# Bird lovers wanted

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Is feeding the birds in your garden helping or harming them? New research aims to find out.

Many thousands of nature-lovers around the country put food out for garden birds to help them survive through cold winters and the rigours of the breeding season. In recent years, popular media and bird charities have encouraged people to feed birds year round.

But a team in the University's Centre for Ornithology has teamed up with CJ Wildbird Foods Ltd and the British Trust for Ornithology to investigate whether these enduring feeding patterns and long-held beliefs are actually supported by scientific facts.

'Up to three-quarters of UK households currently feed birds at some point in the year, with the idea that you can increase their survival, particularly in the winter, and their breeding performance,' explains the Centre's Dr Jim Reynolds. 'The problem is we don't have any hard and fast data to say whether that is true.'

To investigate the impact of supplementary feeding on birds, Dr Reynolds and his team are providing food for blue tits and great tits and their chicks, and measuring how it influences adult health and the number, size and survival of chicks they produce each spring. They have also created a survey asking people about their bird feeding habits, which was promoted through the BBC Midlands Today Springwatch programme and website.

Jim says: 'Our research so far suggests that as well as advancing laying, bird feeding has caused a reduction in the number of eggs laid and chicks hatched. But we need more research to determine if that is the case and if so, why.

'We absolutely don't want anyone to stop feeding their garden birds. Instead, our research aims to help people feed garden birds the right type of food at the right time of year.'

If you feed the birds in your garden and would like to support the Centre's research, please click **here (http://www.biosciences.bham.ac.uk/birdfeeding/)** to complete the survey online or download a copy to print off and return.



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