



Garden Bird Watch February 23rd to March 1st 2025

February has been a miserable month dark, windy and rain. The ground is saturated. Last months Garden Bird Watch was off to a miserable start with strong winds and rain during the early part of the week. It was not until Friday things started to ease off and I wondered about extending the observation period.

Whilst most of the snowdrops in the village are quite recent introductions, I have always been impressed by primroses brightening the verges and gardens. Where I used to live in South Yorkshire, we had one wild meadow at Roche Abbey where in February there were thousands of snowdrops and amazingly, they were not dug up in any quantity. One could not say that about primroses there. They were treated as a personal garden supply chain in the open countryside and it was only in the parts of the Earl of Scarborough's Estate where the gamekeepers managed things that primroses survived.



One of the other spring plants, I have looked for in February in the fifty or so years, I have recorded wild flowers is sweet violet *Viola odorata*. Never common here and one should always check a leaf for the similar hairy violet *V. hirta*, which has hairs on the stem. These are both open grassland species with the picture taken on the north side verge of the gate to the field the Springhead uses as an over-flow car park.

In early March, in woodland start to look for early dog violet *v. reichenbachiana*, which has a spur, straight, pointed, **un-notched**, violet and darker than its later flowering common dog violet *V. riviniana* which has a spur curved upwards, blunt and **notched** at the tip and is paler than its petals. In South Yorkshire woodlands on the Magnesian limestone, these two species were common and worst of all hybridised.

However, plants such as lesser celandine, which in the past appeared as early as the first week in January have not appeared this year yet. In the Preston Doctors surgery grounds, the first of the *Prunus* species cherry plum *P. cerasifera* has been in flower for around ten days. This will shortly be followed by the spiny blackthorn *P. spinosa*.

Garden Bird Watch

Well done 245 records of 36 species averaging 18 per garden from 13 recorders. So, of the thrushes, everybody say blackbirds. There are plenty in the hedgerows driving round. Three reports of song thrush, none of mistle thrush, no redwing and one report of field fare. The blackbirds migrate from the continent but where are the redwing, which I normally see on the east side of Came Wood usually 200 or so at a time and fieldfare just one record.

The other red listed species showing a decline includes house sparrow only at six gardens and in quite small numbers and I am not seeing or hearing them as I wander around Preston. The better news is the increase in greenfinch since Penny planted sunflowers. Hoowever, I suspect chaffinch numbers have dropped.

Please make a note of house sparrows as you walk around both Preston and Sutton Poyntz and I will see if I can get a map done.

Butterflies

In the Biodiversity Group, we have a small team who once a month undertake a standard walk around West Hill across the north side of the Waterworks, returning down East Hill to the village counting the butterflies seen 5m either side of their path. So, Rita and Colin, Sue and Jon, Lizzie Peck, Penny and Mike and myself take in turns to do tis count from 1st April to 30th September. The results are collated on a spreadsheet and sent to Butterfly Conservation Dorset.



Next month, I will be organising the April rota and if anybody else would like to take part, please let me know.