

**Thought for the Week Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan 2024 BBC Radio Wales**  
**Dr Heather Payne, Consultant Paediatrician**

**Behnaz link:** ...time now for Thought for the Week. And today I'm joined in studio by Dr Heather Payne, Consultant Paediatrician. And, Heather, I hear you're in a bit of a flap?!

**Heather:** Well, Behnaz...Do you know your greenfinch from your dunnock, your titw tomos from your aderyn du? No, me neither- but Ive signed up to the Royal Society for Protection of Birds – the RSPB - Big Garden Birdwatch this coming weekend, 26-28<sup>th</sup> January. I've downloaded from their website the free illustrated guide that explains what to do, with colour pictures of the birds I'm likely to spot when I sit at the window for an hour peering through my binoculars and look out over my back yard. This yearly count has allowed the RSPB to monitor numbers of our feathered friends over decades- and it's a sobering fact that our housemartins, starlings, sparrows and many more, are in decline across Wales and the UK, as a marker of biodiversity loss. Like us, they need places to live and things to eat- nests and bugs in their case, but these are at risk from pollution and insecticides. How tragic it would be if our transport or food choices were to silence the dawn chorus audible even over city traffic, or cause us to lose the friendly robin that adopts our garden and becomes a regular visitor.

Migrating, gathering, homing, nesting, hatching, flying- birds do so many remarkable things it's not surprising that they appear at some very significant times in the Bible, with active roles in stories- of people being fed by ravens, or quails, renewing their strength to rise up like eagles, hens gathering their chicks, the cock that crowed. Doves come up repeatedly - the one that returned to the Ark with an olive branch in its beak that told Noah the floods were subsiding; those signifying Abraham's trust in God's promise; Mary and Joseph's thanksgiving gift for the baby Jesus when they first took him to the temple; and the dove that settled on the man Jesus at his baptism in the river Jordan. These gentle birds always seem to signify peace and reconciliation between God and the world. Or as the poet Emily Dickinson so beautifully put it

*'Hope is the thing with feathers That perches in the soul...'*

So on Sunday after church I shall spend an hour hoping to see some avian guests landing to peck at my mealworm suet cakes. As I tally them up, each one will remind me to spread peace by living bird friendly day to day. And although I won't recognise all the ones I see, I'll just wing it.