





# **media release**



**For immediate release**

## **ALL EYES ON THE SKIES**

**THE RSPB'S BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH (28-29 JANUARY 2012)**

The nation will be poised to watch their garden birds at the end of January, for RSPB Cymru's annual Big Garden Birdwatch (28-29 January).

And RSPB Cymru is appealing for more sets of eyes than ever before, from all around Wales, to step up for nature and help form a complete picture of the fortunes of garden favourites in the recent topsy turvey weather.

Dana Thomas from RSPB Cymru, says: "Taking part in Big Garden Birdwatch not only helps the RSPB track the ups and down of garden birds, but it gives participants the perfect excuse to sit down with a cup of tea and enjoy the wildlife that they share their outside space with.

"You'll be a part of the biggest garden bird event in the world and you won't even have to leave the warmth of your armchair!"

Recent harsh winters have seen some garden bird populations drop, only to make a comeback after a good breeding season the following year.

Last year, some of Wales's smallest garden birds bounced back, and the wildlife charity wants to know whether they have managed to maintain their numbers.

Big Garden Birdwatch is one of the first indicators to show how well Wales's birds have fared during the previous breeding season and winter. With thousands of people taking part each year across Wales and over thirty years worth of data the results give an early indication of garden bird trends.

But if even more people step up and take part, the scale of the ups and downs of our garden birds will become even clearer.

“The RSPB keeps a watchful eye out for new and emerging trends from Big Garden Birdwatch results, which helped confirm that there was an alarming decline in birds like house sparrow and breeding starlings.”

Dana Thomas says: “It’s important that we keep a close eye on how our birds are faring, like the house sparrow for example. With so many people stepping up and taking part in Big Garden Birdwatch, if a pattern emerges, we take it seriously. Half a million people can’t be wrong and that’s why the survey is so important.

“There’s nothing else like it on this scale, and as well as getting hundreds of thousands of people enjoying wildlife, it actually helps protect nature by showing the RSPB where we need to focus our efforts.”

Last year’s Big Garden Birdwatch results showed that some of the smaller birds which decreased in numbers the previous year, bounced back.

Sightings of goldcrests, the UK’s smallest birds, doubled, long tailed tits increased by a third and coal tits increased by a quarter.

And thousands of people were also lucky enough to see waxwings with an influx of the striking birds to the UK from Scandinavia known as a ‘waxwing winter.’

Almost 90,000 school children and teachers stepped up and took part in the schools version of the survey last year, ‘Big Schools’ Birdwatch.’ The UK-wide survey of wildlife in schools, which celebrated its 10th birthday this year, introduces thousands of children to the wildlife visiting their school environment.

Nearly 3,000 classes from more than 2,000 schools were involved, which was also a record-breaking number for the survey. 87% of schools taking part reported seeing blackbirds, with an average of five being seen at each school, making it the most common visitor to school grounds.

To step up for nature and take part, simply spend one hour over the weekend of 28-29 January, counting the birds in your garden or local park, and record the highest number of each bird species seen at any one time.

Visit the RSPB website [www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch) for more information and to submit your results online. Pre-registration is now open and those pre-registering will get a 10% discount voucher for bird food and feeders from RSPB shops.

To request a Big Garden Birdwatch pack over the phone, please call 0300 456 8330. The hotline will be open from November 28<sup>th</sup>.

- Ends -

**For further information please contact:**

Dana Thomas, RSPB Cymru Communications Officer 02920 353 007

**Photographs and broadcast-quality footage:**

Photographs to accompany this press release can be found at the following link:

Website: <http://extranet.rspb.org.uk/index.aspx>

Username: birdwatchmedia

Password: b1rdw4tch

Further images are available in digital format from RSPB Images by contacting Lee Douane on 0114 258 0001, email [lee@rspb-images.com](mailto:lee@rspb-images.com)

**Additional notes:**

1. This table shows the average number of the 2011 top 10 species of birds recorded per garden across Wales, and compares this with the results from the 2010 and 1979 surveys.

Species	Average per garden in 1979	Average per garden in 2010	Average per garden in 2011	% change 1979-2011
house sparrow	10.0	4.92	5.389	-46.11
starling	15.0	4.55	7.480	-50.13
blue tit	2.4	3.63	4.374	82.25
chaffinch	3.0	3.61	3.701	23.37
blackbird	4.0	3.42	3.609	-9.78
robin	2.0	1.73	1.728	-13.6
collared dove	.28	1.17	1.17	317.86
goldfinch	-	1.13	1.208	-
great tit	0.9	1.8	1.989	121
wood pigeon	0.2	0.82	0.79	295

2. The Big Schools' Birdwatch asks children and their teachers to spend an hour counting the birds in their school grounds. The survey will take place between 16<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> January 2012. For more information visit: [www.rspb.org.uk/schoolswatch](http://www.rspb.org.uk/schoolswatch)

3. Garden birds have benefited significantly from the increased variety and quality of food that people put out in their gardens. The RSPB Birdcare range offers a wide variety of high quality

food and 100% of the profits go to wildlife conservation. See [www.rspbshop.co.uk](http://www.rspbshop.co.uk) for full details.

4. Big Garden Birdwatch and Big Schools' Birdwatch is part of Stepping Up for Nature, the RSPB's latest campaign to help save nature. See [www.rspb.org.uk/steppingup](http://www.rspb.org.uk/steppingup) for more information.