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RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch

Spot the punk rockers: hope for waxwing boost in annual UK bird count

People encouraged to record sightings of mohican-sporting birds in RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch this weekend



Waxwings have been spotted across Britain during the colder weather. Photograph: Josh Jaggard/Alamy

Patrick Barkham

@patrick_barkham
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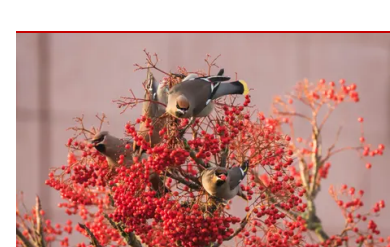


The scale of **this waxwing winter** will be revealed this weekend when people are encouraged to spend an hour recording the birds they see in their gardens, balconies, parks and school grounds.

The spectacular migratory, mohican-sporting birds have been spotted across Britain during the colder weather and will be recorded alongside more familiar sparrows, blackbirds and robins in the RSPB's annual **Big Garden Birdwatch**.

“Waxwings are just such a brilliant bird and they always look like punk rockers in the trees,” said Beccy Speight, the chief executive at the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds). “People have loved seeing them this winter but I haven’t seen any yet so I’m keeping my eye out for them.”

Data from the long-running garden birdwatch has traced the waxing and waning of bird species in gardens, parks and urban areas, with 38 million fewer birds in our skies than almost half a century ago.



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House sparrows traditionally top the list - and **did so again last winter**, with an average of more than four per count - but have declined by 57% since recording began in 1979. Starlings have similarly plummeted in number (down 81% since 1979) and many other common species, including robins and blackbirds, are in long-term decline. Wood pigeon numbers have soared (up 1,048%) with significant increases for goldfinches, magpies and great tits as well.

Goldfinches and great tits have benefited from the growing popularity of bird feeders and the provision of seeds in gardens throughout the colder months, and the **RSPB** highlighted the benefits of birds for humans too.

“Sometimes we forget that the wild world is right outside our windows,” said Speight. “Taking part in the birdwatch is such a great way of accessing that wild world and it can be that first step to getting people interested in the wild world. It’s a magic door that you can easily open. In terms of mental health and wellbeing, I just know from my own life, stopping and looking out at the birds just gives me that moment of otherness which I find really restorative.”

Research showed that people spent more time in nature during the Covid pandemic and lockdowns but **a recent report from the Office for National Statistics** found many people had reverted to their pre-pandemic habits, with over a million fewer people now spending time in nature.

Dr Amir Khan, the president of the RSPB said: “Taking a moment out of my busy life to enjoy the birds that visit my garden is incredibly beneficial for my mental health, helping to increase serotonin, known as the happy brain chemical, which lifts my mood and reduces stress levels.

“I’d encourage everyone who can to take part in this year’s Big Garden Birdwatch, whether in a garden, a balcony or a local green space. It’s fun, free and for everyone, and the perfect way to spend an hour reconnecting with our precious, yet fragile wildlife.”

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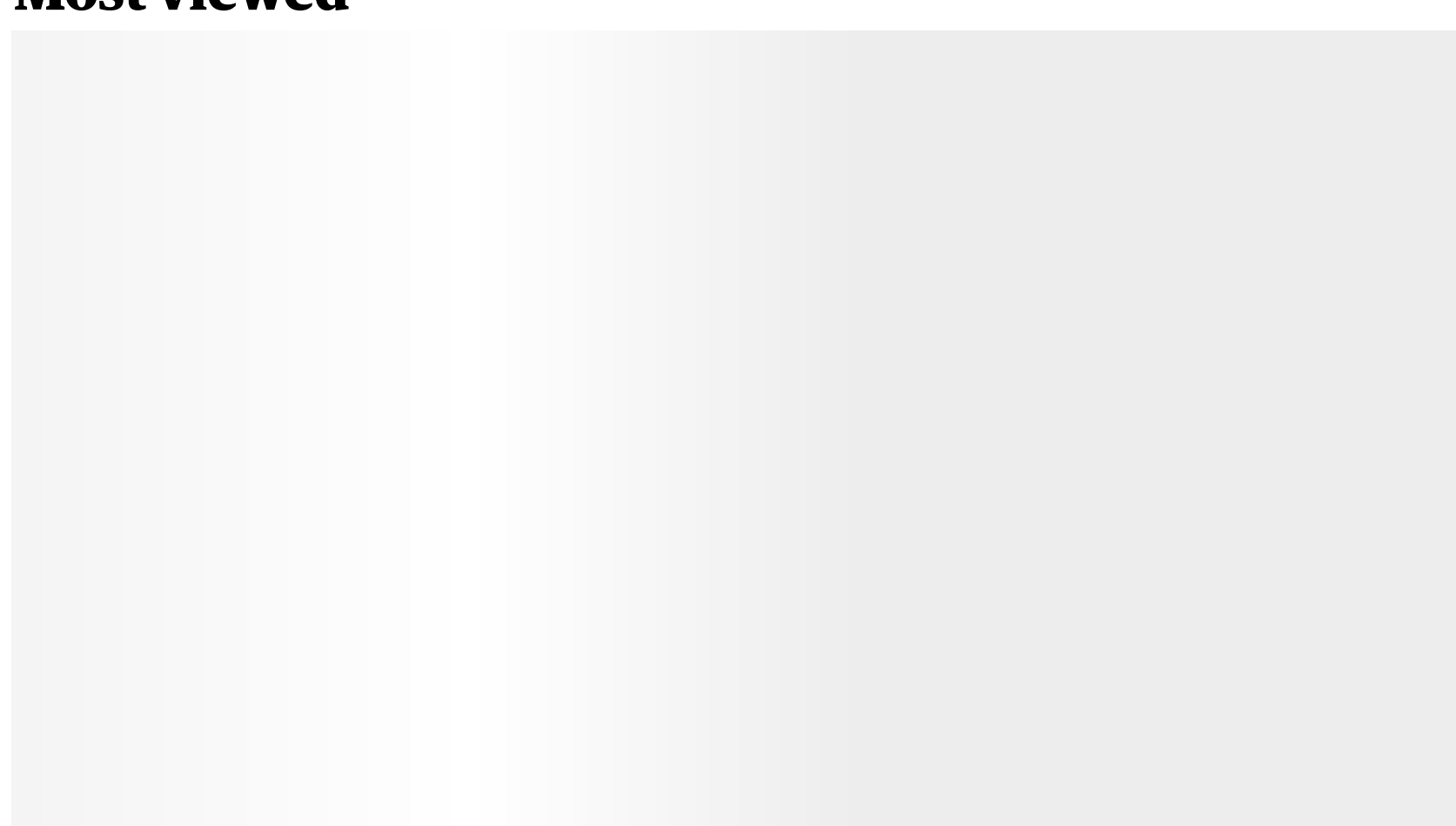
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