

Garden Birds

Why do Birds Matter?

- They help plant life by scattering seeds. This means that seeds get to travel to different places and grow in other places.
- They control insect growth. Many birds eat insects. Without birds eating them, there would be a dangerously high number of insects.
- Birds, like magpies and crows, eat dead animals. This gets rid of the rotting animals which could cause diseases.



Numbers of Common Garden Birds

There has been a big drop in the number of starlings. The reason could be that farming has made it more difficult for them to find their favourite food – the crane fly larvae.

The number of house sparrows has also dropped. This could be because of cats, or air pollution due to more cars being used. Fortunately, last year, there was an increase in house sparrows reported through an RSPB survey.

There has also been an increase in less well-known birds, like fieldfares. One reason for seeing more fieldfares in gardens seems to be the cold weather that has made them leave the countryside and look for food in gardens.



RSPB

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds - a charity that protects British birds.

Migration

Some birds migrate from the UK during the winter months and return when the weather becomes warmer.

- Swifts and swallows migrate to Africa.
- They can fly 200 miles every day.
- Many die from starvation, exhaustion and storms.



At the beginning of 2016, there were more sightings of long-tailed tits and goldcrests. A warmer winter meant more of these tiny birds survived.

Resident British Birds



Robins:

- have a bright red breast;
- are very aggressive and will defend their territory;
- sing all year round;
- can be seen in British gardens all year round.

Magpies:

- have a loud, chattering cackle;
- can be easily seen with their black and white feathers;
- are important insect controllers;
- hunt for leftover food and dead animals.



Questions

1. Why is it a good thing that birds help scatter seeds?

2. What would happen if birds did not eat insects?

3. Name one bird that eats dead animals.

4. What is a starling's favourite food?

5. Give one reason why there are fewer house sparrows around.

6. What do the RSPB do?

7. Why are fieldfares having to leave the countryside?

8. Why are there more long-tailed tits and goldcrest birds around?

9. How far can migrating birds fly on one day?

10. Which word has been used that means robins can get angry with other birds?

11. Write two facts about magpies.

Answers

1. Why is it a good thing that birds help scatter seeds?
It is a good thing that birds help scatter seeds because it means plants can grow in different places.
2. What would happen if birds did not eat insects?
If birds did not eat insects there would be a dangerously high number of insects around.
3. Name one bird that eats dead animals.
One bird that eats dead animals is the magpie/ carrion crow.
4. What is a starling's favourite food?
A starling's favourite food is cranefly larvae.
5. Give one reason why there are fewer house sparrows around.
There are fewer house sparrows around because of cats/ air pollution due to more cars being used.
6. What do the RSPB do?
The RSPB is a charity that protects birds in the UK.
7. Why are fieldfares having to leave the countryside?
Fieldfares have to leave the countryside because of the cold weather and they need to look for food in gardens.
8. Why are there more long-tailed tits and goldcrest birds around?
There are more long-tailed tits and goldcrest birds around because they survived the warmer winter.
9. How far can migrating birds fly on one day?
Migrating birds can fly up to 200 miles every day.
10. Which word has been used that means robins can get angry with other birds?
The word which means robins can get angry with other birds is 'aggressive'.
11. Write two facts about magpies.
**Any two of the following:
loud, chattering cackle;
easily seen with their black and white feathers;
hunt for leftover food and dead animals;
important insect controllers.**

Garden Birds

Why do Birds Matter?

Birds are just there to look pretty and sound nice, right? Wrong! Birds are vital for the environment.



Birds encourage varied plant life through seed dispersal. They disperse seeds within their droppings, by catching them on their feathers and by dropping them from their beaks while flying. This means seeds get to travel to different places and grow elsewhere.



Birds control insect growth. Many birds, such as dunnocks, blue tits and blackbirds, eat insects. Without these insect-eating birds, there could be a dangerous number of insects on the planet.

Many birds, like crows and magpies, help rid the world of disease through eating dead animals. Without these birds eating the carcasses of other animals, diseases could more easily be spread.

Decreasing Numbers of Common Garden Birds

The starling, once common, has seen a steady decline in numbers. The loss of starlings has been linked to farming; it is thought that heavily farmed land makes it more difficult for birds to find their favourite food, the crane fly larvae.

House sparrow numbers have also decreased in the last few years, particularly in urban environments. The reason is not fully known, but could be due to cats or air pollution from more vehicles being used. Fortunately, last year, there was an increase in house sparrows reported through an RSPB nationwide survey.



Urban Environment

Cities and towns.



RSPB

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds - a charity that protects British birds.

The Rise of Less Common Garden Birds

There has been an increase in some birds that are not often seen in gardens, such as fieldfares. Fieldfares are large, colourful thrushes that stand very upright and move forward with little hops. One reason for this increase seems to be freezing

winters forcing fieldfares to leave the countryside and look for food in gardens.

At the beginning of 2016, there was an increase in the sightings of long-tailed tits and goldcrests. A warmer winter meant that more of these tiny birds survived.

Migration

Some birds migrate from the UK during the winter months and return when the weather becomes warmer.



- Swifts and swallows migrate to Africa.
- They can fly up to 200 miles every day.
- Many die from starvation, exhaustion and storms.



Resident British Birds



Robins:

- have a bright red breast;
- are very aggressive and will defend their territory;
- sing all year round;
- can be seen in British gardens all year round.

Magpies:

- have a loud, chattering cackle;
- can be easily seen with their black and white feathers;
- are important insect controllers;
- hunt for leftover food and dead animals.



Questions

1. How do birds help with seed dispersal?

2. Why are insect-eating birds important?

3. What is the benefit of birds eating the carcasses of dead animals?

4. Explain what problems have occurred due to heavily farmed land.

5. Why are there fewer house sparrows? Give one reason.

6. Describe how fieldfares move.

7. Name one bird whose numbers have increased. Explain why this has happened.

8. Why do some birds migrate, and where do they go?

9. Why might storms be a danger to migrating birds?

10. Are Robins always cute and friendly?

11. Name one good thing that magpies do.

Answers

1. How do birds help with seed dispersal?
Birds disperse seeds within their droppings, by catching them on their feathers and by dropping them from their beaks while flying.
2. Why are insect-eating birds important?
Without them there would be a dangerous number of insects on the planet.
3. What is the benefit of birds eating the carcasses of dead animals?
A benefit of birds eating the carcasses is that they stop diseases spreading.
4. Explain what problems have occurred due to heavily farmed land.
The problems that have occurred due to heavily farmed land is that the number of starlings have declined because they cannot find their favourite food, the crane fly larvae.
5. Why are there fewer house sparrows? Give one reason.
One reason there are fewer house sparrows could be due to cats or air pollution from more vehicles being used.
6. Describe how fieldfares move.
Fieldfares move forward with little hops.
7. Name one bird whose numbers have increased. Explain why this has happened.
One bird that has been seen more is the long-tailed tit/ goldcrest because the winters have been warmer and this meant they survived the winter.
8. Why do some birds migrate, and where do they go?
Some birds migrate to escape the winter months/ cold weather. Some of them go to Africa.
9. Why might storms be a danger to migrating birds?
Possible answers: the storm knocks them off course/ they might get lost/ they are killed by the weather/ might get blown into a building or wall/ get tired flying against the storm.
10. Are Robins always cute and friendly?
Robins look cute and friendly but are actually very aggressive and will defend their territory against intruders.
11. Name one good thing that magpies do.
They control the number of insects/ eat the carcasses of dead animals.

Garden Birds

Why do Birds Matter?

Birds are just there to look pretty and sound nice, right? Wrong! Birds are vital for the ecological harmony of the environment.



Birds contribute to the diversity of plant life through pollination and seed dispersal. They disperse seeds within their droppings, by catching them on their feathers and by dropping them from their beaks while flying. This means seeds get to travel to different places and grow elsewhere.



Birds control insect outbreaks and create important nesting areas for other species. Many birds, such as dunnocks, blue tits and blackbirds, eat insects. Without these insect-eating birds, we could be overrun with minibeasts. Also, their nests provide suitable habitats for insects, particularly the nests of sparrows, jackdaws and pigeons.

Many birds, such as carrion crows and magpies, help rid the world of disease through scavenger 'clean-up' services. Without these birds eating the carcasses of other animals' kills, diseases could be more easily spread.

The Decline of Common Garden Birds

In the UK, there are a wide variety of garden birds. The most common species are the sparrow and starling. However, starlings, famous for their winter 'murmurations' (where hundreds of birds swoop together in the sky), have seen a steady decline in numbers. The loss of starlings has been linked to the lack of traditional, established farming pastures. Experts believe that intensively farmed land makes it more difficult for them to find their favourite food – crane fly larvae.



Urban Environment
Cities and towns.



Suburban Environment
Residential areas, less densely populated than urban areas

House sparrows have experienced a rapid decline in the last few years, particularly in urban and suburban environments. The causes remain largely unknown with everything from cats to air pollution being blamed. Fortunately, last year, there was an increase in house sparrows reported through an RSPB nationwide survey.

The Rise of Less Common Garden Birds

There has been an increase in some species that are not commonly seen in back gardens, such as fieldfares and jays. Fieldfares are large, colourful thrushes that stand very upright and move forward with purposeful hops. The reason for this increase seems to be freezing winters forcing fieldfares to leave the countryside and look for food in gardens.

At the beginning of 2016, there was an increase in sightings of long-tailed tits and goldcrests. This is likely to be due to warmer winters so more of these tiny birds survive.

Migration

Some birds migrate from the UK during the winter months and return later in the year when the weather becomes warmer. Swifts and swallows migrate to Africa, covering a staggering 200 miles per day.



During their journey, they face a number of dangers including starvation, exhaustion, storms and predators.

Few predators can catch a swallow in flight, but some sparrowhawks have been known to do this. Swallows can be quite threatening to other birds and have been known to 'mob' crows and magpies.



Resident British Birds



One of the most common birds in British gardens is the robin. With its bright red breast, it is a cheerful bird to spot, especially in the winter months. Robins sing all year round. Despite looking cute, they are hugely territorial and will quickly see off intruders.

Magpies are another common sight. Their chattering cackle can be frequently heard and the flash of black and white plumage is easily recognisable. Known for being scavengers, thieves and aggressive characters, they are not well-liked. However, they are important insect controllers and clear up carcasses when necessary.



Questions

1. Summarise what the general theme of the second paragraph is about.

2. Give two examples of how birds affect the insect population.

3. What benefit do carrion crows offer?

4. What are murmurations?

5. Why has there been a decline in the number of starlings?

6. Which word has been used that means the number of house sparrows has gone down very quickly?

7. Has there been any positive news about sparrows? If so, what?

8. Why have fieldfares been seen more frequently in gardens?

9. Choose one of the dangers that faces migrating birds, and explain why you think it could be a danger.

10. Why do swallows not have many predators?

11. Are Robins always cute and friendly?

12. Why do magpies not have a good reputation? Find one positive point about them.

Answers

- Summarise what the general theme of the second paragraph is about.
The second paragraph is about how plants disperse their seeds.
- Give two examples of how birds affect the insect population.
Birds control insect outbreaks and create important nesting areas for other species. Many birds, such as dunnocks, blue tits and blackbirds, eat insects. Without these insect-eating birds, we could be overrun with minibeasts. Also, their nests provide suitable habitats for insects, particularly the nests of sparrows, jackdaws and pigeons.
- What benefit do carrion crows offer?
Carrion crows help rid the world of disease through scavenger 'clean-up' services. Without these birds eating the carcasses of other animals' kills, diseases could be more easily spread.
- What are murmurations?
Murmurations are where hundreds of birds swoop together in the sky.
- Why has there been a decline in the number of starlings?
The loss of starlings has been linked to the lack of traditional, established farming pastures. Experts believe that intensively farmed land makes it more difficult for them to find their favourite food, crane-fly larvae.
- Which word has been used that means the number of house sparrows has gone down very quickly?
The word which has been used that means the number of house sparrows has gone down quickly, is 'rapid'.
- Has there been any positive news about sparrows? If so, what?
The positive news is that last year, there was an increase in house sparrows reported through an RSPB nationwide survey.
- Why have fieldfares been seen more frequently in gardens?
Fieldfares have been seen more frequently in gardens because the freezing winters have forced them to leave the countryside and search for food in gardens.
- Choose one of the dangers that faces migrating birds, and explain why you think it could be a danger.
Suggested answers:
Starvation – the birds have to fly hundreds of miles and there may not be the type of food they eat available in other places or on their journey.

Exhaustion – the birds have to fly a long way and there might not be anywhere for them to rest; the journey is so long from the UK to Africa.

Storms – storms would throw the birds off course; they could get lost; they could get blown into buildings/ trees and killed.

Predators – Few predators can catch a swallow in flight, but some sparrowhawks have been known to do this.

10. Why do swallows not have many predators?

Swallows do not have many predators because they fly so quickly.

11. Are Robins always cute and friendly?

Robins look cute and friendly but are actually very aggressive and will defend their territory against intruders.

12. Why do magpies not have a good reputation? Find one positive point about them.

Magpies do not have a good reputation because they are scavengers, thieves and often aggressive. One positive point about them is that they control the number of insects/ eat the carcasses of dead animals.