

Country Notes for April 2016

It is always good to hear of a success story - and if that story is about one of our more attractive birds then that makes it all the more exciting. For years the goldfinch was one of the birds which we saw from time to time. If we were particularly lucky we might even see one in the garden. However in recent years their numbers have increased quite dramatically - and not only do we frequently see them in our gardens but they are also regular feeders at bird tables too.

I often find that the first signal that they are around is the tinkling sound of their call, often produced when they are flying around, frequently in small groups. However lovely this call is however, it is the sight of one of these charming birds that really excites. An adult goldfinch has a red and white head with black at the back of the neck. The bulk of the body is brown but the wings are a mixture of yellow and black, complimented with a black tails. Later on in the year we will see their young, and these fail to have the colours on the head at first, although there will be signs of yellow on their wings.

The goldfinch is a seed eater, which is why they have adapted so readily to feeding stations and bird tables. Later on in the year they will enjoy the seed heads of thistles and teasels. They are found throughout much of Western Europe and even in to North Africa. They are partially migratory in the winter, but only within their own breeding range. They nest in deep cover and amazingly the chicks are ready to fledge with 13-18 days.

Their colour and charming call mean that in some parts of the world they are captured and kept in cages. Happily in this country we are happy to enjoy their beauty as they fly around in our gardens and open countryside.

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