

Garden Bird Survey results

In advance of this season's **Irish Garden Bird Survey**, starting on Monday, 30 November 2026, the survey's national coordinator, **Aisling Kinsella**, picks out interesting findings from last winter's survey



With an average of 1,500 gardens taking part each year over the past 10 winters, the **Irish Garden Bird Survey** (IGBS) remains one of the most popular long-running citizen science surveys in

Ireland. Last winter was no exception, with 1,455 households taking part and sending us counts of the feathered visitors to their garden.

Since taking on the role of IGBS Coordinator, it has been truly heartwarming to see the passion, care and curiosity from you. From thoughtfully completed survey

forms accompanied by letters and personal comments, to questions ranging from species identification to feeder etiquette and hygiene, you continue to show a remarkable level of passion for our garden birds.

Your observations about the changes you are seeing, both in your gardens and across wider areas, have been particularly insightful. It is clear that there is a growing appetite for conservation and that you are increasingly eager to understand and protect Ireland's birds.

Mild weather, maximum rain

The people of Ireland love to talk about the weather, especially when storms, like the two we saw last year, pummel the country. **Storm Bram** in December brought gale-force winds



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and **Storm Chandra** in January brought heavy rainfall. Overall, the winter of 2025/26 was mild but wet – both rainfall and temperatures were above average, according to **Met Éireann**, with six of its stations recording their wettest winter since 2016.

Looking at last winter's survey results, the heavy rainfall appears to have posed a challenge for our garden birds. Of the top 30 species, 25 were recorded in a higher percentage of gardens than in the previous winter, which also had mild temperatures but considerably less rain.

Prolonged and heavy downpours can rapidly deplete energy reserves, particularly in small garden birds, which carry limited fat reserves to maintain speed when escaping predators. These minimal fat reserves mean that our garden birds can lose heat quickly – and heat is energy. To combat this, birds use "ptilo-erection" – a method by which they trap an insulating layer of air between their feathers and skin (essentially their version of goosebumps) to keep warm (Karr *et al*, 2025).

When feathers get wet from the rain, it can negatively impact this process, resulting in greater heat loss and, consequently, increased energy expenditure. Gardens therefore

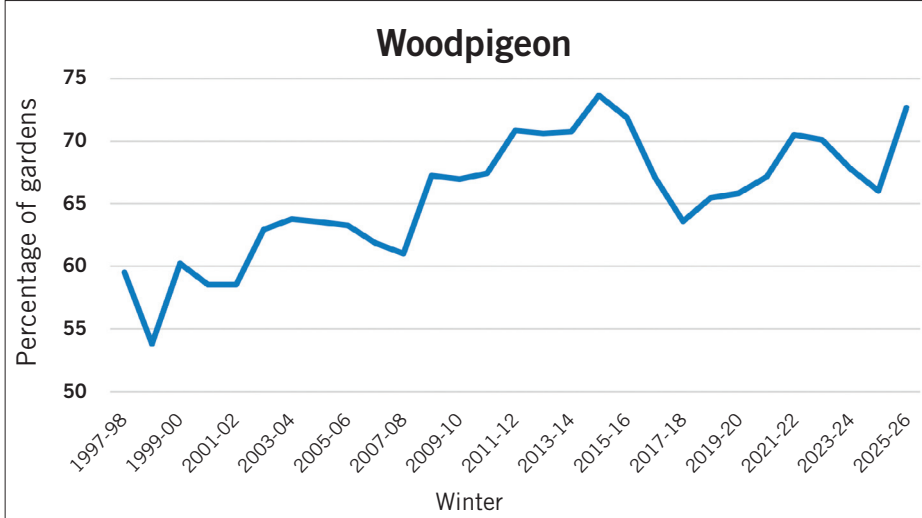


Figure 1. The percentage of gardens visited by **Woodpigeon** during the winter periods 1997/8 to 2025/6 from the Irish Garden Bird Survey.

Ireland's Top 30 Garden Birds in Winter 2025/26

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

Species	Rank in 2025/26	Percentage of gardens	Change from 2024/25 rank	% change gardens	10-year % change
Robin	1	98.0%	No change	+3.0	-1.4
Blackbird	2	96.4%	No change	+2.9	-2.6
Blue Tit	3	94.2%	No change	+5.5	-3.5
Magpie	4	88.0%	No change	+2.3	-3.4
Great Tit	5	87.7%	No change	+5.7	-6.9
Chaffinch	6	87.1%	No change	+6.9	-8.0
House Sparrow	7	83.8%	No change	+5.1	+0.7
Goldfinch	8	78.7%	↑ Up 1	+5.7	-7.6
Starling	9	77.8%	↓ Down 1	+4.1	+2.8
Woodpigeon	10	72.7%	↑ Up 2	+5.8	+0.8
Dunnock	11	71.0%	No change	+3.8	-8.0
Coal Tit	12	69.4%	↑ Up 1	+4.1	-22.7
Wren	13	69.0%	↓ Down 3	-2.0	-8.1
Jackdaw	14	63.8%	↑ Up 1	+2.6	-81.6
Rook	15	61.1%	↑ Up 1	+1.6	-2.7
Collared Dove	16	60.4%	↑ Up 1	+2.0	-1.9
Hooded Crow	17	58.9%	↑ Up 1	+1.7	+2.8
Song Thrush	18	56.8%	↓ Down 4	-6.1	-10.0
Pied Wagtail	19	49.1%	No change	+0.7	+3.5
Greenfinch	20	46.5%	No change	+2.2	-37.1
Long-tailed Tit	21	43.3%	↑ Up 2	+4.6	+5.3
Blackcap	22	40.4%	No change	-1.1	-3.8
Siskin	23	33.8%	↑ Up 1	+3.1	-25.6
Bullfinch	24	33.2%	↓ Down 3	-10.8	-2.3
Sparrowhawk	25	29.5%	↑ Up 2	+7.2	-10.0
Goldcrest	26	26.9%	↓ Down 1	+0.7	-2.3
Feral Pigeon	27	26.8%	↓ Down 1	+1.5	-2.0
Mistle Thrush	28	20.5%	No change	-0.5	-4.7
Redpoll	29	16.4%	No change	+0.8	-25.6
Pheasant	30	14.4%	No change	+0.4	+2.7

provide a welcome relief during winter, when birds are facing the combined challenge of reduced temperatures and increased rainfall, compared to other seasons. The provision of seeds, peanuts and fat balls provides a predictable source of fuel, saving our garden birds' energy by reducing the time spent foraging during challenging weather. Winter is therefore the time when feeders make a real difference to your garden birds.

Top of the table

The top seven species remained unchanged from our previous survey, held during the winter of 2024/25. The ever-reliable **Robin** once again took the top spot, marking its 12th consecutive year at number one, and was recorded in 98% gardens – an increase of 3% on the previous year. This is encouraging to see, as the previous year had marked the lowest percentage of gardens visited by the Robin in three decades.

In the history of the survey, Robin has only ever shared the top position with **Blackbird** and **Blue Tit**, which finished in 2nd and 3rd places, recorded in 96% and 94% gardens

respectively. They were followed once again by **Magpie** in 4th, **Great Tit** in 5th, **Chaffinch** in 6th and **House Sparrow** in 7th place, before the rankings began to shuffle and we saw a little musical chairs among the species further down the list. **Goldfinch** and **Starling** swapped places,

with Goldfinch stepping up to 8th and Starling falling behind to 9th.

Woodpigeon managed to attain a spot in the top 10 for the first time in the history of the survey, which meant that after three years in the top 10, the small but mighty **Wren** was knocked down to 12th. Recorded in 69% of gardens, this was the Wren's lowest occurrence since the winter of 1996/7.

More than just a pigeon

The occurrence of **Woodpigeon** in gardens has been steadily rising since the winter of 1997/98 (**Figure 1, page 17**). This increase in garden visits correlates with an increase in their breeding population, with results from the **Countryside Bird Survey** (CBS) showing a 37.4% increase in breeding records during the period 1998–2016. It's likely that agricultural changes, such as a shift towards autumn-sown cereals and an increase in oilseed rape cultivation, have also helped this species thrive (Lewis et al, 2019).

Looking at the landscape breakdown of gardens reporting this species, a lower percentage of rural gardens have Wood-pigeons visiting (**Figure 2, page 18**). This is likely due to the fact that oilseed rape is the preferred winter food of Woodpigeons, so they are making the most of this in agricultural landscapes, as opposed to relying on garden feeders.

Additionally, Woodpigeons have a more varied diet than many other farmland birds, feeding on green plant material, leaves, buds, berries, flowers and almost any birdfood provided in gardens. They're also remarkably prolific breeders, with their main breeding season extending from April through to November. However, they can lay eggs at any time of year, and nests have been recorded year-round. So, it's perhaps no surprise that we're seeing this adaptable species turning up in more and more gardens.

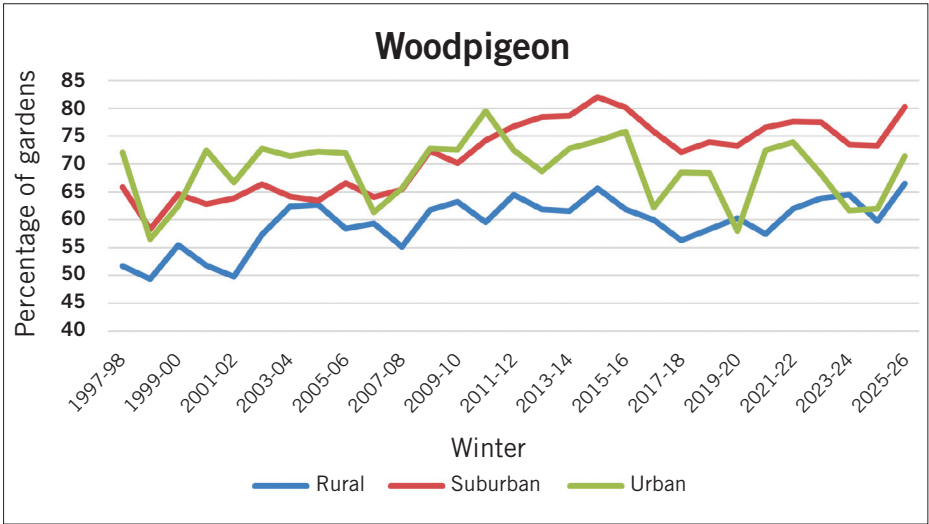


Figure 2. The percentage of gardens visited by **Woodpigeon** in rural, suburban and urban areas during the winter periods 1994/5 to 2025/6 from the Irish Garden Bird Survey.

Drops through the years

When looking at the winter of 2025/26 compared to winter 2015/16, there's a marked change in the percentage of gardens visited by many species – 23 of the top 30 species were recorded in a lower percentage of gardens last winter compared to 10 years ago. To explore this more, I've plotted the 31-year trends of some of these species to see whether this is just a difference between these two winters or if there was something greater at play.

Great Tit, Chaffinch, Dunnock, Coal Tit, Jackdaw and Song Thrush have always occurred in >50% gardens, ever since the survey started. While annual fluctuations are expected, the long-term garden occurrence trend of these species shows a steady decline since 2015 (**Figure 3, page 19**). The percentage of gardens we expect to record Chaffinch, Great Tit, Dunnock and Jackdaw in has dropped by ~10%, and the expected occurrence of Coal Tit and Song Thrush has dropped ~20%.

However, all species bar Song Thrush showed an uptick in the percentage of gardens visited last year.

Similarly, less common species such as **Redpoll, Goldcrest and Sparrowhawk**, which are recorded in <50% of gardens each year, have also shown modest declines since 2015.

However, yet again, all three species were recorded in a slightly higher percentage of gardens last winter compared to the previous winter (**Figure 4, page 20**).

The downward trends observed over the past decade may be partly attributable to the milder winters we have experienced, with fewer birds needing to rely on supplementary feeding in gardens. In contrast, the increase recorded last winter may have been a response to the prolonged rainfall, which placed additional demands on



Great Tit. Photo: Holly Grogan



Chaffinch. Photo: Aisling Kinsella

birds' energy reserves.

It will be interesting to see how these trends develop over the coming years, and continued data collection will help us explore the factors driving these changes. Gardens continue to provide an important refuge when birds need it most. Despite the overall decline in garden use, when conditions become challenging, feeders, and the people who maintain them, can provide valuable support.

So, once again, don't forget to encourage your neighbours, family and friends to take part in this winter's survey, which will be kicking off on Monday, 30 November.

Our data-entry volunteers

With the majority of your submissions arriving by post, we rely on a dedicated team of data-entry volunteers to help bring all that information into our recording systems. It may not involve donning wellies and binoculars or heading out into nature, but this behind-the-scenes work is a vital part of conservation.

Without their time, care and attention, we simply couldn't manage the incredible volume of data gathered by IGBS participants. They are as follows:

M Charnell-Hughes, P Craven, R Miller, C Cullen, L Cocchiglia, J Jennings, F O'Rourke, M Raut, E Green, N Jensen, D Lane, S Griffith, C Harpur, M Greaney, A David, V Eigler, S Kelly, A O'Hara and A Murphy-Scott.

References

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- Lawson, B, Robinson, RA, Colvile, KM, Peck, KM, Chantrey, J, Pennycott, TW, Simpson, VR, Toms, MP, & Cunningham, AA (2012)** The emergence and spread of finch trichomonosis in the British Isles. *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci* **367**(1604): 2852–63. doi: 10.1098/rstb.2012.0130 PMID: 22966140; PMCID: PMC3427565. ■

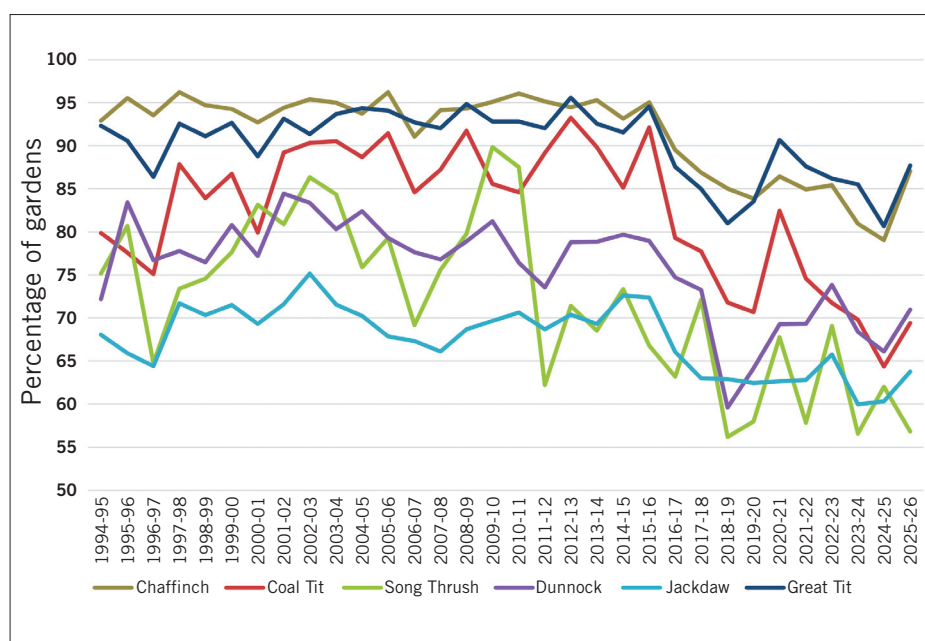


Figure 3. The percentage of gardens visited by **Chaffinch, Coal Tit, Song Thrush, Dunnock, Jackdaw and Great Tit** during the winter periods 1994/5 to 2025/6 from the Irish Garden Bird Survey.



Redpoll. Photo: Shay Connolly

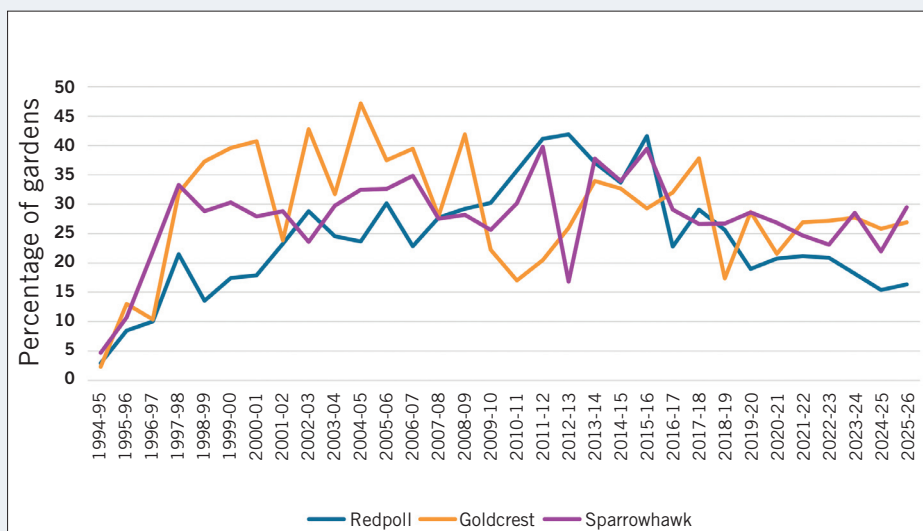


Figure 4. The percentage of gardens visited by **Redpoll**, **Goldcrest** and **Sparrowhawk** during the winter periods 1994/5 to 2025/6 from the Irish Garden Bird Survey.

Your comments...

A few less common garden birds visited the garden. On 5 February, a **Treecreeper** came and climbed the wall. I have seen Treecreepers numerous times in nature and while walking, but never in our garden, so that was a new one.

"In January, RTÉ Radio 1 had a good segment with **Niall Hatch**. He discussed the **Linnet** and its diet of hemp seeds and flax. In German, we say Hänfling or Flachsfinke for the Linnet. The direct meanings are the hempling and flaxfinch, respectively, and Distelfink for Goldfinch. The literal meaning is thistlefinch." – **B Boyle, Blessington, Co Wicklow**

I logged a sighting of suspected trichomoniasis. This was seen in a **Collared Dove** w/c 26 January, and it was a sad sight to behold. I stopped putting out bird food then to try to protect the other birds coming in.

"I get a lot of **Goldfinches**, in particular. I think the number of Collared Doves coming into my garden has gone up this year, and I am not sure if I am imagining it, but they seem to come in pairs. Also, after years of feeding birds, I had **Magpies** for the first time." – **M Connolly, Raheen, Limerick**

A bit of a disappointing year, with the usual suspects, but no **Goldfinches** or **Bullfinches**." – **C Bullock, Dublin 16**

Sadly, for yet another season I didn't spot any **Greenfinches** in my garden. When I first put out peanuts more than 30 years ago, the Greenfinches were by far the most numerous finch coming to the feeders. I thoroughly enjoyed their aerial battles to gain access to the food. By way of compensation, though, **Goldfinches** have taken their place,

through my provision of nyjer seed."

– **M McCauley, Derry**

Very strange year, this was. No **Greenfinch**, only one **Siskin** and numbers noticeably down for **Redpoll**, **Goldfinch**, **Collared Dove** and **House Sparrow**. We put large plant trays under our seed feeders and, each night, we empty these trays and hose them clean. The feeders are then stored overnight in a shed to protect from the weather, and we clean them weekly. Fresh water is put out every morning; those trays are also cleaned and hosed down nightly. It's a lot of work, but we would be devastated if we were responsible for passing on this horrendous disease, which is decimating finches and sparrows. This year, we noticed sick birds in our garden before we had even started feeding them. Education is **vital** so we can reduce or eradicate trichomoniasis."

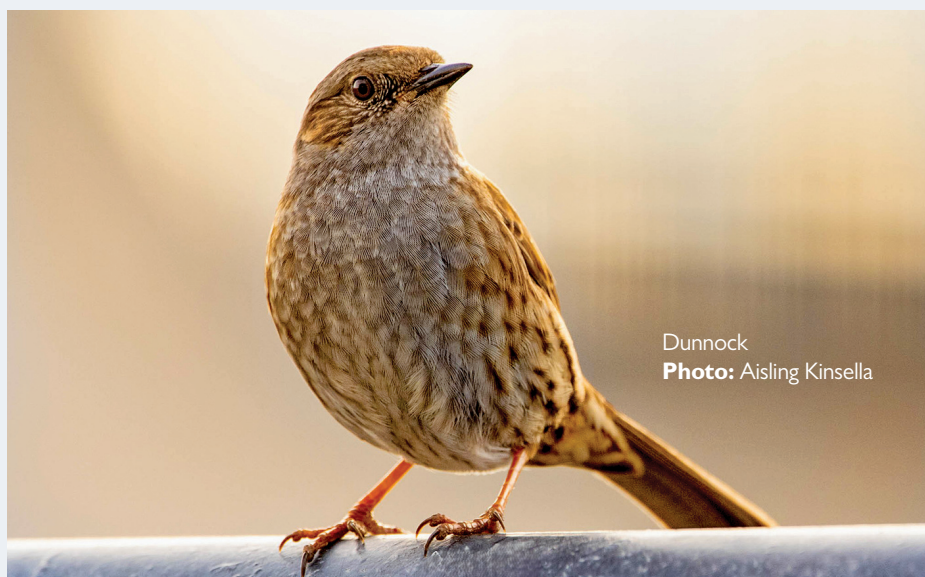
– **S Griffith, Kilpedder, Co Wicklow**

I have **Meadow Pipits** which come to a new patch of grass in my garden – it filled up with tall flowers that they seemed to love – some sort of wild mustard, I think. I saw a fluffy, puffed-up **Greenfinch** in February and I thought it was a fledgling, but now I think it may have been sick, though it was lively and eating well. I also had a sick **Goldfinch** in December.

"I try to clean my feeder regularly; I have spares and I rotate them, but the earth under the feeder is possibly problematic. I plan to try to get a little patch of concrete under the feeder this summer that I can endeavour to keep more clean." – **G Murphy**

We had great fun again this year and got to add a **Red Kite** to our list!" – **Emma & Eoin, Arklow, Wicklow**

My daughter and I enjoyed watching and recording the lovely birds that visit our garden." – **R Lara, Lusk, Dublin**



Dunnock
Photo: Aisling Kinsella