would thus imply that, in general, you would find a 50% chance of seeing that bird over a seven day period within the district. In other words, this principle should give a fair indication as to how common a bird is over the area in general.

The area covered by participants has varied tremendously from month to month, ranging from well out the Selkirk Road to the east and down to Nethermill to the south, some from Annan Water to the north but, unsurprisingly, none from westwards of Beattock. Most, the more regular ones, came from the eastern part of Moffat itself and from Beattock. It must be stressed that the following analysis is for the district as a whole, not individual gardens and, in fact, some birds are very localised and are only likely to be seen in one or two spots.

In the following report, comparison is often made to the December 2008 levels. That month was the 'pilot' for the survey – used for evaluating various means of recording and presenting the information. The number of reports received was far greater than for any other month of the survey. Considering the variances between one garden and another, to give a fair comparison the December 2008 figures used here are based only on the gardens that featured in both the December 2008 AND December 2009 surveys.

The total sightings have been posted on our website month on month. We had the problem of a few reports reaching us too late, for a variety of reasons, to be included in these monthly reports. However, these late reports have been taken into account for this full year summary (unless, of course, there are still one or two that still haven't reached us).

Brief Summary

In total, 53 different birds were recorded in our gardens during the survey year. This is quite a remarkable figure. The survey concerned 'garden birds' so there are, of course, many other birds that would have been observed either in the vicinity or passing overhead (but not IN our gardens) and the total number of bird species actually seen would have been considerably more.

The Chaffinch is the most widespread of our garden birds. Sightings from month to month ranged from between 82% and 100% of all observing days, with a total count of 599 sightings over 650 observing days, averaging 92%! Next most widespread is the Robin, closely followed by Blackbird and Blue Tit with Great Tit, Coal Tit, Dunnock and House Sparrow not far behind. Many birds were recorded only rarely and there seemed little point in producing charts for these under the circumstances. However, should anyone so wish, graphs for these birds can be produced on request.

There should also be mention of birds that may have been expected but which were reported only rarely or not at all. This includes Garden Warbler (1 report), Bullfinch (2 reports), Willow Tit (1 garden), Treecreeper (4 reports), Reed Bunting, Meadow Pipit and Linnet (1 report each). No reports at all on Goldcrest, Waxwing, Spotted Flycatcher or Yellowhammer. There was one report of a Pied Flycatcher but it is suspected that this may have been a case of mistaken identity as the report was in winter when these birds are normally in warmer climates.

The following pages gives graphs for some of the birds, showing how sightings varied throughout the year. Most show a considerable variation through the seasons, some following expected patterns, some not!.

The Weather

The number of sightings may have been influenced by the weather prevailing during the survey weeks. From records at one location, the weather actually seems to have been fairly typical for the most part but with a fair amount of rainfall in August and November. Temperatures seemed to be on the low side during the second half of the year. There are no records for weeks other than the survey ones and the conditions then may be of significance but we have no way of telling.

Going from the records, the general weather picture for the survey weeks, month on month, is as follows:-

January 2009 – mixed, some frost, some rain and some fog.

February 2009 – mostly cloudy, occasional showers and some sunshine, generally mild.

March 2009 – mainly sunny & warm but occasional chilly days.

April 2009 – dry and mainly sunny but windy with one or two quite chilly days.

May 2009 – mostly sunny but some rainy days, warm in the earlier part of the week but cooler later.

June 2009 – mainly cloudy and showery.

July 2009 – mixture of sun and showers.

August 2009 – rain on most days, often clearing by afternoons.

September 2009 – virtually dry throughout, sun on most days.

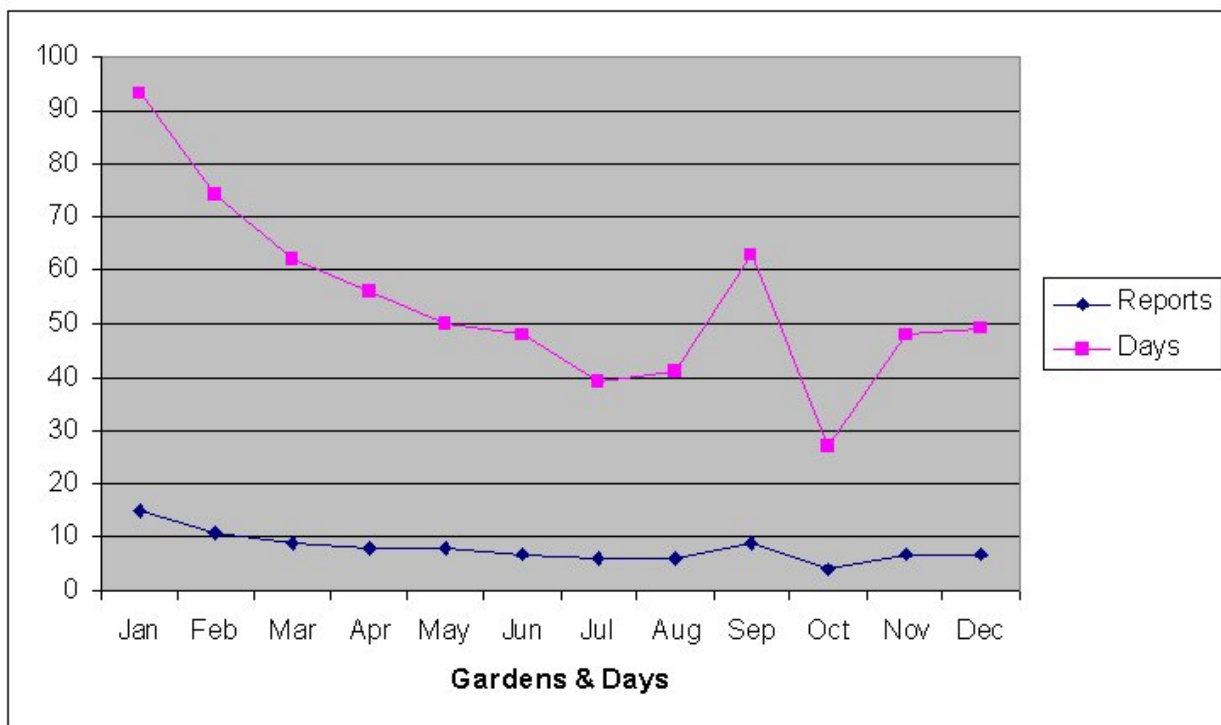
October 2009 – mainly dry but fog/drizzle on some days, occasional frosty start.

November 2009 – wet start to the week with rain or showers, drier in mid-week then rain again, very heavy at times, especially later in the week..

December 2009 – frosty mornings at start of the week, cloudy with some light snow for the rest.

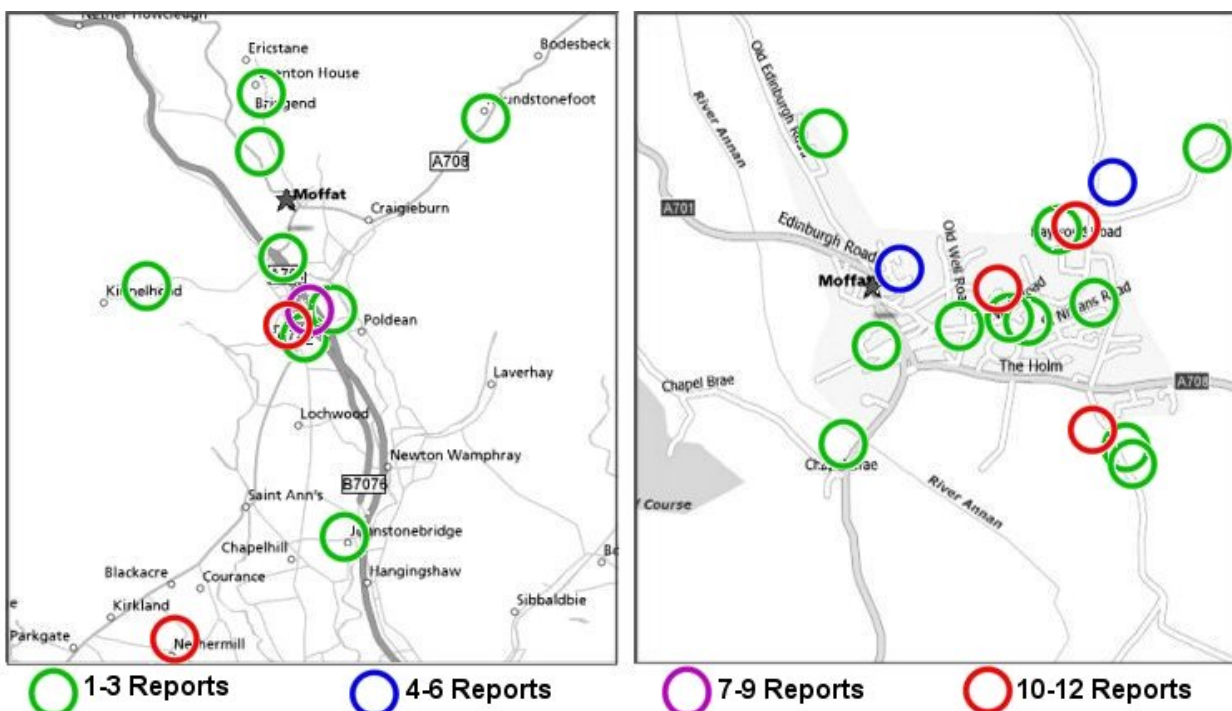
Many, perhaps most, species showed a marked dip during November that could be associated with the heavy rainfall. There was also a big dip in sightings of many of our birds in October when the prevailing weather features were a few frosty mornings and some fog & drizzle but it is possible that the dip had nothing to do with weather – October was the month with the fewest reports! Although August was a fairly wet month, only a few birds seemed to have a dip in sightings during that period.

How the number of reports varied

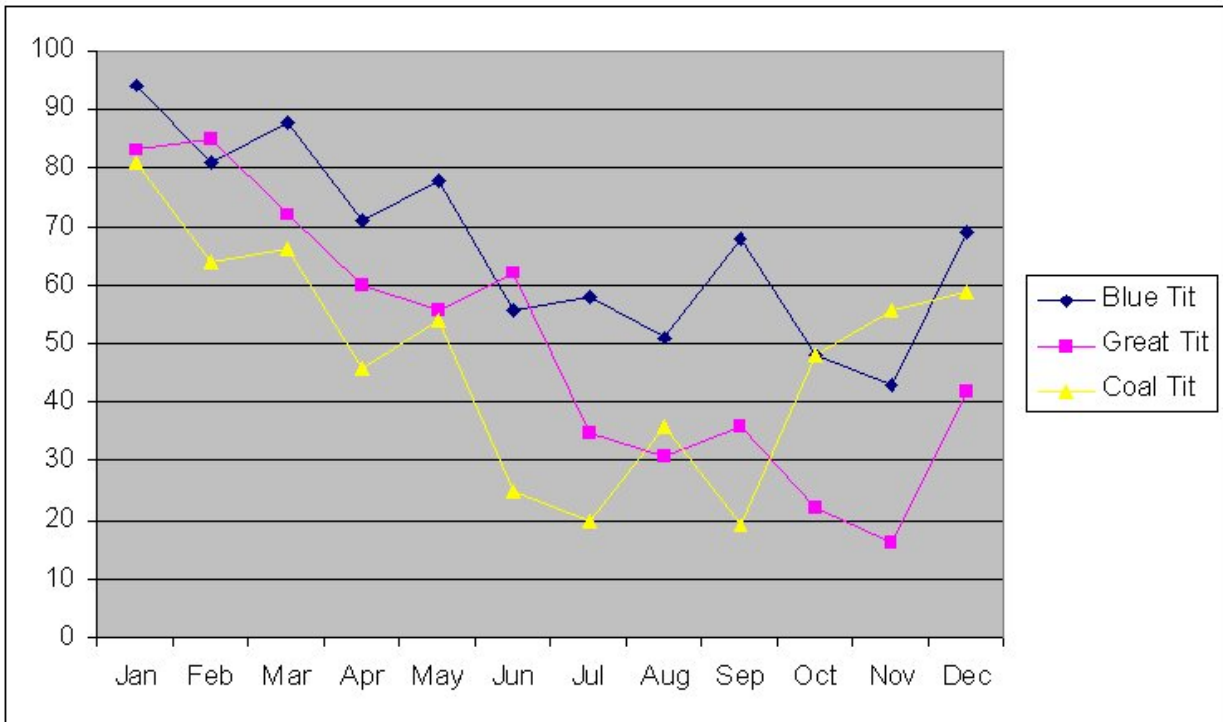


The graph shows the steady decline in the number of reports received through the year. There was a sharp rise in observing days September but October showed the lowest level of reporting for the year. November and December brought it back to roughly the same levels as the period April to August. Only 2 gardens produced a report for every month of the survey, one covered 11 months and one more covered 10 months. Another managed 8 months although the reporter was only resident there for that period. Interestingly, many reports in the earlier period covered only 4-6 days of the observing week while the second half of the year mostly had reports covering the full seven days of the week. In total, recordings for 650 days were received for the year. A few bird types showed peaks during September but whether or not this can be attributed to the rise in reporting levels during that month is unclear but the fact that other birds did not show such peaks would suggest that it did not.

The following map shows the approximate locations for all the reports received, colour coded to reflect their frequency.



The Tit Family



Blue Tit

This has shown a steady decline until September when there was a brief recovery before dropping again until December when there is a strong increase. The December figure is still well below the value recorded in December 2008 (79%).

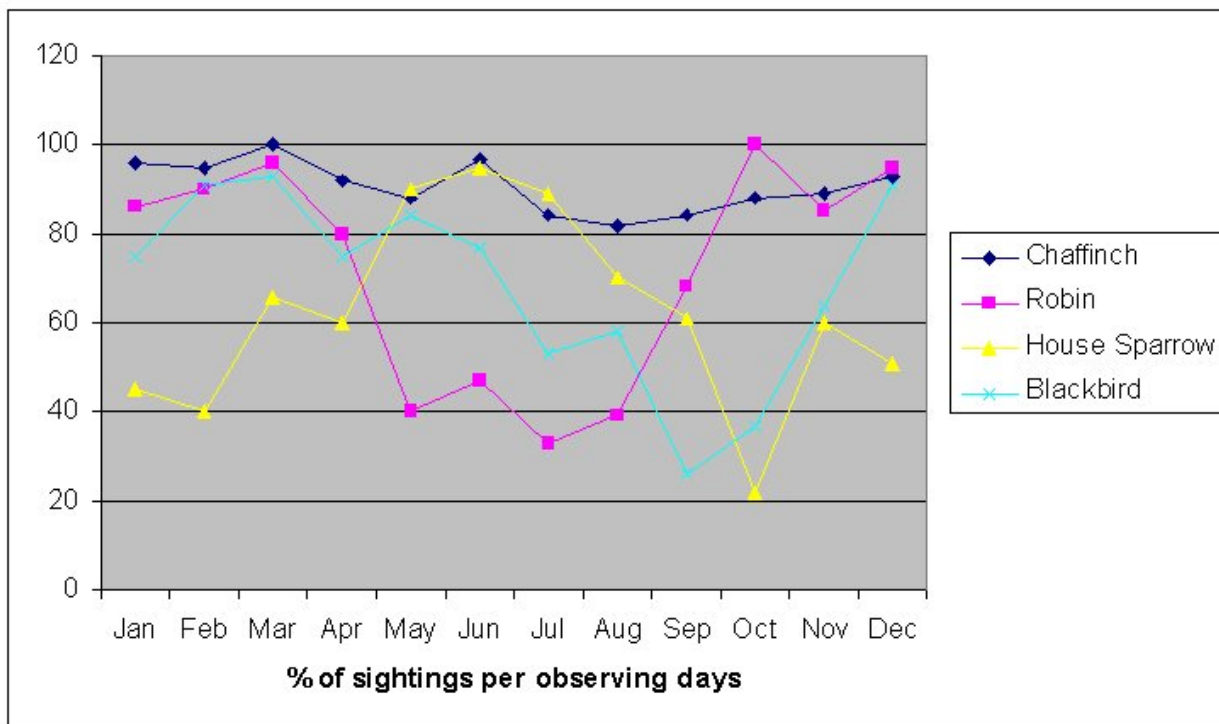
Great Tit

Followed a similar pattern to the Blue Tit but a more pronounced drop although there was a small increase in May, a month earlier than the Blue Tit. Again, December showed a good increase. December values are lower than those for December 2008 (76%).

Coal Tit

Followed a similar pattern to the Great Tit but with a more pronounced drop. Again a recovery in late summer although a month earlier than Blue Tit and Great Tit. Unlike the others, a strong recovery started from September. Again the December values are lower than in 2008 (64%).

Chaffinch, Robin, House Sparrow, Blackbird



Four more of our regular garden birds –

Chaffinch

By far the most widespread of our garden birds and also by far the most consistent throughout the year. It has appeared in no less than 599 of a total of 650 observing days, an overall average of 92% with a minimum of 82% in August and a maximum of 100% in March. Despite its consistency, there have been some reports that flock sizes are smaller than in previous years. Nevertheless, our survey shows that it is still our commonest bird.

Robin

An unexpected trend suggesting that, while very widespread in winter, it is much less so in summer. Number of sightings in December is roughly the same as in 2008.

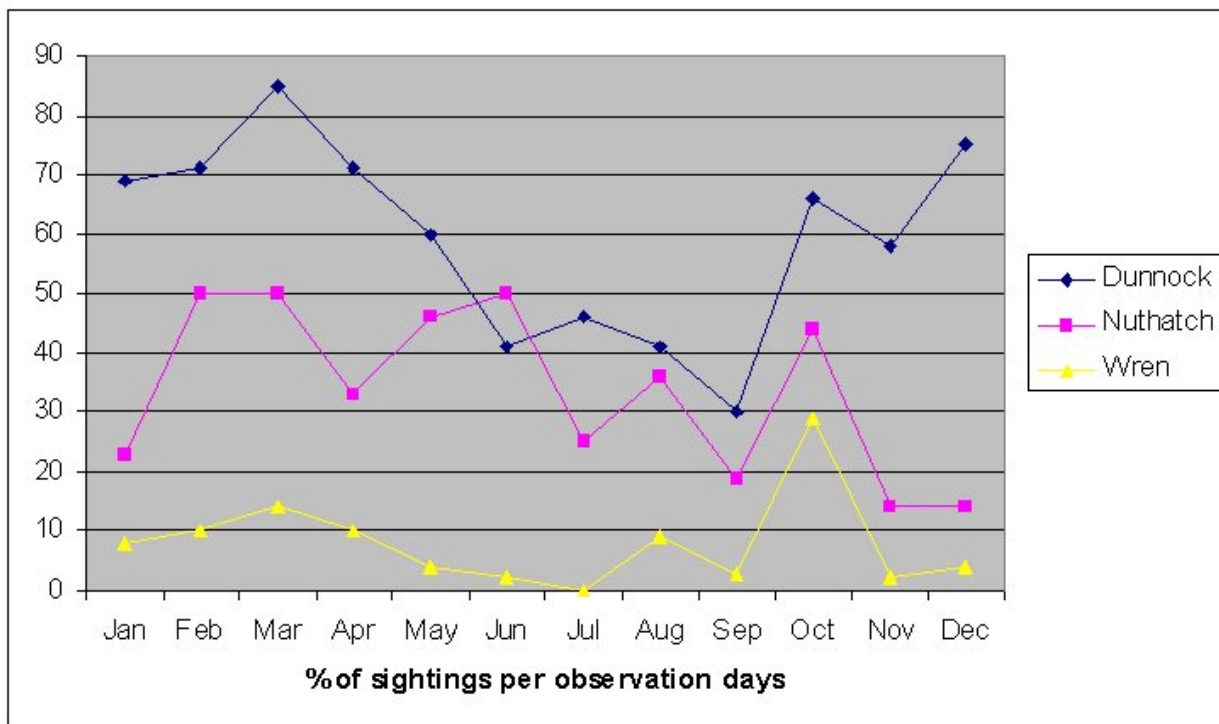
House Sparrow

This one tends towards being restricted to only some areas. The graph is unusual in that it very distinctly peaks through the summer and early autumn, almost the exact opposite of the Robin! House Sparrows were reasonably common in winter but sightings increasing dramatically in summer, probably due to the young birds being taken away from the nest site by a parent while another brood is started in the same nest. October showed a marked dip in sightings before recovering somewhat. December figure is very slightly higher than in 2008.

Blackbird

Good numbers of sightings earlier in the year, tailing off steadily through spring and summer to reach the lowest value in September. Sightings increased somewhat in October and rose considerably during November and December as birds returned to gardens in search of food. Reported sightings for December are well up on the 2008 figure,

Dunnock, Nuthatch & Wren



Dunnock

Generally widespread, the numbers peaked in early spring but then declined steadily until October when there was a steep rise. December figure roughly the same as for December 2008.

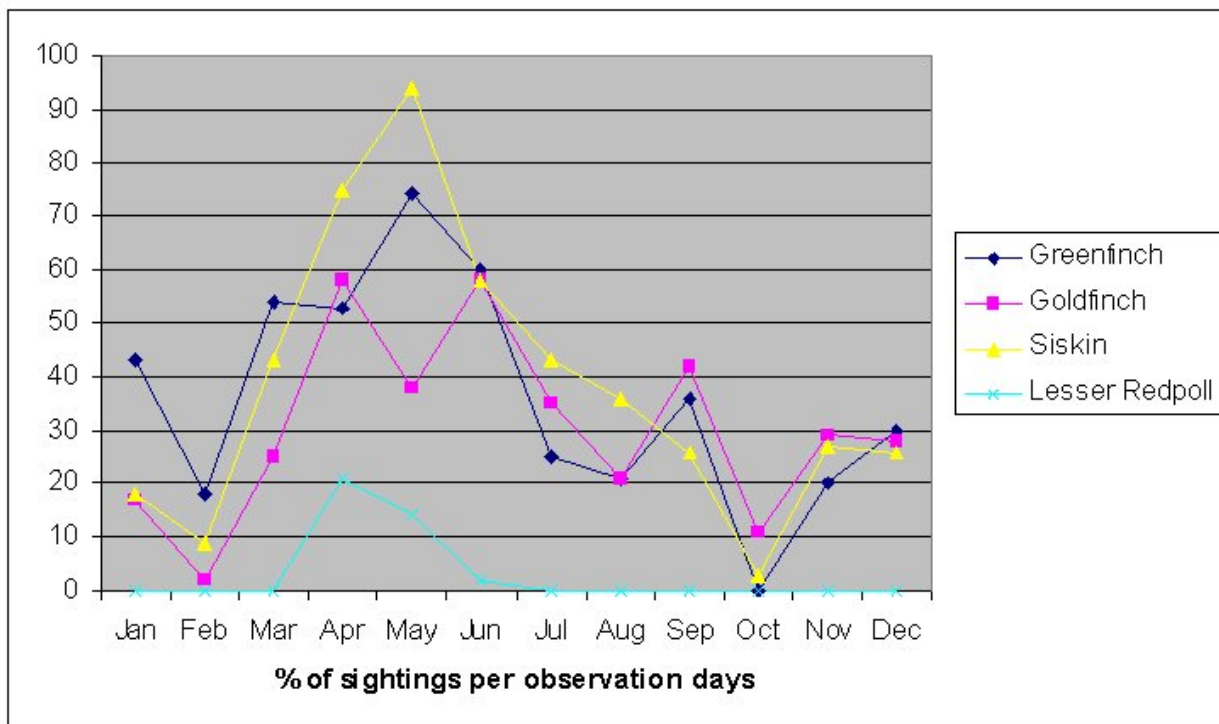
Nuthatch

Very variable but remarkably consistent for most of the year, recorded on between 20% and 50% of observation days. However, dipped sharply in November and December and December is well below the figure for the previous year (26%).

Wren

Mostly a low incidence of sightings, around the 10% mark earlier in the year, falling away through May and June to zero in July. August saw the numbers rise again but September showed another dip. In October, the number soared but the remainder of the year saw it drop back to low levels. December is below the 2008 level.

Other Finches, Siskin & Lesser Redpoll



These birds show remarkably similar graphs and the December values for all three are similar, or slightly up, on those recorded in December 2008.

Greenfinch

The most common of the three until March, overtaken by the Siskin in April. Sightings peaked in May then fell steadily. There was a recovery in September but entirely unreported in October. The sightings picked up again in November and December.

Goldfinch

Low numbers seen in January, very low in February then recovering strongly through March and April. Unlike the other two, May showed a distinct dip in sightings before recovering again in June. Again a steady fall until August and a brief recovery in September. Again a significant drop in October before recovering again during November and December.

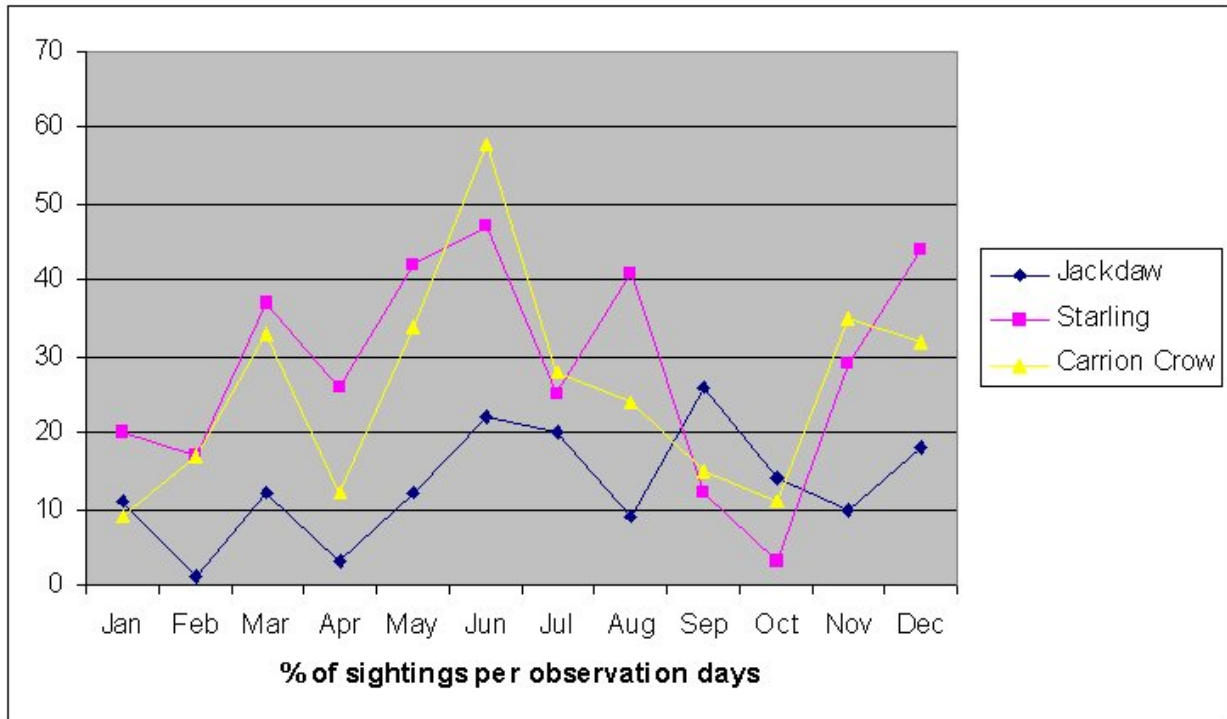
Siskin

Like the others, a low number of sightings for January & February but then a very strong recovery to reach a high in May (when the others had a dip). The decline was then fairly steady until it reached a very low value in October – the rise seen in Greenfinch and Goldfinch in September was not matched by the Siskin. However, like the others, a steady rise during November & December.

Lesser Redpoll

This has not in the past been regarded as a garden bird, yet this year has seen it appear in quite significant numbers in many gardens. Usually seen in company with Siskin, it was first reported during April and this was the peak month. Sightings declined in May and it was almost absent again by June. There were no further sightings reported for the year. There are signs that it may be even more common in 2010 as quite a few sightings were being reported in January.

Crows, Jackdaws & Starlings



While not commonly regarded as garden birds, Starlings are now quite common in most gardens. Crows and Jackdaws are becoming more common in our gardens. These birds are predominantly scavengers in gardens – they see nestlings and young birds as easy prey and, towards winter, are eager to snap up any food scraps they can find.

Jackdaws

An erratic presence during the early months, increasing in summer but with an unexplained dip in August. Sightings dropped off in late autumn but recovered again in December. This bird was not recorded in the December 2008 survey.

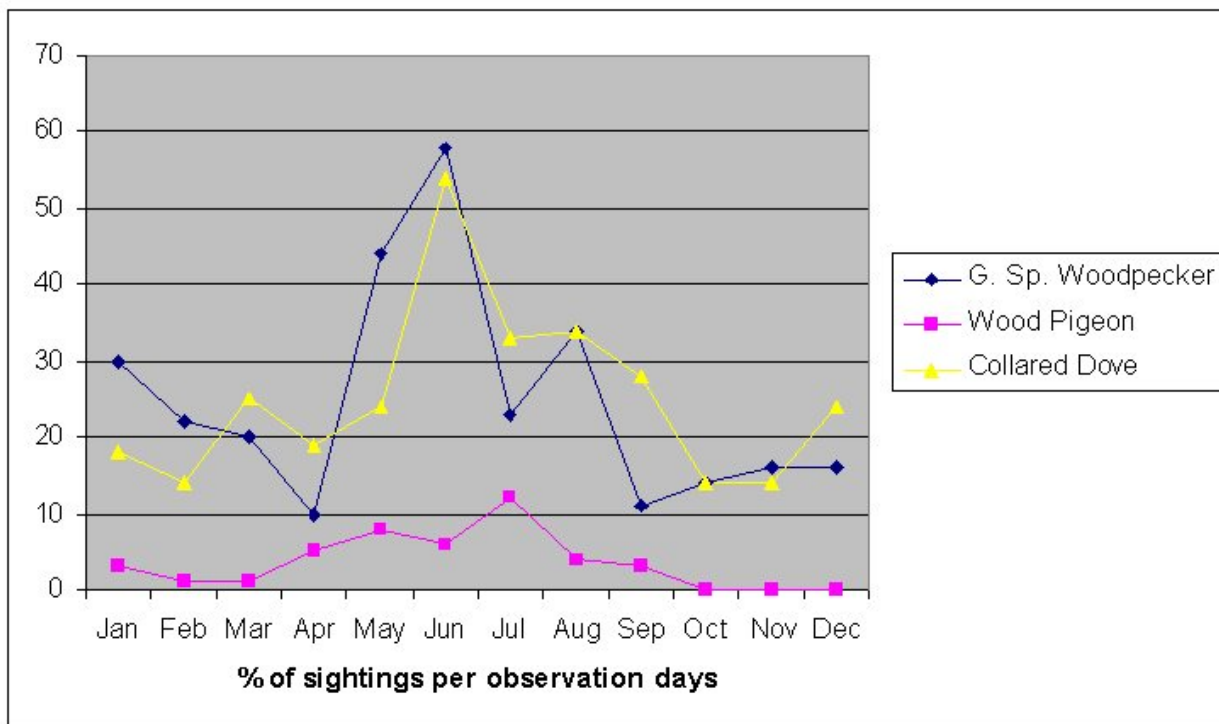
Starling

Fairly low presence initially, but then a distinct rise for spring and summer with many young birds seen. September and October showed a sharp fall, possibly as they moved out into the countryside and even migrating southwards. A big rise in November & December, perhaps boosted by a strong migration of birds from Scandinavia and Russia. The figure for December is up somewhat on the 2008 value.

Carrion Crow

Again quite low numbers sighted initially, rising somewhat in March, dropping again in April but reaching higher levels during May and June (there were many observations of Crows raiding garden nests during this period). Sightings then declined through to October before increasing strongly in the final two months of the year, bringing the December level to almost double that recorded in 2008.

Doves & Woodpeckers



Great Spotted Woodpecker

This seems to be an increasing common bird in our gardens. During the observation year, the number of sightings declined during the early months but rocketed during May and June. Then came a decline through to a low in September, recovering only slightly for the remainder of the year. Down a little on the December 2008 value.

Wood Pigeon

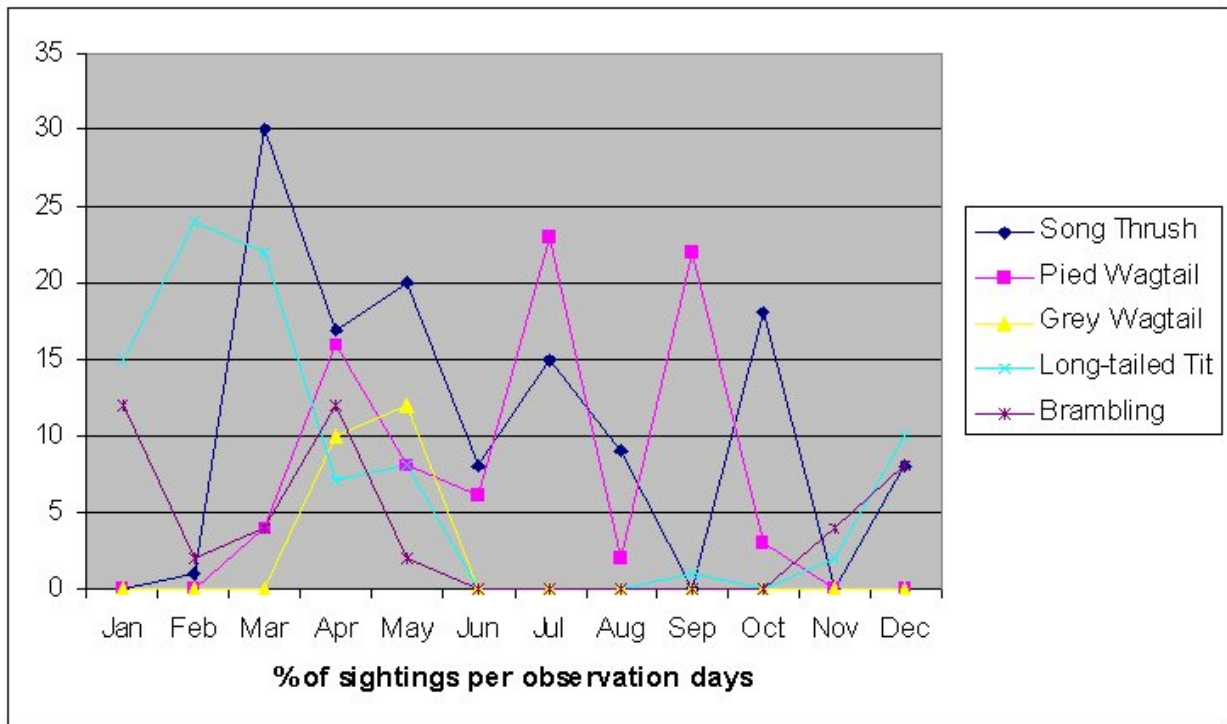
Never prolific in our gardens (it is, after all, mainly a woodland bird), the number of sightings remained quite low throughout the year but with a slight increase over the summer months.

Collared Dove

The graph may not be too typical for this one as this bird seems to be very localised and many of our reports came from gardens within, or close to, the areas they frequent. This could well give the suggestion that the Collared Dove is more common than it actually is. Generally, the incidence of sightings followed a very similar pattern to that of the Woodpecker, peaking during the summer months before falling back again. Down slightly on the December 2008 figure.

Other birds

There are, of course, many other birds to be seen in gardens. Only a selection of these is included here



Song Thrush

This bird is well known for being largely absent from our gardens during winter months and, indeed, it was largely absent initially. March saw the usual influx with sightings increasing greatly. Then came a fairly steady fall through to September. There was a sharp rise again in October, possibly with birds coming to feed on berries. November had no reports at all but there were a few again in December, once again probably berry feeding as winter approached. This bird was not recorded in the December 2008 survey/

Pied Wagtail

A very erratic picture with the number of sightings see-sawing up and down through most of the year but virtually nil through the winter months.

Grey Wagtail

Not a common garden bird but April and May had significant numbers reported.

Long-tailed Tit

This delightful bird was fairly common through the start of the year until May. None reported during the summer (June to August) and only a very few in late summer/early autumn. They began to reappear in greater numbers in November and even more so in December. December figure double that of 2008.

Brambling

A fair number around in January but few in February and March. Highest number recorded in March (probably during migration) but then down to nil by June. None recorded at all during June to October but they started to reappear in November, increasing further by December. It was not reported at all in December 2008.