

The Siskin

Before about 1970 the Siskin was not a common bird in the UK. However, two things changed that – the first was the maturation of the many new conifer plantations throughout the countryside which provided abundant seed for this cone-loving finch. The second change was the Siskin's adaption to taking food from garden feeders – initially they favoured peanuts in red netting (it is thought that these reminded them of pine cones!) but now they happily utilise all kinds of food.



The Siskin is a small finch which is heavily dependant on conifers – it usually nests high in a conifer on an outside branch and feeds almost exclusively on seeds extracted from the cones of spruce, pine and alder.

In the winter, and especially late in the winter when its source of conifer seeds is running low, or when they are migrating back through the UK on the way further north, Siskins often come to garden feeders. We have a pair of Siskins in our garden at the moment feeding mostly on the nyger seed - this is the first for us though I know other people in the areas have them regularly. I have always had a soft spot for them as when I was a post-graduate student in Birmingham we had Siskins coming to our feeders which we hung out of the window of a student flat – this was in 1972 when they had only just embarked on this new habit.

So how do you recognise a Siskin? Well, it is a very small finch, smaller than a Goldfinch and indeed smaller than many of the tits. The male is a colourful bird - predominantly greenish yellow with a smart black cap, yellow rump and with black and yellow on the wings while the female is basically greenish brown with streaked underparts. They both share a very pointed beak and a deeply forked tail.