

Teasel – a Winter Feast for Goldfinches



Teasel is one of the best plants you can grow for birds, especially goldfinches, which love feeding on its seed heads during autumn and winter. As other food sources disappear, teasels provide an important natural supply of seeds, and watching goldfinches clinging to the spiky heads is a real winter highlight.

Teasel is a tall biennial plant, forming a leafy rosette in its first year and tall flowering stems in its second. The mauve flower heads dry into long-lasting seed heads that look striking in the winter garden and are full of bird food.

Growing teasel is easy. It prefers a sunny spot but will tolerate light shade and poor soil. Once established it needs very little care and will often self-seed. Leave seed heads standing over winter for the birds and cut back in spring if needed.

Can it be grown in a pot? Yes – use a large, deep, heavy container to support its height. Pot-grown plants may be slightly smaller but will still produce seed heads and attract birds.

A simple plant, full of character – and a real gift to wildlife.

Plant For Wildlife

Field Trip & Indoor Meeting

Birds To See In February

Nesting & Egg Laying

Bird Of The Month

Birds Seen In January

Other News

Field Trip Tuesday 3rd February

Tuesday 3rd February – Marshside & Hesketh Outmarsh

We will meet at **10:00am at Marshside**, where a 9.7m high tide should push birds closer to the reserve. This gives us a great chance to see a variety of waders, wildfowl and raptors displaced by the rising water.

After a walk to the hides, we will then head on to Hesketh Outmarsh, where further waders and wildfowl can be seen, along with Bewick's Swans.

Meeting point: Sand Works Car Park, Marshside.

Postcode: PR9 9PJ

(Parking charge applies for non-members)

We hope you can make it along for the walk — it should be well worth it. Please remember to bring your lunch, and we look forward to seeing you there.

Indoor Meeting Wednesday 4th February

We are delighted to welcome back Mike Roberts as our next guest speaker. Mike will be giving a fascinating talk on Bitterns, exploring the life of this elusive reedbed heron and the encouraging recovery of its numbers in the UK.

Perfectly camouflaged among the reeds and rarely seen, the Bittern is best known for its extraordinary deep booming call – the loudest of any UK bird – which can carry for miles across wetlands.

Mike's knowledge and passion for this remarkable species always makes for a captivating evening, and you are sure to come away having learned a great deal about this truly special bird.

We hope you can join us.

Bird Puzzle – Can You Name the Bird?!

Unscramble the bird names

1. RENSITAGL
2. KESAPWROHRA
3. NAFHCIF
4. RTEHGR EAETPCKEOR
5. ODWROGEPDNEKERC
6. YJA
7. LLAAMRD
8. ITTKIWT EAKW
9. RNEH
10. KIBLLPAST

Answers On Last Page

What Birds Can We Expect to See in February

February birding in Lancashire is all about wetlands, estuaries, farmland and woodland edges. Cold weather often concentrates birds, making this an excellent month for both beginners and experienced birders.

Wetlands & Reserves

Reliable sites for wildfowl, raptors and early breeding activity:

- **RSPB Leighton Moss** – Marsh Harrier, Bittern, Bearded Tit, winter ducks
- **Marton Mere** – Teal, Wigeon, Goldeneye, water rails
- ****Brockholes** Nature Reserve Ribble Estuary – Curlew, Dunlin, Pink-footed Goose, raptors
- **Morecambe Bay** – Huge wader numbers, wildfowl, winter gulls
- **Fleetwood Marsh** – Geese, ducks, Marsh Harrier

Farmland & Open Country

Often overlooked but excellent in winter:

- Pastures and stubble fields for Fieldfare, Redwing and Lapwing
- Rough grassland and roadside verges for Barn Owl
- Hedgerows for Bullfinch, Yellowhammer and Tree Sparrow

Woodland & Parks

Great for resident species and early breeding behaviour:

- **Bowland Fells** – Raptors, ravens, winter passerines
- **Local woods and country parks** for Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch, Treecreeper and Goldcrest

Gardens & Feeding Stations

Never underestimate your own garden:

- Sparrowhawk hunting feeder birds
- Great Tits and Song Thrushes in full song
- Goldfinch, Siskin and Redpoll where feeders are stocked

February Tip:

Cold, still mornings and late afternoons are often the most productive, especially for owls and birds of prey. Frosty weather can concentrate birds into smaller areas.

Starting this month, we'll include a two-month guide highlighting the garden birds most likely to be nesting and laying eggs during that period.

Nesting & Egg Laying – February & March (Garden Birds)

As daylight increases and temperatures begin to rise, many garden birds start preparing for the breeding season. February and March are mainly about nest-site inspection, pair bonding and early nesting, with egg laying beginning for some species by March.



February

Most birds are not laying eggs yet, but important early behaviour is underway:

- Great Tit & Blue Tit – actively inspecting nest boxes
- Robin – territories established; nest building may begin
- Blackbird & Song Thrush – singing strongly and pairing up
- Woodpigeon & Collared Dove – may already be nesting in mild winters
- Member tip:
- February is the last ideal month to clean out nest boxes before nesting begins in earnest.

March

The breeding season starts to gather pace:

- Robin – nest building well underway; eggs often laid late March
- Blackbird – early nests completed; first eggs laid
- Song Thrush – one of the earliest garden birds to lay eggs
- Great Tit – nest building begins; egg laying usually late March or early April
- Blue Tit – nest building, especially in boxes, with egg laying soon after

What to Watch For

- Birds repeatedly entering and leaving nest boxes
- Carrying moss, dry grass or feathers
- Increased song, especially early mornings
- Brief territorial disputes around nesting sites



Coming Next

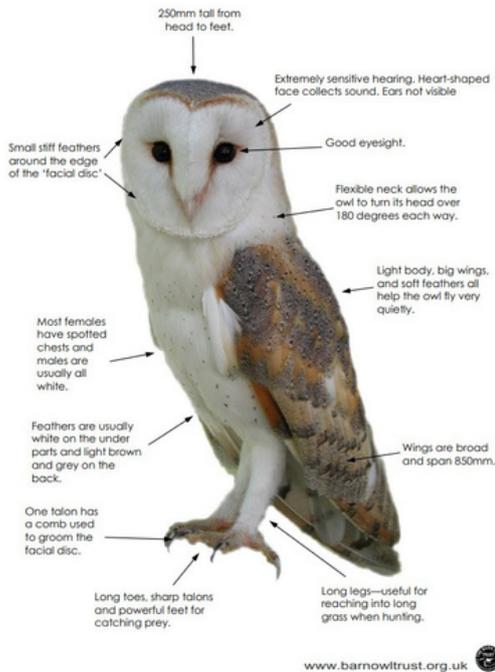
Peak nesting and egg-laying months for garden birds

April & May

Bird Of The Month

Meet the Barn Owl – A Closer Look

This month we are focusing on Barn Owls, inspired by the many Barn Owl photographs being shared by photographers on Facebook at the moment. Seeing so much enthusiasm and interest makes it an ideal opportunity to learn more about these beautiful birds.



How Can You Tell If A Barn Owl Is Male Or Female?

It is almost impossible to tell if a Barn Owl is male or female just seeing it fly overhead. However, a close look may give you a clue. Females often have darker brown feathers around the rim of the facial disc as well as darker bars on the tail and small black spots on the chest and underside of the wings. Males are generally lighter and a more pure white underneath.

What Do Barn Owls Eat?

In England, Scotland and Wales, Barn Owls feed mainly on small mammals. Field Voles make up the largest part of their diet, followed by Common Shrews and Wood Mice, with House Mice, Brown Rats, Bank Voles and Pygmy Shrews also taken. Other prey such as amphibians, birds, bats and invertebrates are only very rarely recorded.

Barn Owls swallow their prey whole and later regurgitate the indigestible fur and bones as pellets. An adult typically eats three to four prey items per night, and during the breeding season a pair must find this amount for each owlet as well. Over a year, this can total close to 4,000 prey items. Hunting success can vary and is often reduced by poor weather or low prey availability.

What Do Barn Owls Eat?

Barn Owls hunt where prey is most plentiful. Rough grassland is especially important, as it provides excellent cover for small mammals, allowing their numbers to build up. Field Voles create networks of burrows beneath the thick grass litter and emerge through small holes to feed on the surface, with these vole holes being easiest to spot between November and March.

In summer, crops and hay meadows can also provide good hunting opportunities, while in poor weather Barn Owls will often hunt in and around farm buildings.

When And How Do Barn Owls Hunt

Barn Owls are superbly adapted for hunting and learn these skills largely through instinct between 8 and 14 weeks of age. They are most active at dusk and dawn, typically leaving their roost and travelling across less suitable habitat to reach favoured hunting areas such as rough grassland.

Relying mainly on sound to locate prey, Barn Owls fly slowly and low over the ground, usually no more than a few metres high, quartering back and forth until a small mammal is detected. They may briefly hover before striking, or sometimes drop suddenly straight into the grass. When attacking, the owl dives head-first before pulling back and extending its talons, ready to seize its prey.

They will often hunt from posts or other suitable perching places, allowing them to conserve energy by reducing activity and minimising heat loss in cold conditions.

They will also face challenges as a result of their almost silent flight. Their specially adapted feathers are not very waterproof and they cannot store large fat reserves, meaning they are unable to hunt in heavy rain and are particularly vulnerable to starvation during prolonged periods of severe weather or prey shortages.

Where To See Barn Owls Across Lancashire

Barn Owls can be found across parts of Lancashire wherever there is suitable hunting habitat, particularly areas of rough grassland, field margins and quiet farmland. Sightings are most likely at dusk or dawn, especially on calm, dry evenings.

Well-known local sites where Barn Owls are occasionally seen include **Brockholes Nature Reserve, Lunt Meadows, and Martin Mere**, as well as quieter stretches of the **Lancaster Canal. RSPB Leighton Moss** can also be productive, particularly around the reserve edges and surrounding farmland.

Outside of reserves, Barn Owls are often spotted along quiet rural lanes, roadside verges and canal banks, where they hunt low over grassland. Watching from a distance and avoiding disturbance is essential, especially during the breeding season.

Lunt Meadows



These three superb images capture a Barn Owl hunting low over the grassland at Lunt Meadows, taken recently by **club member Alex Charnock**.

Photographed in beautiful golden light, they show the owl quartering the fields with that characteristic buoyant flight, wings held in a shallow V as it listens intently for prey beneath the grass. The soft, blurred backgrounds and foreground grasses really emphasise the owl's grace and precision, giving a strong sense of movement and intent.

Lunt Meadows provides excellent habitat for Barn Owls, with its mix of rough grassland, wet features and open farmland supporting healthy small-mammal populations. These striking images are a great reminder of the value of well-managed wetland landscapes—and of the quality of photography being produced by our members.

Common and Regular Winter Sightings

Across East Lancashire and around Burnley, Clitheroe, and Alkincoats Nature Reserve, birders are reporting lots of the expected winter regulars such as:

- Canada Goose, Pink-footed Goose
- Tufted Duck, Goldeneye
- Goosander
- Lapwing, Snipe
- Fieldfare and Redwing
- Buzzard and kestrel
- Woodcock
- Little Owl and Tawny Owl
- Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker
- Blackbird, Robin, Dunnock and various tits (blue, great, coal)
- Raven and magpie
- Ring-necked Parakeet seen in a couple of locations (uncommon but not unheard of in towns)

Notable or Less Common Sightings This January

Among the less common sightings this January, a Scaup (1st-winter male) was recorded at **Spade Mill Reservoirs**, while careful scrutiny of winter gull flocks produced records of Caspian Gull and Yellow-legged Gull, both of particular interest to those scanning mixed gull gatherings. A Ring-necked Parakeet continued to be seen around the **Towneley Holmes and Woodgrove Road areas of Burnley**.

January has also produced several notable rarities and specials across Lancashire, with one standout species attracting attention at multiple sites. An American Wigeon has been the clear highlight of the month, with a drake reported at the **River Ribble around Howick Cross Lane, as well as at WWT Martin Mere Wetland Centre**. Further sightings came from **RSPB Marshside and Crossens Inner Marsh**, including reports of a first-winter drake. Additional records were logged at **Banks Marsh**, where the bird was seen associating with large flocks of Eurasian Wigeon, and a further January sighting was also recorded at **Myerscough Quarry**. Other rarities reported to birding news services this month include Smew, Ring-necked Duck and Tundra Bean Goose, underlining the potential for high-quality finds even in mid-winter. Perhaps the most exceptional record was an Great-tailed Grackle, seen around **Speke Hall** and the surrounding area — an American species that represents an extreme rarity in Britain. While not all of these records are yet fully documented in local club reports, their appearance in wider Lancashire sightings lists highlights how winter birding can still deliver remarkable surprises, particularly at wetlands, estuaries and floodplain sites holding large concentrations of wildfowl.

Garden Bird Watch

Thank you to everyone who took part in the Garden Birdwatch. It was great to see so many members getting involved and contributing their sightings. We have now collected all the numbers and these are currently being sorted and analysed. Once this process is complete, we will be pleased to share our findings.



Bird Food

A huge thank you to everyone who has been buying the club bird food. Your continued support really does make a difference, helping to strengthen club funds and enabling us to do more as a club for the benefit of all our members. Whether it's a bag of seed or a pack of fat balls, every single purchase counts and is genuinely appreciated.

Raffle & Prizes

Once again, a huge thank you to everyone who has donated raffle prizes. Your kindness and generosity really do make a difference to the club, and it is very much appreciated. If we ever find ourselves with more prizes than we need in a particular month, the extras will be carefully saved and used at a future meeting.

Bird Puzzle Answers

- Starling
- Sparrowhawk
- Chaffinch
- Greater Spotted Woodpecker
- Woodpecker
- Jay
- Mallard
- Kittiwake
- Wren
- Lapwing

Until the next call or highlight of the season, we hope to see you out in the field or at our next meeting.



GROUP

