

Country Notes for May 2016

I am sure that many of you will have taken part in the Big Garden Birdwatch organised by the RSPB back in January. The aim of this annual survey is to discover which bird is the most common in our gardens each year. Contenders will always be House Sparrow, Starling, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Blackbird, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Chaffinch and Robin. More recently we could probably add Goldfinch to this list.

However the distinction of being the commonest bird throughout the whole of Britain is a different matter and the bird at the top of the list for many years now may well be quite a surprise to you. This bird has over 8.5 million breeding territories and is found throughout Great Britain from north to south, including the offshore islands. It is also one of the smallest, which means that it is often difficult to detect unless one knows it's call. It's call is in fact rather loud and once learnt, fairly easy to recognise.

The bird in question is the Wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes*. How can this be I hear many of you cry, trying to remember the last time you saw one. It is so small and tends to hide deep in the undergrowth so it is seldom seen, unless one is really searching. Recently I heard one calling in a scree bank high up on Langdale Pikes in the Lake District, with hardly a bush in sight! There are certainly plenty in Hollingbourne!

The Wren is basically brown all over with a delicate beak and a very upright tail. Its wings are quite small, giving it the appearance of fluttering when it flies. It nests in undergrowth, such as ivy and other dense growth and will also use nest boxes.

And for those of you who would like to know what the other contenders are for the top three spots; the answer is that there is some debate, but it is probably the robin in second place and the chaffinch in third.

Enjoy searching for all three as you revel in the, hopefully, warmer days of May!

Andrew Snowdon