

Country Notes for April 2021

The recent spell of cold, snowy weather will have made life very difficult for the wild birds and animals which inhabit our villages. With the ground frozen and covered with snow and ice, it will have been much harder for them to gather food to help them survive the harsh conditions. Those of us with bird tables, stocked with peanuts and kitchen scraps, will have really helped many species of birds to keep going.

The tit family and the finches will have really benefitted from peanuts or seeds left out for them and I have commented in previous Country Notes about the rise in the number of goldfinches and long tailed tits visiting our garden feeding stations. One previously common visitor which has had a rapid decline in recent years is the greenfinch. I do not remember the last time I saw a greenfinch in my garden, although I know of another garden where a pair of greenfinches are regular visitors. In the 10 years leading up to 2017 there had been a 59% decline in the number of greenfinches in the UK and it was being considered for the endangered Red List. This was in part due to a disease called trichomonosis which is spread by the saliva of infected birds.

Imagine my delight therefore to see a sudden surge in numbers on the Hollingbourne Meadows Trust during the cold weather. The birds had presumably arrived from further north or perhaps even Europe. The good news continues, in that at the time of writing the number of greenfinches has remained. Let's hope that they stay to breed this summer.

Greenfinches may often be identified by their call which is best described as a sliding 'cheeeess'. They also have a distinctive rattle like call. The males are the most colourful with predominantly green plumage and a clearly defined yellow wing stripe. The female is brown in colour and the yellow wing stripe, although present, is less bold. The bill in both is quite chunky, to allow them to crack open seeds and nuts. The only bird with which they are likely to be mistaken is the siskin, although the siskins, whilst a similar colour, are smaller and streaked with dark flecks.

Let's hope that the Meadows continues to become a place where greenfinches do well. It looks hopeful!

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