

Winter has but a few months left and although it has been mild, I suspect there is still chance that the persistent South Westerly winds will change and bring a colder snap from the North or North East before Spring is here.

The colder winter weather brings certain benefits from a wildlife point of view. My last article mentioned the arrival of Siskins and Lesser Redpolls and as the winter has progressed it has been the Lesser Redpolls that have really grabbed my attention. Siskins have been visiting some gardens but they have so far missed me completely. Goldfinches have always been the most numerous bird to visit my feeders but this winter I have, on occasions, had up to 7 Lesser Redpolls arrive in a small flock consisting of mainly females.

So what is a Lesser Redpoll? It is actually a small finch. Smaller than a sparrow and Goldfinch. They have small yellowish beaks. They arrive here in winter from colder climates and often breed here in early spring. The Females are brown, buff /white striped and very sparrow like. The males are Brown, black, white striped birds with a cap that ranges from chestnut brown to cherry red. During the breeding season the mature males chest may have a spray of cherry / maroon red. They also have a distinct black face and beard.

After doing some further research I now understand that they have larger relatives called Redpolls that are rare in this country. They don't normally breed here so I believe that the birds that I have been seeing locally are actually Lesser Redpoll.

Unfortunately / fortunately I have to report a few garden bird losses from our neighbourhood Sparrowhawks. I love birds of prey but it is never nice to see them make a meal of your feeding birds. It is brutal as nature can often be. I like to think that with my continuous bird feeding I have helped to raise many dozens of Blue tits, Goldfinches etc so if I lose a few to birds of prey then I guess nature benefits in a positive way.

For me, Sunflower hearts with 10% Robin mix have been consumed the most. I did try some Niger seed as this is a natural food for Lesser Redpolls and Goldfinches but they were not impressed. I hope that you get to see many birds in your gardens. If not then you may at least enjoy my photos below. I will also post this article on the Stisted Village and Stisted Wildlife facebook pages along with the photos and the benefit of a few videos too. Happy bird watching.

Picture one and three are mature males,

Picture two is female

Graham Holloway CANS wildlife representative.

