

# 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?

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2. Why are insect-eating birds important?

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

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

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

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6. Describe how fieldfares move.

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

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

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

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10. Are Robins always cute and friendly?

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11. Name one good thing that magpies do.

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# 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.**