

*2010 is International Year of Biodiversity – it is a celebration of life on earth and of the value of biodiversity for our lives. Worthys Conservation Volunteers (WCV) is marking this special year by featuring a series of monthly articles on a variety of topics about our local wildlife, this month is very close to our homes ...*

## Garden Birds in April

In Kings Worthy we certainly have a diversity of garden birds! Just by putting up one or two feeders it is possible to attract a variety of birds and enjoy watching them.

I only have a small garden, but with hedges to provide cover nearby, putting the feeder on a pole away from the reach of cats and providing water in a small birdbath, it is a bird haven.

Sunflower hearts are the favoured food of my garden birds: peanuts tend to be left to go mouldy.

Most frequent visitors are the goldfinches, sometimes eight or more at a time. With their red faces and bright yellow wing bars they are a cheerful sight. Later on in the year the juveniles appear, without the red face.

Green finches are common too the male yellow green below and olive green above with yellow on the tail. The female is duller, a streaky green and grey. They can be quite aggressive on the feeder.

There have been far fewer sparrows about recently, but a few come to the garden. Chaffinches are known as ground feeding birds, but they also take from the feeder. Usually they pick up the seeds that the goldfinches and greenfinches cast out in their greedy feeding. As spring approaches the males become very brightly coloured with a pink breast and white wing bars.

Also picking up from the ground under the feeder are collared doves, blackbirds and of course the ubiquitous wood pigeons. I have had six blackbirds in the garden recently, four males and two brown females. They spend as much time chasing each other away as they do feeding. They also search the borders, picking over dead leaves looking for worms and insects. The blackbirds will start nesting from the end of February and later on in the year I shall start to see the spotty juveniles, looking almost like a thrush.

Blue tits fly in, take a seed and fly back to the hedge to hold it in their claws to eat. Great tits, larger with green and yellow plumage and a black crown and bib, occasionally put in an appearance. Other occasional visitors have been long-tailed tits and a coal tit.



The pied wagtail is easily recognised with its black and white plumage and constantly wagging tail. As well as picking up from the grass they love to peck around house gutters and roofs.

A larger but equally shy visitor is the song thrush. It will sometimes come to the bird bath but usually keeps close to the hedge. A bather which is not at all shy but becoming less common is the starling. They are very sociable and boisterous; I have seen four at once in the small bath.

No-one can call the robin shy! Every gardener will have had one watching from a fence waiting for a juicy worm to be turned over.



Last year there was a pair of blackcaps enjoying the sunflower hearts. They are greyish brown, with the male having a black head and the female a brown one. They now stay in Britain all year round, at least here in the south. This year I have only seen the female. The male has a beautiful song.

Low down in the vegetation a small brown dunnoek scuttles about looking for insects. It too has a lovely song. Another lover of low vegetation is the tiny wren, with its rusty brown plumage and upturned tail. For its size it has a particularly loud song.

To conclude the list of bird visitors are two which only rarely put in an appearance in my garden; the brambling and the siskin. The brambling is similar to a chaffinch but has a more orange colour and a white rump. The siskin is a small greenish streaky bird with yellow tail and wing bars. The male has a black head. They will visit the feeders sometimes in February.

Not really a garden bird, but every year the house martins return to nest in the eaves of the houses, and they are always a welcome sight, signifying summer on its way.

As you are reading this the dawn chorus will soon be about to start. It is a wonderful experience to get up early and go out to a wood nearby and listen to all these amazing bird songs, which are as diverse as the birds themselves. I guarantee you won't forget it!

**Connie Martyn, March 2010**

*This year WCV is setting up a nature database to help create a picture of what's in our parishes and we would like your help by logging on to [www.worthysconservationvolunteers.org.uk/naturewatch](http://www.worthysconservationvolunteers.org.uk/naturewatch) and recording your own sightings.*