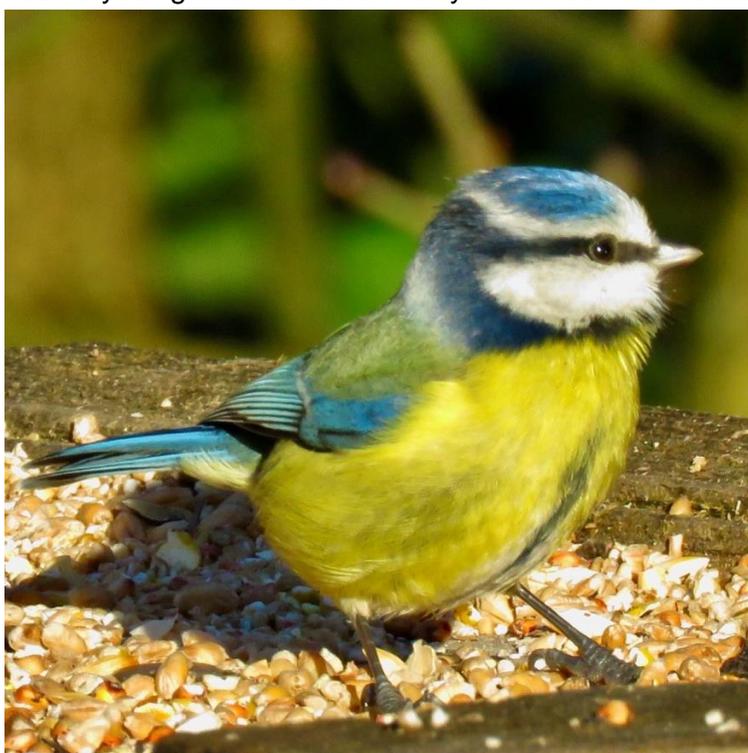


The Journal

Nature Notes

I hope the new year is bringing lots of birds to your garden feeders. Many of our common birds depend on bird seed supplied by us to get them through the winter and in return they delight us with their presence every day. Blue Tits are amongst the commonest visitors to our bird feeders and there are not many that are more acrobatic. Although they feed their young on insects during the spring and summer, at this time of year they are mostly reliant on seeds and nuts; it is not unusual to see 10 or more at our bird feeders. They will happily feast on mixed bird seed, sunflower hearts and fat balls, often hanging upside down to get at the food.



Rather larger and sporting a black cap, the Great Tit should also be around feeding on much the same food items and often joining with other tits to form feeding flocks in the winter. However, it is larger and more aggressive than its close relatives and can dominate the bird table. They are resident throughout the country and may be seen in every month of the year, often choosing garden nest boxes for their nesting sites. With the warmer winters that we have been experiencing recently, larger numbers of Great Tits have been surviving the cold spells resulting in a rise in the population to around 3 million birds.



A much rarer member of the family is the Marsh Tit pictured here and I would certainly like to hear about it if any reader finds one of these in our area. It is around the size of a Blue Tit, but is mainly brown with a shiny black cap and bib and a pale belly. A further problem is that it is extremely similar to the Willow Tit, although the latter has a pale wing bar, a duller cap and a larger, untidy black bib. The Willow Tit is even rarer and largely confined to willow thickets around bogs, marshes and gravel pits. A much commoner species, and one that may well visit your feeders, is the Coal Tit which has a distinctive grey back and black cap with a white patch at the back of the neck.

For those of you who feed the birds, please don't forget the Big Garden Birdwatch, run by the RSPB from 25th to 27th January. Details can be found at their website (<https://www.rspb.org.uk/>). This wonderful example of citizen science enables the scientists to analyse the abundance and distribution of garden birds throughout the country. This enables them to find out which species are thriving and which are declining and in need of assistance. All it takes is one hour of your time counting the birds in your garden or local park.