



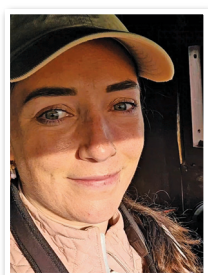
Bullfinch

Photo:

Aisling Kinsella

Garden Bird Survey results

In advance of this season's **Irish Garden Bird Survey**, starting on Monday 1 December 2025, **Aisling Kinsella** looks at the results from last winter's survey and picks out some interesting findings



Last winter, we saw an increase in participation in the **Irish Garden Bird Survey** once more, following a few years of modest declines. More people are again turning to their

gardens, balconies and local green spaces as places of connection with Irish nature. The Irish Garden Bird Survey is one of the best ways to nurture this connection – not just for ourselves, but for our communities and our shared environment. So, to everyone who took part last winter, I want to say a massive thank you. And, if you haven't already, please tell a neighbour, a friend, or a co-worker about the survey. Encouraging even one

more person to take part can make a difference.

Weathering the winter

The winter of 2024/25 didn't come without its challenges. December brought Storm Darragh, and in January the unforgettable Storm Éowyn swept through with record-breaking gusts. Earlier that month, large parts of the midlands, south and west experienced snow, thanks to a particularly cold air-mass, according to Met Éireann. Despite this stormy backdrop, our garden birds remained impressively resilient. The abundance of the top ten species remained remarkably stable compared to the same period over the previous three years.

The top 10

At the top of the charts once again, the ever-



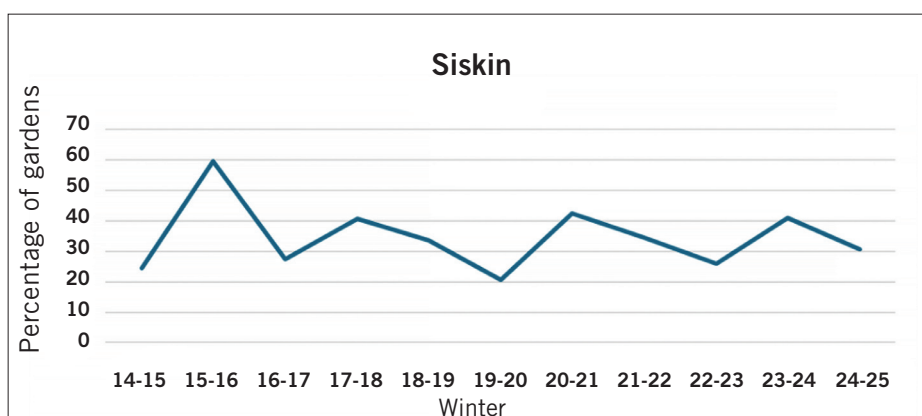
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charming **Robin** held its position as the most widespread garden bird. But this beloved species, while still a favourite, is not immune to change. Through the lifetime of the survey, Robins were often recorded in 98-99% of gardens, and even 100% of gardens back in 2014/15, but last winter this slipped to 95%, the lowest percentage recorded in three decades for the species.

Blackbird continued its strong run, taking second place for the 17th consecutive year and appearing in 94% of gardens. The feisty and colourful **Blue Tit** rounded out the top three, spotted in 89% of gardens. Yet both species, like the Robin, have shown subtle but steady declines in garden usage over the last ten years – especially the Blue Tit, whose garden presence has dropped nearly 10% compared to 2014/15. This could be a result of the milder winters we've been experiencing, and birds are not retreating to gardens as much as they once were.

Although the species within the top 10 remained the same, some rankings saw a bit of musical chairs: the **Magpie** climbed to 4th place, nudging the **Great Tit** down to 5th. **Chaffinch** and **House Sparrow** also swapped spots, with the former climbing to 6th and the latter falling to 7th. **Starling** edged past



Siskin occurrences in gardens have fluctuated over the years. Siskin is an "irruptive" species – meaning these finches will show up to areas (such as gardens with feeders) in large numbers when food becomes scarce in their natural ranges/habitats.

Goldfinch into 8th place, while the small but mighty **Wren** remained reliably in 10th.

Similarly to our garden passerines, corvid occurrences in gardens showed a slight downturn. **Magpie** was in the 80th percentile for the second year in a row, when once upon a time it had remained in the 90th percentile for more than ten consecutive years. **Hooded Crow** records had been on the rise between 2017 and 2023, but dropped 2% last winter, since its highest recorded level in 2023. While garden visits by **Jackdaw** and **Rook** have remained relatively stable in recent years, if we compare it to ten years ago we can see over 10% fewer gardens visited by both species. However, we've seen an increase in **Rook** breeding numbers from the **Countryside Bird Survey** over the same period, with a 4% increase in five years and a 6% increase in eleven years.

The finch factor

A beloved group of birds since Darwin, it would be remiss of me not to do a deep dive into some of our garden favourite finches. After maintaining its position in 8th place for the past three years, **Goldfinch** has dropped down a spot and occurred in just over 2% fewer gardens last winter compared to the previous year. If we compare this to winter 2014/15, we see an 11% drop in gardens visited.

Chaffinch is back up to 6th place, the rank it had claimed for three consecutive years before a brief stint in 7th place for winter 2023/24. However, looking at the percentage of gardens visited by Chaffinches compared to 10 years ago, there's been a 13% decrease.

Our finches remain the most affected group by the avian disease **trichomoniasis**, so to help these feeder frequenters be sure to keep a look out for sick birds. Signs include fluffed up feathers, slower than other birds to fly away when disturbed, bits of food stuck



Siskin. Photo: Aisling Kinsella

around their bill and a swollen neck or face. You can record sick birds on your survey form, and please feel free to also send us details and photos in an email.

Greenfinch is particularly susceptible to this parasitic disease and, given the trend our data is showing (>30% decrease in garden visits compared to 10 years ago), it's important we continue to collect as much information as we can. Last winter the survey recorded the lowest percentage of gardens visited by this species in 30 years.

Bullfinch, on the other hand, showed a positive trend last winter; jumping from 24th to 21st, and was recorded in nearly 10% more gardens than the previous winter; showing less than a 1% decrease since winter 2014/15. In another round of musical chairs, **Siskin** has traded places with **Bullfinch**, dropping from 21st to 24th, and was recorded in 10% fewer gardens than during the previous winter.

The last 10-year period has seen fluctuations in **Siskin** records, which we could likely associate with the availability of natural conifer seeds. The fewer seeds available during a winter; the more likely we are to receive **Siskin** visits in gardens as

they search out alternative food sources. If we look at the chart, there is a pretty clear three-year trend. If this continues, we could predict that this winter; 2025/26, will show another decline in garden visits before another increase the following winter:

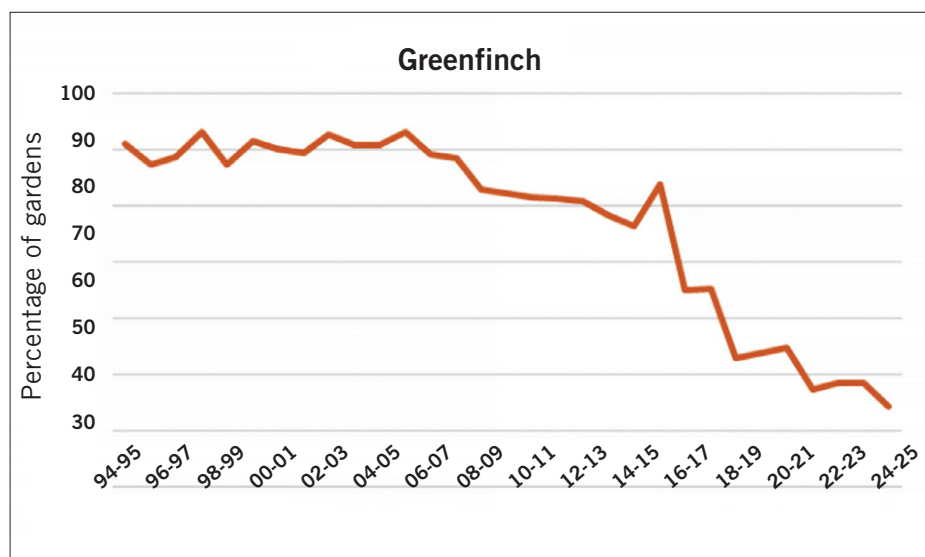
Tits and Treecreepers

Treecreeper visits to gardens had been steadily increasing in both rural and urban/suburban areas, until a noticeable decline between 2018 and 2021. Encouragingly, recent data suggest that sightings are once again on the rise. Looking at our Irish Garden Bird Survey data from the past 30 years, you're around 3½ times more likely to spot a Treecreeper in your garden if you live in the countryside.

After Greenfinch, **Coal Tit** has shown the starkest decline in the percentage of gardens visited compared to 10 years ago, with a drop-off rate of nearly 20%. It also dropped two places in the rankings last winter; down to 13th. We're seeing a similar decline in their breeding numbers from the Countryside Bird Survey – down 12% in five years and 31% in 11 years.



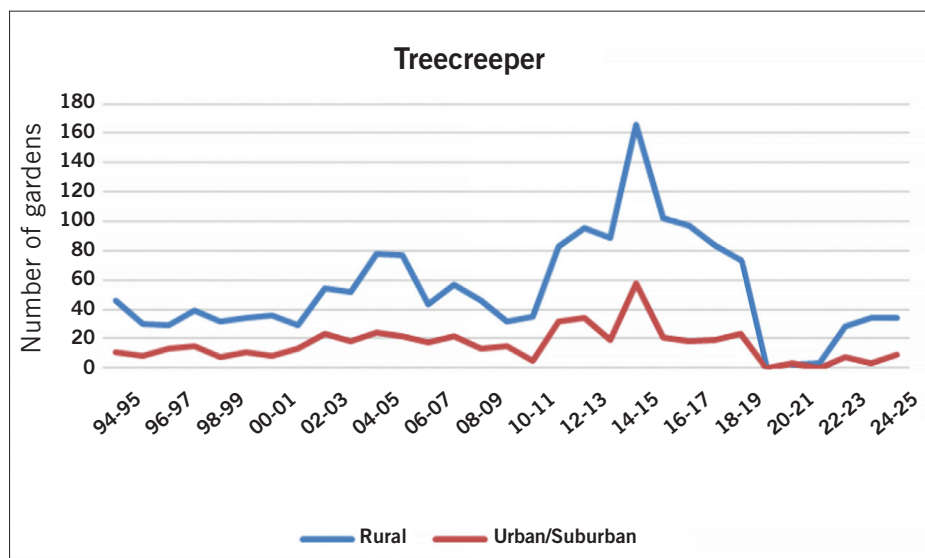
Blue Tit. Photo: Aisling Kinsella



Our data is showing a greater than 30% decrease in garden visits by **Greenfinches** compared to 10 years ago.



Treecreeper. Photo: Aisling Kinsella



Treecreeper garden visits are on the rise again after a sharp and sudden decline.

No such thing as a seagull?

If we've met in person, you've probably heard me say, "There's no such thing as a seagull." While that's not entirely accurate – seagull is a widely used common name – "seagull" isn't a term specific to any one species of gull. In Ireland,

there are seven species of breeding gull, six of which also occur inland, over farmland or freshwater; and many more that can be spotted throughout the year.

Gull identification can be tricky, especially with juvenile and immature birds in the mix, so if you're unsure, we're still very happy to receive

any records labelled as "seagull." It's always useful to know they're visiting your garden.

A big thank you

A massive thank you to our wonderful volunteers, who came through at the last minute this year to help us digitise all the data that came in through paper forms and emails. We couldn't have done it without their time and efforts. They are as follows: C Cronin, M Daly, F Rourke, A O'Hara, K Philips, S O'Halloran, J Jennings, A Bateman, J Fogarty and R Busby.

Submitting your data

We are more than happy to receive your forms in the handiest way for you, be that sending them into the office or via email, but we would like to highlight our online data submission portal for your convenience. The link can be found at the bottom of the survey form and we advise filling it all out in one go at the end of the survey period.

If you have a hard copy of the form, simply open your web browser and type the link into the search bar and it will bring you directly to the online portal. From there, it's just a matter of filling out the details exactly as they are on your form – and then you'll receive an email confirmation with the results of your survey, so you can keep them forever and track the changes in your own garden year after year.

Looking ahead

The resilience of our garden birds, despite turbulent weather and some long-term declines, is a reminder of why citizen science matters. Every feeder filled, every form submitted, and every shared conversation about birds helps build a clearer picture of what's happening on our doorsteps.

As we prepare for another winter season, let's keep the momentum going. Whether you're a seasoned birder or a first-time feeder-watcher, the Irish Garden Bird Survey offers a meaningful way to engage with nature and contribute to real conservation efforts. ■

Ireland's Top 30 Garden Birds in Winter 2024/25

The rankings from last winter compared to the previous winter, and a long-term comparison with 10 years ago

Species	Rank in 2024/25	Percentage of gardens	Change from 2023/24 rank	% change gardens	10-year % change
Robin	1	95.0%	No change	-0.9	-5.0
Blackbird	2	93.5%	No change	-0.2	-6.1
Blue Tit	3	88.7%	No change	-2.2	-9.1
Magpie	5	85.7%	↑ Up 1	-0.9	-8.2
Great Tit	4	82.0%	↓ Down 1	-4.9	-9.7
Chaffinch	7	80.2%	↑ Up 1	-1.9	-13.0
House Sparrow	6	78.7%	↓ Down 1	-3.6	-7.4
Starling	9	73.7%	↑ Up 1	-1.8	-8.4
Goldfinch	8	73.0%	↓ Down 1	-2.7	-11.4
Wren	10	71.0%	No change	-1.6	-13.5
Dunnock	12	67.2%	↑ Up 1	-2.2	-12.6
Woodpigeon	13	66.9%	↑ Up 1	-1.9	-6.8
Coal Tit	11	65.3%	↓ Down 2	-5.5	-19.9
Song Thrush	18	62.9%	↑ Up 4	+5.5	-10.5
Jackdaw	14	61.2%	↓ Down 1	+0.3	-11.6
Rook	15	59.5%	↓ Down 1	+0.2	-10.3
Collared Dove	16	58.4%	↓ Down 1	-0.7	-9.7
Hooded Crow	17	57.2%	↓ Down 1	-1.3	+2.8
Pied Wagtail	20	48.4%	↑ Up 1	+1.3	-10.4
Greenfinch	19	44.3%	↓ Down 1	-4.1	-32.2
Bullfinch	24	44.0%	↑ Up 3	+9.4	-0.9
Blackcap	23	41.5%	↑ Up 1	+6.3	-1.5
Long-tailed Tit	22	38.7%	↓ Down 1	-2.0	-6.8
Siskin	21	30.7%	↓ Down 3	-10.4	+6.3
Goldcrest	26	26.2%	↑ Up 1	-2.0	-6.5
Feral Pigeon	27	25.3%	↑ Up 1	+0.3	-1.8
Sparrowhawk	25	22.3%	↓ Down 3	-6.7	-11.7
Mistle Thrush	28	21.0%	No change	-0.8	-8.0
Lesser Redpoll	29	15.6%	No change	-2.9	-18.1
Pheasant	30	14.0%	No change	+0.1	-1.7