



How to Care for the Birds in Autumn

Many of us have discovered the positive effect that watching garden birds has on our mental health. This piece gives advice on how to help birds visiting our the garden to survive over the lean months.

As summer turns into autumn there's a notable change in the light, mood and atmosphere of the garden. Birds feels the change which triggers them into their migration mode. Many birds fly from the UK to warmer climates (some as far as South Africa) or arriving here from colder countries for the winter. Every season brings a challenge for birds, so if you enjoy their presence in the garden it's important to make sure you cater well for their needs.

Natural Food

The autumn garden can provide a natural larder of berries, fruit and insects that form the natural diet of many birds. With a big range of berry-bearing plants in the garden, you'll be treated to not only branches laden with ripening fruit, but you'll also find lots of birds attracted to this rich food source.

Autumn is a great time to get a variety of garden plants in the ground to support the birds. There's a big range of trees and shrubs that will provide birds with vital food and shelter throughout the colder months. Plant crab apples, rowans, cotoneasters, pyracantha and other fruiting plants for garden birds. Add mixed hedging plants as garden boundaries instead of man-made fencing. It's also important to provide a constant supply of fresh food and water.

Choose food that imitates their natural diet for the very best results. Food such as Peckish Natural Balance Seed Mix that is enriched with Black Sunflower Seeds is perfect for providing additional fats. Our Peckish Complete Seed & Nut Mix is also perfect for all year round feeding.

Bird Drop

Have you noticed a lack of bird activity in your garden at the moment? Many birds leave for warmer shores as the colder weather sets in, this noticeably redu their overall numbers. As well as this, birds are in their final throes of moulting. While losing their feathers makes birds less active, growing them back is also a slow, energy-demanding procedure too. Moulting can leave your garden birds feeling a little under par, so a little TLC in the form of energy-rich food will give them a welcome boost and a helping hand, providing them with the essential nutrients that they need.

If you are passionate about birds then choose to feed them a specially formulated mix designed to not only provide a rich and varied diet but to attract a range of bird species to keep coming back for more. Try our Peckish Robin Insect Seed Mix that is high in protein, thanks to the mealworms.

Our Peckish Wild Bird Food range is designed to supplement the natural food available in your garden so they don't go without. Birds spend 98% of daylight hours foraging for food and can suffer protein deficiencies if food becomes unavailable to them for any reason. The warm summer this year has dried out much of the garden fruit for instance. Supplementary bird food is essential for the survival of your garden birds.

Comings and Goings

Autumn is a busy time for many birds as they move to their winter homes. Birds migrate in their millions every autumn from cooler northern climes to more southerly wintering grounds. It's a slow process, usually dictated by the weather, which starts as early as July and August for some species and continues through to October and November for others. It's two-way traffic too. While some of our garden birds move south, others arrive in their place, seeking the relative mild sanctuary of the British Isles for their winter stay.

Summer visitors such as cuckoos, warblers, swifts, house martins, and swallows will gradually leave Britain flying south making considerable journeys to as far away as Africa.

Nature abhors a vacuum so fills this gap with winter visitors; swans and geese, redwings, waxwings, bramblings and fieldfares all arrive on our shores to escape the colder weather elsewhere.

Topsy-turvy weather can bring some surprising species on a freak wind, creating great excitement for birdwatchers. Some species will stay and others are just passing through using our gardens and wider landscape to sustain them on their journeys. Keep them well-fed with a range of quality food offered in feeders and on bird tables to ensure good accessibility for all their needs.

Roost Sites

Birds often roost in trees and hedges to give them protection from predators, but they also use empty nest boxes and roosting pouches to insulate themselves from the cold and provide shelter from the rain. Make sure your garden has plenty of dense hedges, shrubs and trees where your feathered friends can stop over for the night well protected. Walls, trellis and even trees clothed in ivy and climbers give good leafy cover for some species like little owls, while other birds prefer to roost en masse in boxes to preserve their body warmth.

Some birds will share their body heat and shelter overnight in small flocks inside a roosting box. Wrens are known to pile in on top of each other to endure cold winter nights; 62 individual birds were counted as a record number in one site. Treecreepers have a similar roosting pattern, jamming themselves together in cracks and crevices in the trees to preserve their warmth. While nest boxes can and do provide shelter for many solitary birds, a dedicated roost box is better designed for the purpose and usually fitted with special perches and internal walls featuring places for birds to cling and hang in comfort.

Bird Boxes

With the nesting season over, autumn is the perfect time to clean out your bird boxes with an effective disinfectant, repair any damage and get them ready for next year's bird families. Even boxes that haven't supported a brood need a check over to ensure they are in good condition. Open them up, clear out any debris carefully and use a special cleaner/disinfectant for wildlife to clean into the cracks and crevices.

Get the box ready for early spring nests now. This allows time for a range of garden birds to inspect their prospective home and can use it for roosting in the winter. Mend any damage, seal up cracks and oil the hinges if they're squeaking. Line the box with fresh, dry moss or dried, autumn leaves and put the boxes back up ready for spring. If you need new nest boxes, try our Peckish Blue Tit Nest Box and Peckish Robin Nest Box.

We recommend you face the entrance away from the prevailing wind and fit metal guards to the entrance holes to prevent predators from gnawing the wood to gain access. Angle the box slightly so that any rainwater falls away, rather than into the nesting area which can lead to damp and disease.

Water Source

After this hot summer maintain the habit of giving garden birds a fresh, clean source of drinking and bathing water. Even as the weather cools, birds need to drink and bathe to stay hydrated and maintain their feathers. A purpose-made birdbath is a good choice; just replenish the water daily especially in freezing weather, or add a water drinker that hangs at the feeding station.

Keep your birdbath and drinkers hygienically clean using a dedicated wildlife disinfectant to prevent bacteria and disease spreading. Position your water source in a safe, open spot so that predators can't prey on the birds while birds' attention is diverted.

Provide several venues for water sources at different levels to cater for a wide variety of bird species and their habits. A good quality bird bath is essential, like the Peckish Secret Garden Bird Bath, and we recommend you place them in view from a window to enjoy the spectacle. It offers hours of entertainment, lifts the spirits and doesn't involve a watt of electricity.

<https://www.gardenhealth.com/advice/birds-and-wildlife/how-to-care-for-birds-in-autumn>