



Blue Tit

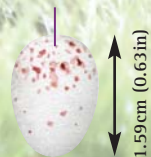
Parus caeruleus

A superb acrobat, the hyperactive Blue Tit rarely keeps still for long. It flits through foliage, hanging upside-down to investigate the under-sides of leaves, hopping along twigs or clinging to tree trunks in a seemingly never-ending quest for insect prey. Weighing about the same as a pound coin, this charismatic species is a frequent visitor to bird tables, artificial nest boxes and nut bags, much to the delight of garden-owners everywhere.

Go to virtually any leafy park or suburb in Britain and Ireland, and it won't be long before you see the Blue Tit as it thrives in most parks and gardens, as well as woods, scrub and hedgerows, even visiting the balconies of flats in city centres.

Blue Tits gather in groups for protection as a communal lifestyle offers many rewards. Being part of a team means they are more likely to locate the best food supplies and have more eyes on the lookout for danger. However, Blue Tits produce large broods, so predators have no long-term effect on their numbers.

Eggs are white with reddish-brown flecks



1.59 cm (0.63 in)

Bluish green upperparts

Tiny bill

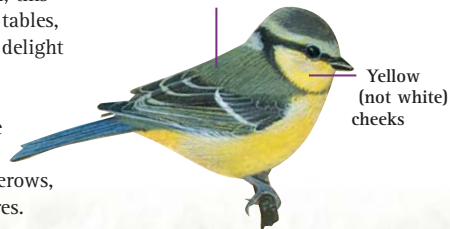
Neat black 'bib' joining blue-black collar

Lemon-yellow underparts, often with thin black central stripe



Flies fast on whirring wings

Juvenile (May–August) has duller plumage with yellowish green tinge; no stripe down belly



Yellow (not white) cheeks

Bright blue crown

White face and cheeks with black markings

Birder's Tip



In winter, woodlands can seem quiet because smaller birds tend to group together in feeding flocks; Blue Tits usually mix with other tit species. Goldcrests, Nuthatches and Treecreepers may join in as well.

KEY FACTS



Length: 11.5cm (4.5in)

Wingspan: 17–20cm (6.75–8in)

Weight: 9.5–12.5g (0.3–0.4oz)

Food & feeding: Insects, such as caterpillars and spiders; also seeds, fruits, nectar and pollen outside breeding season; peanuts are bird-table favourite; also other bird-table scraps

Voice: High-pitched, trilling song of repeated *tsee, tsu* and *hu* notes; most common is thin, repeated *tsee-tsee-tsee* contact call; also more harsh *tsee-tsee-tsee tsit* in late winter and spring; when alarmed or excited – rapid, forceful *churr-rr-rr*

Nest: Base of moss and grass containing neat cup lined with wool, hair, bark fragments or feathers; usually inside tree hole or nest box but often more unusual sites such as wall cavities

Eggs: Mostly 6 to 16, rarely up to 18 or as few as 2

Incubation: 13–16 days, by female

Fledging: 13–16 days, by female

Broods: Usually 1, sometimes 2

Breeding season: March–June

Maturity: 1 year

When present: All year

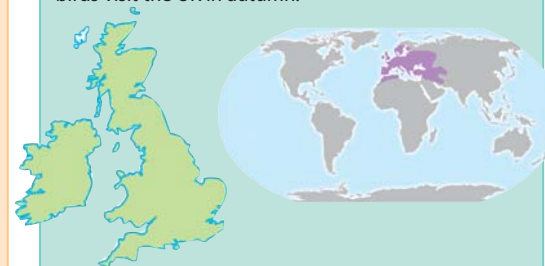
Caterpillars are the main food for hungry chicks, and they may eat 10,000 of the grubs in just 2–3 weeks.



Research has given us an insight into how female Blue Tits choose their partners. Their azure-coloured crown reflects ultraviolet light, thus appearing brighter to other members of the species. During laboratory trials, females always preferred males with the shiniest crown; this is why, in courtship displays, males push their heads forward and erect their neck feathers.

DISTRIBUTION

Movements: Resident throughout Britain and Ireland, apart from a few Scottish islands; some continental birds visit the UK in autumn.



Population: Very common, with an estimated 3.5 million British and 1.1 million Irish breeding pairs.