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RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch

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House sparrow tops Big Garden Birdwatch charts for 21st year in a row

Blue tits, starlings, wood pigeons and blackbirds next most sighted in RSPB survey involving 600,000 participants



An average of four house sparrows were spotted in every garden. Photograph: Anadolu/Getty Images

A friendly if slightly tuneless chirp is the most ubiquitous birdsong in British gardens with the house sparrow topping the Big Garden Birdwatch charts for the 21st consecutive year, according to the annual RSPB survey.

Blue tits, starlings, wood pigeons and blackbirds were the next most-sighted birds by more than 600,000 participants in the world's largest wildlife garden survey.

The long-running citizen science project provides conservationists with invaluable data on how common species are faring. Although an average of four house sparrows were spotted in every garden when the survey was conducted in January, the number recorded has declined by nearly 60% since the survey began in 1979.

Top 20 bird sightings in the 2024 RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch

Table with 4 columns: Rank 2024, Species, Count per garden, % change since 1979. Lists top 20 bird species including House sparrow, Blue tit, Starling, Wood pigeon, Blackbird, Robin, Great tit, Goldfinch, Magpie, Long-tailed tit, Chaffinch, Collared dove, Jackdaw, Feral pigeon, Dunnock, Carrion crow, Coal tit, Greenfinch, Wren, Great-spotted woodpecker.

Guardian graphic. Source: RSPB

The starling, the third most seen bird this year, is on the UK red list of most threatened breeding bird species because of a sharp decline in its breeding population since the 1960s. It remains a popular visitor in winter, when birds arrive from northern Europe, but gardens and house roofs may be an increasingly important refuge for this declining species.

Gardens are an important habitat for many birds, covering an estimated 4,330 sq km in the UK, an area larger than the county of Somerset.



Starlings were third on the most-sighted list this year. Photograph: Robert Bannister/Alamy

Beccy Speight, the chief executive of the RSPB, said: "Last year's State of Nature report laid out a grim picture, finding that there's been no let-up in the decline of our wildlife over recent decades, with one in six species at risk of being lost from Great Britain.

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"However, with seven out of eight households lucky enough to have access to a garden, it is the place where many of us can make a positive difference to the ongoing nature crisis. Gardens and community green spaces can both give a crucial lifeline for struggling species by providing a huge patchwork of potential homes for nature."

Other species in the top 20 included the great spotted woodpecker (20th), robin (6th) and jackdaw (13th).

This article was amended on 12 April 2024 to correct errors supplied by the RSPB in the final column of the table, and to remove a paragraph that the previous data made unverifiable.

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