

BIODIVERSITY on your Farm

Species Profile # 33

The National Biodiversity Data Centre has set a challenge for farmers to record some of the amazing biodiversity found on your farm during the year. We have 40 species for you to record.

Are you up for the challenge?

Species: Common Bullfinch

Scientific Name: *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Irish name: Corcrán coille

Group

Belongs to the Finch (*Fringillidae*) bird family.

1 of 457 resident and regularly-breeding bird species in Ireland.

How common on farms

Biodiversity surveys were carried out across 40 farms within the National Biodiversity Data Centre's 'Protecting Farmland Pollinators' EIP project (<https://biodiversityireland.ie/projects/protecting-farmland-pollinators/>). The 40 farms were chosen to reflect farms of differing types and intensity levels. The Common Bullfinch was present on some of the 40 farms.



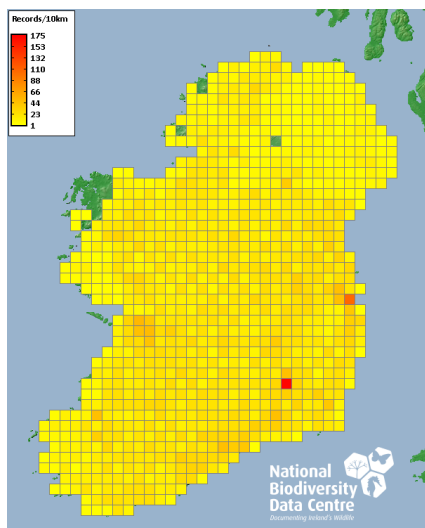
Bullfinch. Note: Bright crimson breast, glossy black cap, grey back (male).

Identification Tips

- Around 15cm in length, appearing bigger than a House sparrow, with a thick neck.
- Male has a bright crimson breast, glossy black head and grey back.
- Female has the same pattern, but in subdued brown colours.
- Can be difficult to see, but if disturbed the white rump flash can be a good identification feature.
- As is the distinctive call, that can sound like a mournful, nasal 'pheeew'.

Distribution

Common and widespread.



Source: The Common Bullfinch records as viewed on Biodiversity Maps, 2023.

Biodiversity Tip No. 33

Plant pollinator-friendly native trees on the farm.

They're great for pollinators and other wildlife.



Photo: Ruth Wilson

Conservation Status

Red Lists are an internationally recognised methodology for assessing conservation status. An [Irish Birds of Conservation Concern \(IBoCC\) List](#) was published for 2020 to 2026. It found that the Common Bullfinch was Green listed, meaning they are a breeding bird not of Red or Amber conservation concern. It was noted that Bullfinch had increased their breeding population (2021).

Management Tips

On the farm:

- Retain or create native hedgerows and thickets, include Rowan, Elder, Guelder Rose and Honeysuckle.
- Ensure there are lots of berries and fruits on the farm hedgerows in the winter.
- Cut the farm hedgerows on a 3 year rotational cut, this will ensure hedgerows are at different stages on the farm and at least two thirds will have winter berries and fruit.
- Let some hedgerows grow tall and wide, with gentle side trimming only.
- Cut hedgerows as late as possible, after November to January.
- Retain or create small woodland areas with good understory, include natives species, that blossom and have fruit and berries, e.g. Oak, Cherry and Hawthorn.
- Leave some areas of brambles, docks and nettles, they love their fruits and small black seeds.

In the farm garden:

- Plant berry-laden bushes, such as Guelder Rose and Honeysuckle.

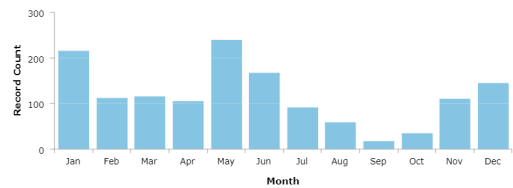


Guelder Rose.
A favourite fruit
of the Bullfinch.

When?

A resident species, additional birds arrive from the Continent in the winter.

Records per month across all datasets



National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland, Common Bullfinch, *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* image, accessed October 2023.

[Common Bullfinch \(*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*\) - Detail - Biodiversity Maps](#)
(biodiversityireland.ie)

Where on the farm?

They can be found in areas with good thickets of shrub, old orchards or mature hedge cover, preferring untrimmed hedgerows, gardens, parks, churchyards.

Value

- An enigmatic species, they have a shy and retiring nature and tend to prefer staying hidden in the bushes.



Female Bullfinch: similar pattern to the male, but their colour is a muted greyish-buff, they retain the black cap.

Photo: Pixabay

Further Info

Bullfinches can be difficult to see, but the white rump flash as they dart for cover after being disturbed is a good identification feature, as well as its mournful, slightly nasal 'pheeew' call.

Bullfinch feed mainly on buds of native trees and shrubs (Oak, Cherry, Hawthorn, Guelder Rose) as well as seeds and berries.

Late in winter, when seeds and fruit may be in short supply, their habit of feeding on spring blossom buds has brought them a bad reputation in fruit-growing areas. Research has shown that the removal of some cover around the orchard is effective in reducing the number of birds, as opposed to trapping under license, which happened in some parts, in the past.

A pair of Bullfinch nest solitarily, but they show no obvious territorial or other conspicuous behaviour.

The female builds the nest usually 1 to 2m off the ground in bushes or trees (Bramble, Hawthorn or Blackthorn), often on sheltered branches. The nest is a loose structure of fine twigs, moss and lichen with a neat inner cup of roots and hair. They lay from 4 to 5 eggs and feed insects to their young.

Similar species

A very distinctive bird. The male Chaffinch has a pinkish breast and lacks the black cap and white rump. The Brambling has a white rump, but their colouring is very different to that of the Bullfinch.

Need some help with identification?

Just drop us a line, we'll be happy to help:
pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie

Useful Links

Birdwatch Ireland have information here:

[*Bullfinch - BirdWatch Ireland*](#)

Try out our free 'Farmland bird' learning platform.

[*Ireland's farmland birds \(biodiversityireland.ie\)*](#)

Listen to the distinctive call of the Bullfinch here:

[*XC25564 Eurasian Bullfinch \(Pyrrhula pyrrhula\) :: xeno-canto*](#)

Record here

Your records will help us build a picture of farmland biodiversity in Ireland. If you're happy with your identification, you can submit your record.

- On the National Biodiversity Data Centre website:

<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/record/biodiversity-on-your-farm#7/53.455/-8.016>

Affected by a change in climate?

It is not known how climate change will affect the Bullfinch.

But a change in the seasonal flowering and fruiting timings may affect their food supply and the insect diet that their young rely on.



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta
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