

Hungry Jays

Have you seen a lot of Jays this autumn? Have you seen Jays doing things you would not expect them to do?

What Jays would normally do at this time of the year is raid oak trees for acorns and then cache them away in a tree hole or in a hole in the ground. They are a common sight seen flying across roads with their crops full of acorns and one extra in their beak! They rely on these stores of acorns to feed them through the autumn and to see them through the winter.

But this year in many parts of the country there seems to have been a complete failure of the acorn crop, probably due to adverse spring weather. This does happen from time to time so Jays as a species obviously manage to cope with it, but it does lead to some interesting behaviour.

Jays have been seen on the islands which is most unusual – 5 on Ramsey on 20th Sept and a flock of 101 over Skokholm on 6th October. Up to 40 have been at Westfield Pill, feeding unusually on sloes, and 90 at Freshwater West and 20 at St David's. Some of these birds were feeding locally but it appears that many may be heading for Ireland – this would be a big movement for a pretty sedentary bird.

More locally, Jays have been reported in gardens where they have never been seen before, often eating apples.

This is what they are doing in our garden – we have local Jays who somehow make a living and breed in the scrap of woodland across the road, where there are a few oak trees. They have already dealt with the crab apples, which usually hang on till December, and they are now demolishing the apples I put out each day (our relatively small crop of apples did not last long on the trees). The 2 Jays currently in the garden are apparently the adult Jays from last year - they know how to use the peanut feeder. They bred successfully so I wonder where their offspring are – maybe joining these flock in Ireland?



If you do see Jays in your garden, have a close look at them. They have a truly remarkable plumage – soft pinky brown all over with a piercing yellowish eye, black and white stripes on the crown and an amazing bright blue flash striped with black on the wing coverts. When they fly (which they do with a characteristic floppy style) they show a huge white rump and black tail.

And give them some apples or peanuts in exchange for brightening your day!

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