

## SGU3A Natural History Group – 9<sup>th</sup> November 2022 – Meeting at Mere Lecture Hall

### Fungi, Garden Birds and Cones

16 group members met for a varied programme. Gordon had named many of the **fungi** photographs he took at Garston Wood and we were able to enjoy seeing their varied colours and forms again.

We observed birds in our gardens during the first days of November. We then collated **these records** for **10 of our gardens** in order to compare with the **BTO Garden Bird Watch** data for autumn 2021.

Species	% of our 10 gardens	% national Q4 2021	Species	Only one garden	% national Q4 2021
Woodpigeon	100	81	Blackcap	10	7
Robin	90	85	Bullfinch	10	11
Blackbird	80	90	Feral Pigeon	10	15
House Sparrow	60	65	Fieldfare	10	
Blue Tit	50	89	Goldcrest	10	4
Coal Tit	50	45	Jay	10	11
Magpie	50	45	Nuthatch	10	15
Wren	50	31	Rook	10	8
Dunnock	50	76	Song Thrush	10	18
Great Tit	40	75	Sparrowhawk	10	11
Long-tailed Tit	40	23	Greenfinch	10	53
Starling	40	50	Meadow Pipit	10	
Carrion Crow	30	27	Canada Goose	10	
Chaffinch	30	63	Pheasant	10	
Collared Dove	30	63	Chiff-chaff	10	2
Goldfinch	30	52			
Jackdaw	30	30			
G. S. Woodpecker	20	24	<i>Q4 2021: This data is for Oct/Nov/Dec and covers all GBW gardens in UK. It is the average weekly reporting rate for each 'core' species. Some species are not included.</i>		
Green Woodpecker	20	2			
Raven	20				

Differences will reflect the varied habitats of our 10 gardens, including urban, suburban and rural.

We then looked at the **GBW 25 year anniversary reports** for birds rising and falling in the rank order between 1995 and 2019. We recognised some of those changes from our own observations.

Ranking change	Description of change	Suggested causes
Chaffinch -1	Now only 70% of what they were in 2007	Finch trichomonosis
Goldfinch +12	2.5 times as many as there were 25 years ago	Garden feeding; flocks roam an area
Blackcap non-mover	Some from central Europe now migrate to UK for winter, instead of Mediterranean	Use garden feeders; milder winters
Song Thrush -8	Biggest drop in numbers from 50% to 15% of gardens, though stable populations elsewhere	Don't know why – slug pellets speculated but not investigated
Woodpigeon +10	Ranked 12 <sup>th</sup> 1995, now 2 <sup>nd</sup> .	Spread from farmland to take food from feeders; large and bold – can overwhelm small birds
House Sparrow -4	1995 recorded in 95% gardens; now 70% Like gardens with dense shrubs & creepers	London sparrows carry avian malaria. Lack of scruffy areas in towns
Greenfinch -7	From 2006 numbers drop from 80% to 40% of gardens	Finch trichomonosis. Garden hygiene important
Nuthatch +6	Come to peanut feeders when natural food is scarce. Affected by very cold weather	Milder winters helping them expand northwards

**Coniferous trees** – cones vary in size and shape. Some remain upright on the tree, dropping their scales to release the ripe seed. Others turn to hang downwards as they ripen so that the seed can be shaken out.



**These are some cones we observed and looked up in books.**

**Some suggested names were:**

Scots Pine, Monterey Pine, Maritime Pine, Bhutan Pine, Norway Spruce, Douglas Fir, Cedar, Larch, Cypress, Monterey Cypress, Western Hemlock, Noble Fir



Atlas (Blue) Cedar – *Cedrus atlantica*  
We found many male flowers on the floor - they appear in the autumn. The tree has rising branches.



There were some ornamental conifers in Mere Cemetery. The rosettes of needles suggest this might also be a cedar. The cones take 2 years to mature and then break up to leave a thin central spike.

