



It may be mild but it's still winter!

As I write this column the warmth of the sun and the unseasonably mild temperatures could almost make you believe that we had missed winter altogether! There has been such a marked contrast in this year's winter weather to last year's when humans and birds alike shivered in the ice and snow that gripped our land

But don't be fooled into thinking that just because temperatures are mild the garden birds no longer need your food. There may well be a bountiful supply of berries at the moment, but if that temperature gauge suddenly plummets, the birds will return to your garden expecting food. If you no longer leave any food out they may not have an alternative source and may not survive the night.



If you do provide food, make sure that it caters for the differing needs of the species whether they are seed eaters, insect eaters or just general feeders. If

you are unsure what to leave out, high energy foods such as suet products and sunflower seeds are suitable for most visitors to your bird table - but any food is better than none! Don't forget to leave them water because when there is a hard frost they may not be able to find an alternative supply. Keep the drinkers clean and well topped up and defrost them regularly when temperatures fall below zero.

Small birds such as Blue Tits, Long-tailed Tits and Wrens are particularly at risk in cold weather. Although they have a naturally high temperature and metabolic rate they also have low fat reserves, which mean they have to find food every day to survive. They also have a high surface area to volume ratio which means they are prone to heat loss, so to help retain heat, when they are still they will fluff up their feathers which helps keep them warm.



Every winter all small birds face a very difficult balancing act between eating so little they risk starvation, or eating too much which makes them fat and slow and puts them at the risk of predators. However the male Great Tit has learned how to overcome these problems. Scientific research done at the University of Oxford has shown that dominant male Great Tits carry less fat and are lighter during the day. This makes them less agile and less likely to fall foul of predators. But because they are dominant, when it is late in the day they bully more subordinate birds away from sources of food, so they fill up with food and survive the harshest winter night.

We have had many requests for information about 'Lily' our adopted racing pigeon. I am pleased to tell you that it seems she has finally had enough of sunning herself in Bedfordshire and has finally flown back north to rejoin her fellow pigeons and happy owner. But I have a strange feeling that one day she will once again fly south and visit us on the farm.

For further information on our products please email James Parrish at info@parrishsfarm.co.uk or go to www.parrishsfarm.co.uk.