

The Bullfinch

It was not long ago that Bullfinches were considered a serious pest of orchards – they would descend on the trees in the spring and consume the flower buds. They were probably very hungry – like most seed eaters in the UK there is very little for them to eat in the spring and the first dandelion clocks are eagerly awaited! Because of this food shortage, at this time of the year some unusual seed-eating visitors can be seen in gardens making use of food we supply. Siskins, Bramblings, Yellowhammers and Reed Buntings are all most common in gardens in March and April. And it seems that Bullfinches are beginning to use these food supplies, following in the footsteps of Goldfinches which were rare at garden feeders only a few years ago.



It would be truly splendid if Bullfinches were regular visitors to our gardens, for they are a stunning bird. The male, with his black cap, smart pale grey back, white rump and bright pink underparts is one of the top competitors for the most colourful bird in the UK. But they do tend to hide their light under a bushel – keeping well concealed in the tall hedges and scrub which is their favoured habitat. But once you know their contact call, you will hear them far more often than see them – it is a soft, plaintive, breathy whistle – “piuu”.

And keep your eyes open for a bird flitting across the road between two hedges – if it has a bright white rump then it is a Bullfinch. This is frequently all you see, but is by no means an uncommon sight around this area.