

Blue tits



The colourful and acrobatic blue tit is one of our most common and best loved garden birds, and can be seen all year round. They are quite small birds, only 4½ inches long, and both males and females have blue and white heads with prominent blue-black eye stripes, a greyish-blue and green back and lemon-yellow underparts. Young blue tits are duller in appearance than the adults and have pale yellow rather than white cheeks. The only bird that you could possibly confuse it with is the coal tit but this is not so brightly coloured and has a distinct white patch on the back of its head.

During April and May blue tits search for places to build their nests. These include holes in trees, crevices in walls and, quite often, wooden nest boxes which have been specially provided for them. The male and female blue tits work together to construct the nest from grass, moss, leaves and animal hair, lined with hair and feathers. If you have a nest box and would like to attract blue tits to occupy it, you should place some of these materials in your garden.

Each year female blue tits lay a single clutch of up to fifteen eggs, which are white with reddish-brown spots. This is one of the largest clutches produced by a British bird, with a total weight of up to one and a half times the weight of the female. The large family which hatches from the eggs keeps both parents extremely busy as they search for caterpillars and other insects to feed their hungry young, sometimes making as many as a thousand feeding trips in a day.

A string of peanuts and a feeder filled with seeds hung close to the house will attract blue tits and allow you to watch their acrobatics. This source of nourishment can be important in winter months when there is little natural food to find. If you see four or five blue tits at your garden feeder or bird table at any one time, you may well be feeding more than twenty. Bird ringers have found that many dozens of blue tits may pass through a garden in a single day.

However it is better not to feed the birds during the nesting season as the young will benefit from natural foods, and you will not reap the benefit of their collecting insect pests from your garden.