

## Dukeries Eco Watch – Spring 2026

### **Let's twitter about birds!**

Spring is nesting season and one of the joys of Warsop life is enjoying a stroll around The Carrs, feeding the birds and watching the antics of young cygnets and ducklings as they go about their day on the Mill Dam.

Feeding garden birds at home is fun, too, and these days, this simple pleasure is becoming a vital tool in nature conservation. Much as we love our birds, their numbers have been falling significantly, down by roughly 73 million birds over the past 50 years (Defra). Farmland birds have been hit hardest - Turtle Doves, Tree Sparrows, Lapwings – declining by over 60% since 1970, along with sharp declines in woodland and seabirds. With 70 species now on the UK Red List for highest conservation concern, our birds need all the help we can give!



Photo credit: RSPB: l-r Turtle Dove, Tree Sparrow, Lapwing

### **Why are bird numbers falling?**

As is usually the case, human activity:

- Intensive farming and development leads to fewer nesting and breeding sites.
- Chemical use against “pests” can affect whole ecosystems and destroy natural food chains.
- Climate change is bringing weather extremes that are harder for wildlife to survive, and seasons are drifting - flowers are blooming earlier, out of sync with the insects that depend on them for food.
- Diseases are killing many birds, often spread by us! Avian trichomoniasis has contributed to the decline in many garden species, often spread by contaminated feeders, and bird flu risk in the UK is now high for seabirds and poultry: scientific studies show human commercial activity, mainly poultry-related, is one of the leading drivers of bird flu spreading and mutating into more deadly strains.

## What can we do to help our wild birds?

### 1 Feed birds the right food

The best way to help our birds is by creating garden habitats that provide food and shelter naturally, with trees, bushes and plants producing seeds, berries, shelter – a quick Google search lists many plants that help feed UK birds: ivy, hawthorn, rowan, holly, cotoneaster, sunflowers, teasel, pyracantha, guelder rose, etc. Leave some areas untouched, with leaf and log piles to provide shelter for insects, an important bird food source. Create a pond; dig a patch of ground for robins. Garden ecosystems provide food naturally, avoiding the spread of diseases that can happen when birds congregate at feeders.

Wild birds need high energy food, especially through winter. Please do not feed them bread, which is “junk food” – it fills their tummies but with no nutritional value, leading to malnutrition and dangerous health conditions like Angel Wing Syndrome, deformed wings that leave them unable to fly.

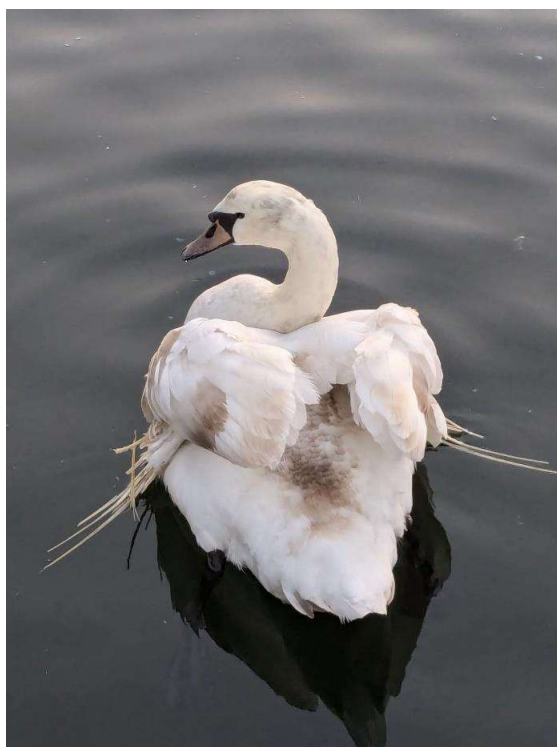


Photo credit: Angel Wing Syndrome, Barnegat Bay Island NJ

Bread in the Mill Dam also leads to pollution, algae growth and attracts pests.

Lots of info on the RSPB website on best food for wild birds and how to feed them, but in general our wild birds benefit from mixed seeds and sunflower hearts, peanuts

(unsalted and aflatoxin-free, in feeders not loose), suet pellets, mealworm, fruit, uncooked oats.



Photo credit: RSPB

## **2 Avoid spread of disease: keep feeding stations and bird baths clean**

- Opt for easy clean feeders - congregating birds are high risk areas for spreading disease, so regular cleaning is essential, ideally at least once a month. Wash feeders and bird baths with animal-safe disinfectant and warm water.
- If food is taking too long to be eaten, put less food out to avoid the risk of it going stale or mouldy.
- Having more than one feeder in different parts of the garden reduces overcrowding and the spread of infection.
- Move your feeders and feeding stations regularly to prevent buildup of droppings/waste which can cause disease and attract unwanted visitors.
- When handling feeders, wear gloves or thoroughly clean your hands afterwards.

## **3 Please do not litter!**

Ring pulls, plastic packaging, deflated balloons, etc, are lethal to wildlife. If fishing in the Mill Dam, please take all hooks, lines and rubbish home. Too many birds become entangled, risking life and limbs for birds and rescuers!



Photo credit: Warsop Wildlife Rescue Team

In general, please protect active nests from strimming/trimming. Keep cats indoors, especially during the nesting season. Avoid chemical use.

### **Should I worry about Bird Flu in garden birds or catching it myself?**

RSPB confirms bird flu in garden birds is rare and the risk of the public contracting bird flu in the UK is very low; few strains can pass from bird to human and then only through direct contact with infected birds, their saliva or droppings. Public health advice (Gov.UK) is to avoid touching dead or visibly sick wild birds; report them to Defra online or call their helpline 03459 33 55 77.

Although we sometimes forget, we, too, are part of nature and everything we do affects the ecosystems around us. It has never been more important for us to learn how to reduce our impact and protect our wildlife.

Happy Easter!