

Bugbrooke Birdwatch 25th-26th January

Thank you to the 40 people who took part this year. It was a terrible weekend for the Birdwatch as the weather was atrocious and included a mighty thunderstorm on the Saturday afternoon. Most of the rest of the time it was pouring with rain and we must assume that the birds were taking cover like we were. Many people regarded their results as a disaster, and I have heard that many did not return their results as they did not think them worthwhile. However, poor results are just as important as good ones, so if it happens again, don't be discouraged. One year is not significant, but if it is part of a trend, it is better to be alerted to it.

The overall number of species seen was 28, and ranged from 3 to 16 in gardens. The average number per garden was 8.375 which is lower than in 2013 when the average was 9. Regular participants generally saw fewer species than previously, especially those who are affected by the building work in Johns Road and at Peace Hill.

For the first time since the Birdwatch began in 2010, the chaffinch has fallen out of the top ten species seen in gardens. This might be explained by there still being a lot of seeds available in the countryside, and that it has been a mild winter. The open countryside must be safer than an enclosed garden where cats and sparrowhawks know where to go for a quick and relatively easy kill. In coming years we shall see whether it is significant. The chaffinch has been replaced by the jackdaw which has made its first appearance in the top ten. This does look like a trend, as they have steadily risen in the rankings. In 2010 they were at 20th position. In subsequent years they were at 16th, 12th, 12th, and now are at 10th place. It might be that numbers have increased, or more likely that they have learnt to take advantage of the food put out for others.

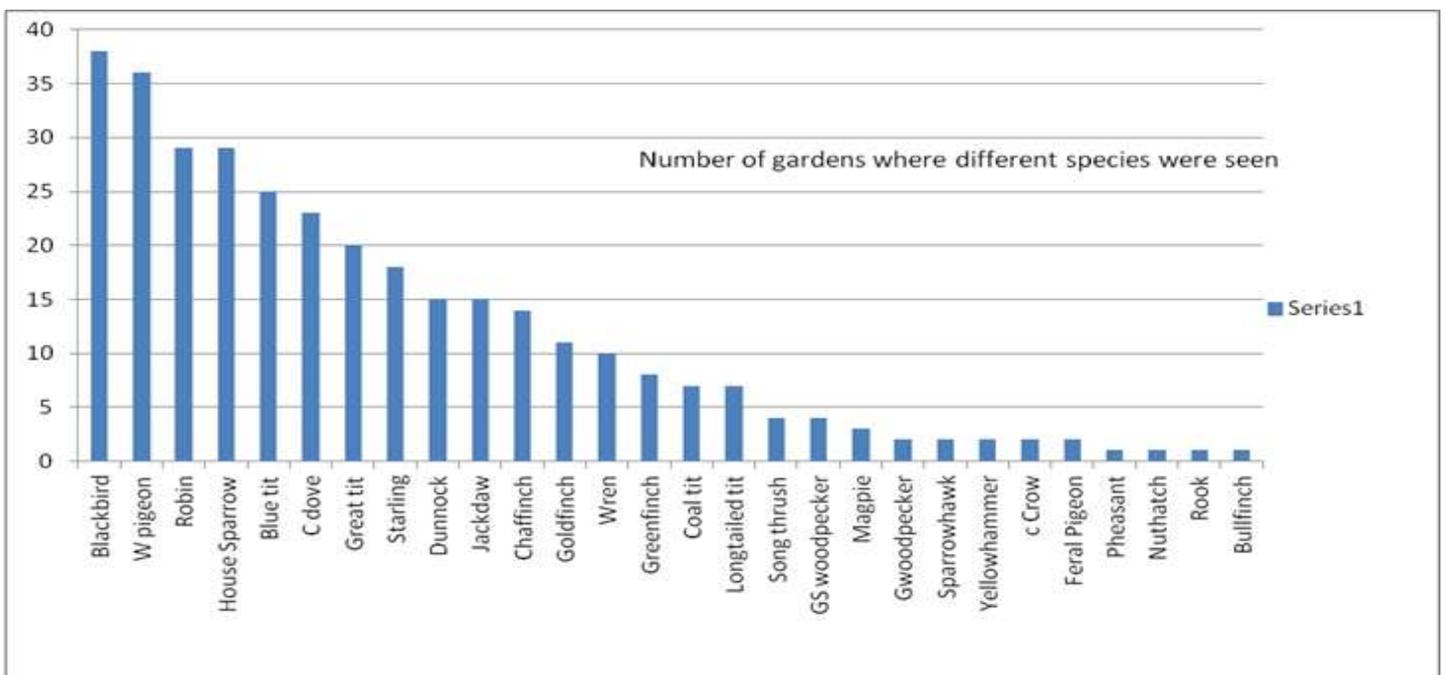
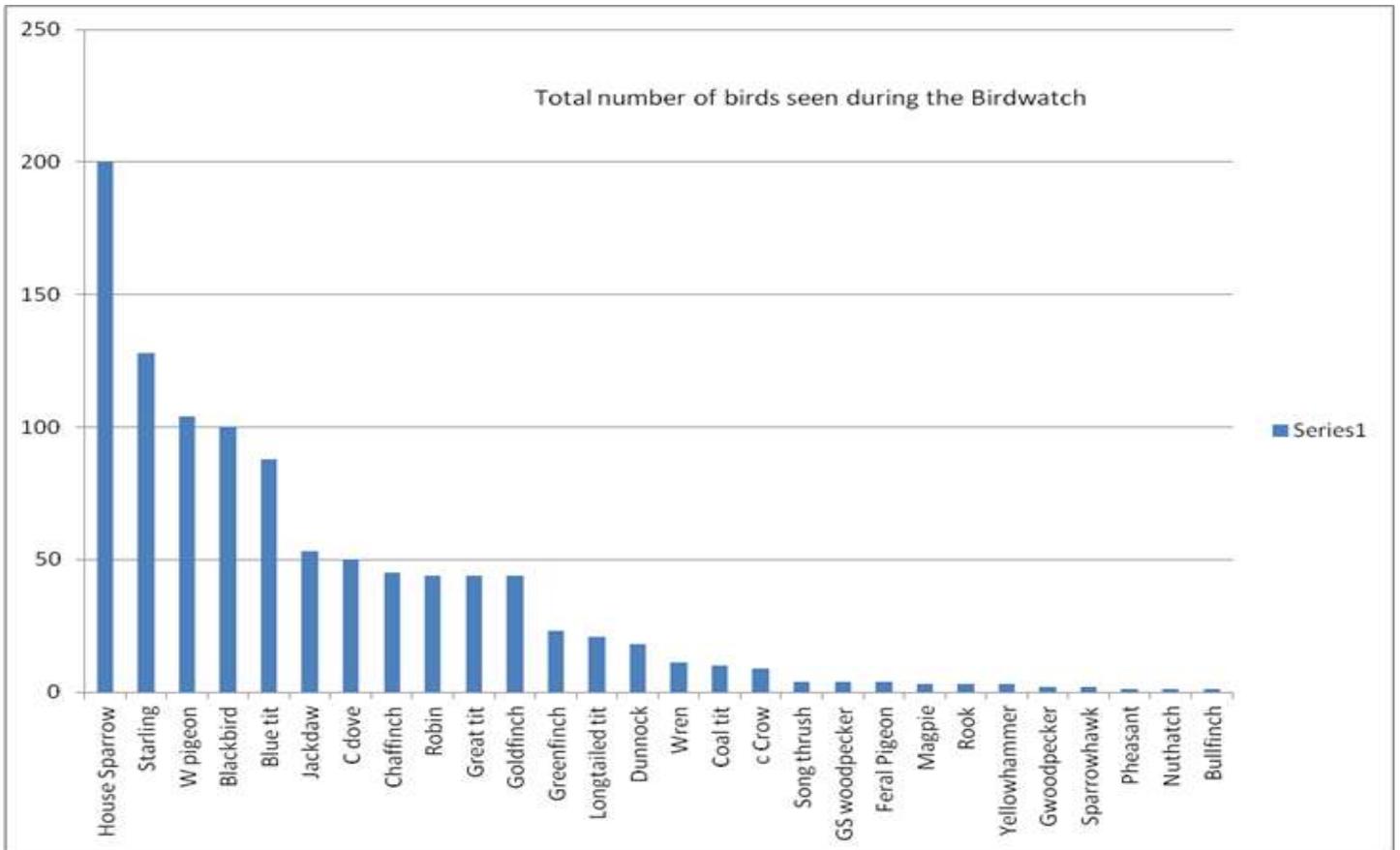
In total numbers the top 2 are still the house sparrow and the starling. Jackdaws have regained their position in the top 10 after falling back last year. Goldfinches have fallen from 7th position to 11th since their first appearance in the top 10 last year. Dunnocks continue to fall in the rankings. In 2010 they were at 9, then 10 for 2011 and 2012, 13 last year and 14th place this year.

The song thrush seems to be doing badly. This year only 4 were seen in 40 gardens. One in ten is the worst ratio seen during the 5 years of the Birdwatch. It has been as high as 1 in 2 in previous years. The RSPB recognise it as being endangered and explain its position by the loss of hedges in the countryside and changes in agricultural practice. It is a bird that thrives best in grazed permanent pasture and woodland, but it is difficult to see that during the last 30 years, our countryside has changed that much. Arable farming is, and has been prevalent for that long and the loss of hedges as field boundaries has reduced since the 1980s. Old hedges are being lost where houses are being built and despite new hedges being planted, they will take a long time to be useful for nesting.

Song thrushes are solitary birds and it is unlikely that more than one will be seen in gardens, and as most gardens have a resident blackbird who cannot tolerate its less aggressive cousin, it isn't surprising that we do not see many song thrushes. However, it is a concern and it might be thinking twice when you put down slug bait. Slugs and snails are a nuisance to us, but they are an essential part of the song thrushes diet.

Recent sightings: In February, Bob Riches saw a long eared owl at day break in Captain's Close. It was on the ground, and then flew on to the sheep feeder. Its distinctive tufts that look like ears were

distinctive. We had our first visit from a hedgehog during the night of the last day of February. Since then I have put a saucer of crushed peanuts, suet and a few currants for it to help it regain the weight it has lost during hibernation.



Top Ten in gardens

	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
1 Blackbird		1	1	1	1
2 Woodpigeon		2	2	5	5
3 Robin		4	3	2	2
House					
4 Sparrow		3	5	6	3
5 Blue tit		7	4	3	4
Collared					
6 dove		6	8	7	5
7 Great Tit		9	10	8	9
8 Starling		5	7	4	8
9 Dunnock		10	9	10	11
10 Jackdaw		12	12	16	20
11 Chaffinch		8	6	9	7
15 Coal tit		14	15	11	10

Top Ten of numbers of birds

	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
1 House sparrow		1	1	1	1
2 Starling		2	3	3	3
3 wood pigeon		4	4	5	7
4 blackbird		3	2	2	2
5 blue tit		5	5	4	4
6 jackdaw		12	7	16	15
7 c dove		6	12	7	6
8 chaffinch		8	6	12	8
9 robin		10	11	9	5

10	great tit	9	8	8	10
14	Dunnock	13	10	10	9