



It's not only Cuckoos that fly south for the winter

Autumn is one of the busiest times of year for many wild birds as they fly to warmer climates where they are guaranteed a plentiful supply of food. Although we lose summer visitors such as Swallows, House Martins, Warblers and Flycatchers, their place in the garden will soon be taken up by birds flying in from Scandinavia, Russia or even further afield.

Many summer birds leave us, but because of climate change we are now seeing an increasing number of Chiffchaffs remaining here during the winter. They can often be found in local areas such as sewage treatment works, which provide warmth and shelter and also insects on tap.

Similarly the Blackcaps that overwinter are not our summer breeding birds. Ringing data has shown that some have been bred in much colder climates such as Germany and East Europe and they migrate to the warmer climes of the UK in the winter. UK breeding Blackcaps migrate south as usual.



There is more food available here during winter than in the frozen North, but we can also do our bit to help those birds that are visiting us during the colder months, especially if the winter is as hard as last year. Putting out good quality seed and suet based products will not only keep the birds fit and healthy, but it will also attract many birds not normally seen in the garden.

If you're lucky you may well be rewarded by a visit from thrushes like Redwing and Fieldfares, or finches such as Brambling, Redpoll and Siskins. You may even attract more unusual birds such as

Goldcrests that flock to the UK from Northern and Central Europe. These tiny birds migrate across the North Sea and when the weather is particularly bad, they use the oilrigs and ships to rest during their journey.

Occasionally we become the winter residence to some spectacular migratory birds like Waxwings that descend upon us in great numbers because of limited food resources in Europe. In a “Waxwing Winter” (such as in 2010), the birds scour the countryside for the last of the wild fruits, and then move into the towns to feast upon the berry-bearing bushes commonly found in supermarket car parks and gardens.

We have been extremely busy on the farm and last month we harvested the sunflowers and the millet, much to the delight of the finches that enjoyed a banquet of sunflower seeds. Next month we will be harvesting our maize crop, all ready to be mixed with our other seeds and suet to produce our A-maiz-ing fat balls.

If you wondered what had become of Lily the racing pigeon, I have good news. Lily is now returned to full health and although she goes off for a few weeks at a time, she hasn't cut ties completely. This weekend, much to the delight of all at Parrish Farms, Lily once again graced us with her presence.



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