

Coalfield Environment Initiative



Garden Birds Viewing Project



Garden birds are amongst some of the most visible wildlife visitors to our gardens, but sadly the numbers of some garden birds are declining. Providing food and shelter is one way that we can help birds when they most need it.

Feeding birds in the garden is a popular activity - over a half of adults in the UK feed birds in their garden. People enjoy seeing wild birds at close quarters and it is an easy way to start teaching children about wildlife.

The wildlife of the East Ayrshire coalfield is special. At its heart is a 263 km² Special Protection Area (SPA), which has been designated under the European Union Birds Directive. The SPA supports breeding populations of some of the UK's rarest birds. Unfortunately, these birds can be difficult to see and as a result it can be difficult for young people to appreciate their significance. The great thing about birds, however, is that garden birds are just as fascinating as the rare birds of the SPA.

Project Outline

This innovative project will establish garden birds viewing facilities at a primary school within the Cumnock and Doon Valley area of East Ayrshire. Using innovative technology, any movement within the nestboxes will be digitally recorded. One of the classes will be asked to take responsibility for filling the feeders and recording activity at the nest boxes and the bird table. Over the months a video diary will be created, which will then be displayed to the public via the mobile viewing facility.



Nestcams

At the core of the project would be nest boxes with cameras concealed within the roof ("*nestcams*"). Each nestcam will be attached to a computer viewing station within the school, where a software program will be used to digitally record any movement within the box. The computer will also act as a console to view images from each nestcam simultaneously.



Feeding stations

To encourage birds into the school in months prior to nesting and throughout the duration of the project, a bird table will be erected. Children will take on the responsibility for providing food and water for the birds on a daily basis.

Public viewing area

An important aspect of this project is to make the results accessible to everyone within the local community. A mobile viewing station will show footage recorded from the primary school, whilst interpretative material will provide information on the project, garden birds, and on some of the rarer birds that are present in the area. The mobile viewing station will visit libraries within the area, where it will remain for two weeks at a time.

Project Objectives

The project aims to:

- Show young people the value in caring for and protecting garden birds
- Build an awareness of the conservation issues facing not only the areas rarest wildlife but that of “common” garden birds too
- Provide an educational resource for young people
- Illustrate the wildlife value of the East Ayrshire Coalfields area

Project Timescales

Garden birds will begin laying eggs from March onwards. The nestcams should be in place well before this, and the feeding station should be in place as soon possible to encourage birds to visit the school. The mobile viewing station will begin touring local libraries in June once sufficient footage has been recorded.