

Count the wildlife  
that's counting on you

**BIG**  
Garden  
Birdwatch

Everything you need to know  
to do the Big Garden Birdwatch

**28-30 January 2017**

Thank you for counting the  
wildlife that's counting on you  
Join in the conversation at  
**#biggardenbirdwatch**

[rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](http://rspb.org.uk/birdwatch)





# Relax

Sit back and welcome to the Big Garden Birdwatch

## What is it?

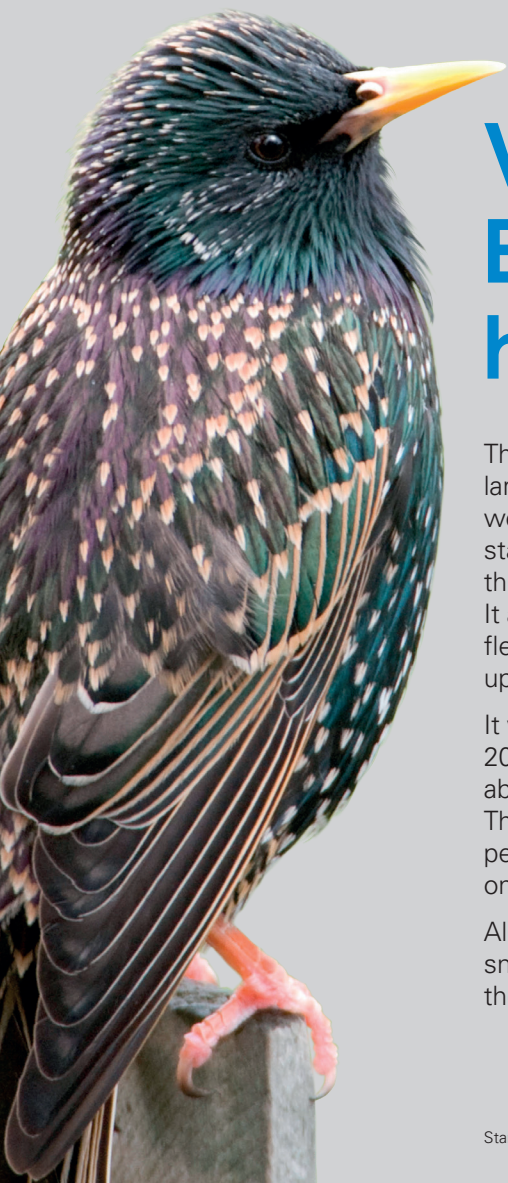
Since 1979, people have been watching the birds in their garden or local park for an hour, and telling us what they've seen. It's a simple hour of watching, but we now have 37 years of data to compare against. That's an astonishing amount of insight into how our wildlife is faring.

## Why do it?

It's a relaxing and interesting way to spend an hour, and it will help you to get closer to the birds and other wildlife in your garden. What started out as a small children's activity in 1979 now has over half a million citizen scientists taking part each year, and the more people that take part, the more accurate the survey will be.

The results help us to find out what wildlife is in trouble, and what's thriving. Then we can take action to put things right. Also, it means that over half a million people UK-wide are connecting with the nature nearest to them.

"I enjoyed knowing I was doing something useful, counting the birds."



## What the Birdwatch has told us

The Big Garden Birdwatch is the world's largest wildlife survey. Through the Birdwatch, we know that, in our gardens since 1979, starlings have declined by 81% and song thrush numbers have declined by around 70%. It also told us that in 2016, the long-tailed tit flew into the top 10 following a mild winter – up by 44% from 2015.

It was originally just a bird survey, but since 2014 we've also been asking respondents about other wildlife that visits their garden. Through this, we now know that only 25% of people see hedgehogs in their garden at least once a month.

All this information adds up to create a detailed snapshot of how our wildlife is faring around the UK.

Starling by Andrew Walmsley / Alamy Stock Photo



Image by RSPB

# Attract

You'll see more birds if they know your garden as a feeding spot.

Different birds like different kinds of foods, from shop-bought fat balls to kitchen scraps.

## From the kitchen

Try putting out grated cheese, cake, cooked potato, fruit, pastry, dried porridge oats or sultanas. Avoid dried fruit if you have a dog, as it can be poisonous.

Birds and other wildlife also need water to drink and bathe in, so make sure there's always a fresh supply.

You can find more activities you can do to get ready for your Birdwatch at [rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](https://rspb.org.uk/birdwatch)

## From the RSPB shop

**Sunflower hearts** are full of energy for blue tits, great tits, greenfinches, goldfinches, blackbirds and house sparrows. Put them in a feeder, on a table, or simply sprinkle them on the ground.

**Suet balls** are great for blackbirds, house sparrows, starlings and robins in winter, when birds need high-fat foods to survive the cold.

Vist [rspbshop.co.uk](https://rspbshop.co.uk) for other bird foods and ways to give nature a home.

"I was completely engrossed by the birds' acrobatics for food and felt the time watching was a great stress-buster. Wonderful!"



# Birdwatch results around the UK

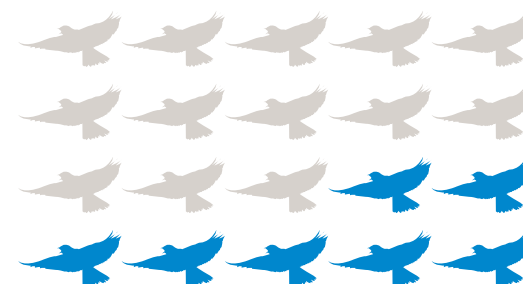
The Birdwatch tells us what's happening to garden birds both UK-wide and closer to home.

Over the last 10 years we've seen huge changes to the numbers of greenfinches and goldfinches. See what's happened in your country opposite.

Large decrease 2006–2016

## Greenfinch

2006  
2016



England:  
**-66%**

N. Ireland:  
**-75%**

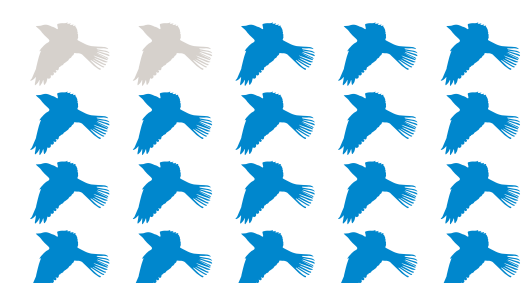
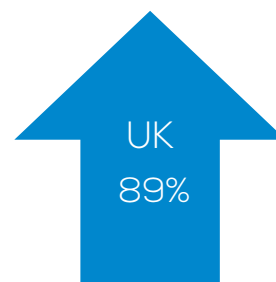
Scotland:  
**-67%**

Wales:  
**-68%**

Large increase 2006–2016

## Goldfinch

2006  
2016



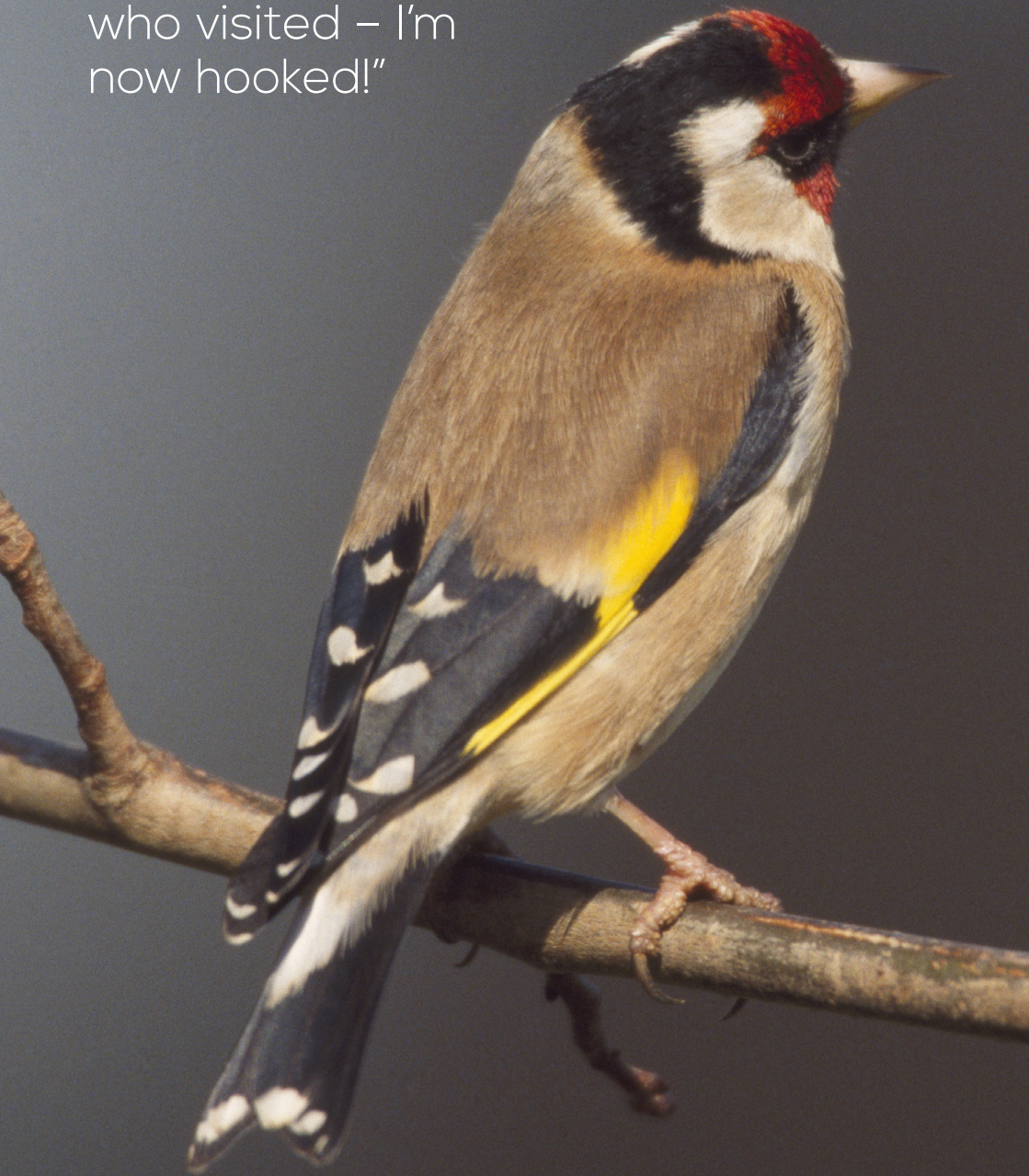
England:  
**90%**

N. Ireland:  
**44%**

Scotland:  
**91%**

Wales:  
**92%**

"It was a revelation to see who visited – I'm now hooked!"



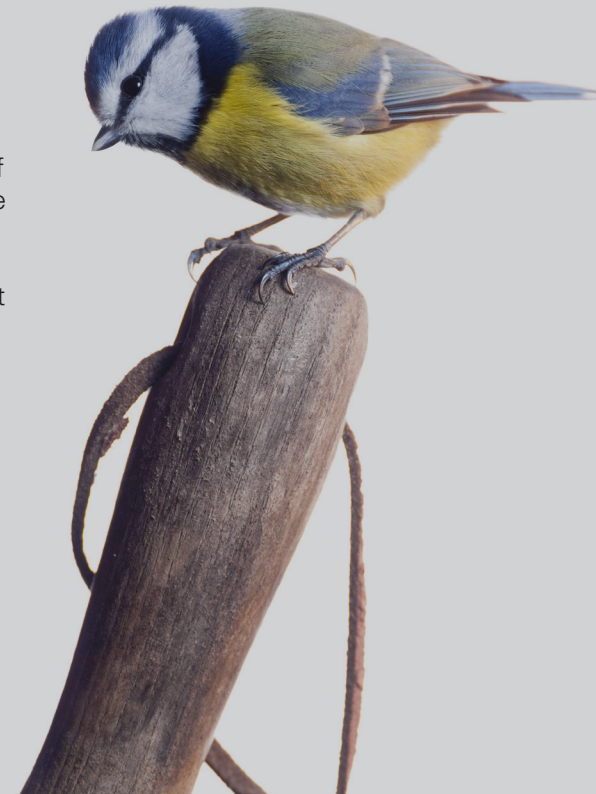
Goldfinch by Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

# How

Here's what you need to do to be a Big Garden Birdwatch citizen scientist on 28, 29 or 30 January 2017.

- 1 Choose a time of day that's convenient for you. You'll probably see more birds if you do it early in the morning, but any time of day you can do it is useful for us. To make it easier for you, we've extended the event to three days.
- 2 Make yourself comfortable and watch the birds in your garden for an hour.
- 3 Record the highest number of each bird species that you see at any one time. Then answer the other questions about other wildlife species that visit your garden during the year.
- 4 Don't worry if you don't see anything over the hour, as it's still really useful information.
- 5 Let us know what you see. You can go online at [rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](https://rspb.org.uk/birdwatch) or use the survey form. Remember to share your wildlife news using [#bigardenbirdwatch](https://twitter.com/bigardenbirdwatch)

Good luck with your Birdwatch!



Blue tit by Niall Benvie (rspb-images.com)



# March

As the breeding season kicks off, birds will be on the lookout for nesting material. Give them a helping hand by leaving bundles of twigs, hay and moss in your garden.

1 **St David's Day**

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3 Keep an eye on ponds for the first frogspawn of the year.

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17 **St Patrick's Day**

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26 **Mothering Sunday**

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# April

Keep your bird feeders well stocked up for seed eaters such as finches and other farmland birds who often venture into gardens at this time of year for extra food.

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14 **Good Friday**

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16 It's Easter – but if there are any real Easter eggs in your garden, make sure you don't disturb them.

17 **Easter Monday**



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21 **RSPB Members' Weekend**

22 **RSPB Members' Weekend**

23 **St George's Day**

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# May

Bring your garden to life - sow colourful, nectar-rich flowers. They'll provide food for bugs, bees and butterflies, plus they'll look great too.

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Bank Holiday
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Keep a look out for swifts returning from Africa.
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Spring Bank Holiday
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# June

Leave an area of your lawn uncut until late summer to create your own mini-meadow. Wildlife will love you for it, and it'll give you a bit of a rest, too.

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Father's Day
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Today's the longest day, but birds like blackbirds and sparrows still need to raise another brood.
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# July

Remember to keep your bird bath topped up during the warm summer months. The water you provide can be a lifeline for thirsty birds when natural supplies have dried up.



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12 **Bank Holiday (NI)** \_\_\_\_\_  
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At this time of year, many dragonflies are at their peak. Keep an eye out next time you're near a lake or pond.

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29 **RSPB Big Wild Sleepout** \_\_\_\_\_  
30 **RSPB Big Wild Sleepout** \_\_\_\_\_  
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# August

August is a great time to see pipistrelle bats in your garden. Look up to see them feeding on insects at dusk.

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7 **Summer Bank Holiday (Scotland)** \_\_\_\_\_  
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Look out for moths on warm summer evenings.

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28 **Summer Bank Holiday (England, NI)** \_\_\_\_\_  
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# September

Create a water feature. Even if you don't have space for a full-blown pond, a washing up bowl will provide a great place for wildlife to drink and bathe.

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**5** Over the next couple of weeks, watch out for swallows and house martins congregating before they migrate to Africa.

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# October

Make your own compost and leaf piles. Not only will it be good for the garden, but the compost heap itself is great for all sorts of wildlife.

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7 **RSPB AGM & Members' Day**

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15	_____	28	_____
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17	_____	30	_____



18	_____	<b>31</b> Boo! Remember that spiders are nature's pest controllers, so don't scare them away.
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20	_____	

# November

Create a dead wood pile, using any sticks and logs. They're great for insects, fungi, mosses and lichens, and if you're lucky, a hedgehog or toad might take up residence.



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Remember, remember... to check your bonfire for hedgehogs before you light it, in case they're hibernating in there.

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Remembrance Sunday

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St Andrew's Day

# December

This is a great time of year to get planting. Fill gaps in your garden with a tree or shrub, such as hawthorn or holly, which are great news for birds and insects.



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Christmas Eve

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Give your garden birds a tasty Christmas treat.

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Boxing Day

New Year's Eve

# Which birds can you see?

You can use this handy counting sheet during the Big Garden Birdwatch. Please count the most you see of each species at any one time, not the total seen over the hour. Then submit your results at [rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](https://rspb.org.uk/birdwatch) or fill in and send us the survey form from the pack – **don't send this sheet!**

Seen something else? Go to [rspb.org.uk/birdidentifier](https://rspb.org.uk/birdidentifier) to find out what it might be.



## Great tit

Look for a black stripe down its yellow front. The males have a slightly thicker stripe than the females.

How many have you seen all at once?



# Robin

Unmistakable orange breast. Some visit from the Continent in winter. You can hear its song almost any time of year.

How many have you seen all at once?



# Woodpigeon

This large garden bird is mostly grey with a white patch on its neck. Often on the ground hoovering up fallen seed.

How many have you seen all at once?



## Long-tailed tit

Tiny body; long tail. Known affectionately as “bumbarrels” in some parts of the country. Often in groups.

How many have you seen all at once?



## Blue tit

Blue is not the only colour on this tit.  
Look out for yellow on its front, green  
on its back and white on its face too.

How many have you seen all at once?



# Goldfinch

Look for the gold in its wings, but also the red on its head. More than one? A flock of goldfinches is called a charm.

How many have you seen all at once?



# Greenfinch

Bigger than goldfinches, greenfinches have a chunky beak to crack seeds. Look out for green/yellow in the wings.

How many have you seen all at once?



**Magpie**

This large bird will feed on scraps.  
Look closely and you might see purples  
and greens in its iridescent feathers.

How many have you seen all at once?



## Starling

Look closely in winter and you'll see lots of different colours in this mostly black bird, including white spots.

How many have you seen all at once?

Male



## Chaffinch

Male chaffinches have a pinky-orange breast, while females are more brown. Both have distinctive white bars in their wings, which you can see well when they fly. They usually prefer feeding on the ground or a birdtable.

How many have you seen all at once?

Female



## Collared dove

Look for its black neck collar. It came 11th in the 2016 Birdwatch, after only colonising the UK in the 1950s.

How many have you seen all at once?

Male



Female



## House sparrow

Although still at the number one spot in the 2016 Birdwatch, results show that house sparrows have declined by 58% since 1979. The male has a grey head, black bib and brown streaky back, while the female is more brown all over.

How many have you seen all at once?



## Dunnock

The dunnock is a small streaky brown and grey bird. It feeds on the ground, flicking its wings nervously as it goes.

How many have you seen all at once?



## Coal tit

Smaller than a great tit, with a black head and white stripe down the middle at the back.

How many have you seen all at once?

Male



Female



## Blackbird

Males are black and females brown, both with yellow beaks. Often feed on the ground on fruit, worms or insects.

How many have you seen all at once?

Don't forget to submit your results at [rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](https://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch) or fill in the survey form from the pack and post it back to us!

Great tit by Steve Round, blue tit by Tony Hamblin, woodpigeon by David Kjaer (all rspb-images.com), robin (Alamy Stock Photo), magpie, goldfinch and dunnock (all dreamstime.com), male chaffinch (thinkstock), female chaffinch, greenfinch, starling, female blackbird, male sparrow, female sparrow and collared dove (all shutterstock), long-tailed tit, male blackbird and coal tit (all 123rf.com). The RSPB is a registered charity in England and Wales 207076, in Scotland SC037654. 356-0922-16-17.

# For you Birdwatch biscuits

## You will need:

- 170g/6oz butter
- 170g/6oz brown sugar
- 170g/6oz caster sugar
- 1 egg
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- 260g/9oz plain flour
- ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 85g/3oz oats
- 85g/3oz sunflower seeds

1. Preheat oven to 200°C/400°F/Gas Mark 6.
2. Grease and line a baking tray.
3. Cream together butter, brown sugar and caster sugar.
4. Add the egg and vanilla extract, and beat.
5. Add flour, bicarbonate of soda and oats, and mix well, blending in sunflower seeds.
6. Knead to a smooth paste.
7. Form into 2.5cm (1 inch) rounds, spaced 2.5cm (1 inch) apart.
8. Bake in a preheated oven for 15 minutes, until golden brown.
9. Cool on a wire rack, and enjoy with your RSPB coffee whilst you take part in the Birdwatch.
10. Feed any leftover sunflower seeds to your birds.



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# For the birds Bird cake

## You will need:

- Yogurt pots
- String
- Scissors
- Suet or lard
- Mixing bowl
- RSPB bird seed
- Raisins
- Grated cheese

1. Using scissors, make a hole in the bottom of the yogurt pot.
2. Thread string through the hole and tie a knot on the inside. Leave enough string so that you can tie the pot to your tree or a birdtable.
3. Allow the lard to warm to room temperature, cut it up into small pieces, and add to a bowl.
4. Add the other ingredients to the bowl, and mix them together with your fingertips.
5. Keep adding the seeds, raisins and cheese, and knead until it is all held together by the fat.
6. Fill the yogurt pot with the bird cake mixture, and put it in the fridge to set for an hour or two.
7. Hang your bird cakes from trees or your bird table. Watch out for greenfinches, tits, and even great spotted woodpeckers.

**NB: Don't use raisins if you have a dog, as they are poisonous to them.**



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