

TWITTER

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Ringings: By permission of NWT
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Treswell Wood - Information To Tell Every Ringer.

Treswell Wood is generally blessed with finer weather than many of the surrounding places. Even when the weather is poor, there are usually sheltered corners of the wood where ringing can be done. This ten week period has proved exceptionally difficult, with all the slack time being needed. Two consecutive weekends were very windy making standard site mist netting impossible. The next, good, weekend was followed by a weekend with rain until well after starting time - too late for standard nets. The following weekend we only just managed the 5 hours before furling the nets and dismantling them in thick snow. The Saturday night forecast in the first weekend of December was for heavy rain on Sunday, and at the Bleasby reveille time it was raining hard. Naturally it was fine at Treswell and that was another week without a five-hour visit. That left four weekends and four sites to go. Fortunately the wintry weather held off long enough for a final standard visit on 29th December, completing the year's cycle of constant effort visits with 2 days to spare.

Comparisons of the overall totals for 1995 (Twitter 1995/5) and 1996 (page 7) are interesting. There are major declines in some species and a few apparent increases, some spectacular, in others. However, all the increases have been a result of additional captures at the feeders and may be a sign of the difficulty of the 1996 breeding season rather than the abundance of birds! In the notes below the first figure in parenthesis refers to 1995 and the second to 1996. Numbers or percentages are given according to which may be more appropriate.

The high increases were for Great Spotted Woodpecker (9 → 22), Chaffinch (73 → 124), Greenfinch (6 → 140) and Yellowhammer (2 → 87). The bulk of the feeder captures for these species were in the breeding season. Because birds were coming to the feeders in good numbers, we kept them stocked far longer than usual - but was it shortage of 'natural' food that forced the birds to use them? Blue Tits and Great Tits kept more or less the same overall total but their major drops in nestlings ringed (491 → 198 and 108 → 62 respectively) and sight records were offset by additional captures at the feeders throughout the winter and spring. Big declines were registered in the warblers. For our three most numerous - Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler - the decline was mainly attributable to lack of juvenile captures. Robin and Long-tailed Tit showed the same type of decline, whereas Wren, Dunnock (both down 30%) and Willow Tit (down 50%) had equal declines in both adult and juvenile captures. Goldcrest have also dropped (97 → 18) with very few captures in the 1995/96 winter, the bulk of the 1995 captures being in the 1994/95 winter. Overall a major decline in numbers which is very much in line with national results and provisional CBC results so far.

The two paragraphs above were written before the 1997 R&M conference, ready for a rapid publication of Twitter in the early New Year, and were based on our normal summary tables on pages 7 & 8. Comparison with the 1995 equivalents in Twitter No. 5 shows the major changes already mentioned, but the drop in standard site captures in the late summer and autumn is spectacular. During the R&M conference, the CES session was shown the results of analysing the first 70 returns for 1996. For almost every species, the ratio of juveniles to adults caught was dramatically down, in line with our own findings.

Readers will remember that Treswell Wood was the first site to establish that CES figures **do** reflect the abundance of juveniles in the population (Ringing & Migration, Vol 12, Part 3, December 1991). We wondered, therefore, whether autumn standard site captures would continue the trend - if there were few juveniles in the countryside generally, there should be few new juveniles for us to recruit through the autumn. We looked at the summaries from August onwards and this is what we found:-

	Aug -Oct		Oct - Dec	
	1995	1996	1995	1996
New '3'	129	54	20	28
Retrap '3'	45	12	18	11
Total '3' captures	174	66	38	39

The drop of 62% in the first 10 weeks, contrasting with similar figures in the final period, seem to support the theory. We have also looked at the total captures of '3's at CES sites for the whole year. Almost all the species looked at show decreases, though the percentages vary:-

All '3's	1995	1996	1996 as % of 1995
Wren	46	21	46%
Dunnock	20	12	60%
Robin	52	23	44%
Blackbird	14	14	100%
Song Thrush	3	2	-
Blackcap	27	7	26%
Chiffchaff	9	2	22%
Goldcrest	36	4	11%
Long-tailed Tit	25	1	4%
Marsh Tit	16	8	50%
Willow Tit	6	0	-
Coal Tit	8	2	25%
Blue Tit	37	11	30%
Great Tit	10	4	40%
Treecreeper	5	6	120%
Chaffinch	0	2	-
Bullfinch	12	11	92%
All Species	334	134	40%

The overall decrease is 60%, with only Treecreeper and Chaffinch showing small increases (although the numbers are so small that no significance may be attached to them). Before we can say too much we might need to eliminate repeat captures of individuals within the period, so that we would be looking at the number of individuals, not the number of captures within the period. Then, perhaps we should look at Autumn catches for other years to see if low juvenile numbers (or percentages) can be related to poor breeding figures from other sources. There are five years with lower totals than 1996 - but in every one the period 5 catch rose again - this year it fell. More mysteries to unravel! Any offers?

Thoughts from R & M

The emphasis of the 1997 R & M conference was on finding the best ways to use our ringing effort for the advancement of knowledge and understanding needed for sound conservation. The Treswell Wood operation featured in at least three high-profile presentations by BTO staff and was praised (to an embarrassing extent) for the systematic, long-term and dedicated work by all involved! It was a model to be followed and was called an 'IPM Site'. Indeed, **the** IPM site! This is a site in which CES ringing, nest recording and some form of censusing is carried out over a long period of time. The promotion of an IPM Site scheme is not yet formalised, but BTO staff consider that such long-term efforts can give results not obtainable from national surveys (e.g. our Treecreeper year-specific survival rates). We await developments confident in the encouragement given to us at the conference. Perhaps we ought to think of ways to integrate more closely with the CBC team?

At the CES meeting we were shown provisional 1996 results. Most spectacular was the reduction in the ratio of juveniles to adults for all species. Such a poor breeding season is apparently unprecedented. Most exciting was the fact that it had been thoroughly documented (and we had played our part too).

Treswell Wood CBC 1996 - from Margaret Price

In 1995 I estimated 96 pairs of Wrens, the BTO estimate being 91 against their 1994 estimate of 79. This year, I estimate 47 pairs (I have been cautious in arriving at that figure) which reflects the effect of cold spells during the winter and the cold, late spring. The figure also agrees with the shortage of birds experienced by the ringers. I completed the maps more quickly than usual showing there were fewer registrations of our resident species than after a mild winter although Blue Tits were noticeably active in the southern end of the wood. Willow Warblers were again concentrated in the southern half of F, those that were not in F being mostly along the northern edge of the wood.

From David Glue

David has written to thank us for the 1996 nest record cards. Although Chris and Richard have done the paperwork, the nest finding, recording and nestling ringing is very much a joint effort, so his (and the BTO's) thanks are to all of us.

It was a pleasure to be greeted by the Woodcock nest history, while the set of 15 Wren cards is the largest yet for

the year and extremely valuable. ... Backbone of the set were the titmice nest histories, again pointing towards a poor season in general. The four Marsh Tit records provide welcome additions to limited holdings. The cold May tore out the heart of the season with you also though the exceptional total of 65 BT and 29 GT active nests early in season aided by the wealth of natural foods had hinted at so much promise. It is up to us (the BTO) now to put your records to good use. Enjoyable nest finding, box checking and recording over a happy New Year.

Eirlys Gilbert, Ph.D.

Treswell Wood lost one of its oldest and greatest friends in October, with the death of Eirlys Gilbert. She had been elected as a Vice-President of the Notts Wildlife Trust in recognition of her service as Secretary of the Retford Group, and as 'Conservation Queen' of the area. She was the original Secretary of the Treswell Wood Management Committee and was helping to set up the annual Buttermarket event in Retford when she was taken ill, just before she died. As a qualified botanist, she gave yeoman service to the Trust - and we ringers can be specially grateful for her recognition of the value of our work and her support of it. (J M McM)

Treswell Wood Ringing Group

We have submitted our application for recognition as a formal group. José has agreed to be the T-shirt man. When he returns from Portugal he will begin on this serious work. The logo is likely to be a Treecreeper superimposed on an outline of the wood.

Great Tit colour ringing

As soon as spring starts you find an increasing number of Great Tits in Treswell Wood which - surprisingly enough - will carry colour rings on their legs. To be honest, they are not allowed to choose the colours. Instead, the Treswell Wood ringers have been fitting the rings (many thanks for all the helping hands!) and this effort will continue this year. As the year proceeds another well known Treswell Wood phenomenon will reappear: furtive characters, carrying strange apparatus, lurk in the wood, record Great Tits, and look for colour rings (why are they so excited by little coloured rings on bird legs?). This year, however, you have to focus your eyes lower than usual, in case you meet a wandering ghost, since only Ulli will be looking out for her olive-green-and-yellow with black breast-striped friends. If you wish to meet José, you will have to go some thousand miles to the south-west where he will start tracking down Portuguese Corn Buntings in February. Same apparatus, similar colour rings, but much nicer weather.

For the Treswell Wood Great Tits the program will be the same as last year: Locating their territories by recording singing, and therefore territory-defending, males; identifying the individuals by their colour rings; listening for their song repertoires. In April we will conduct some interactive playback experiments with heavy-weight equipment. The data from last season are quite satisfactory, so there need be only a few of these experiments. In case you have not been able to see, or to hear, the system working - this is a short description: It is usually possible to set up an array of 4 microphones in the centre of a male's territory (hoping the owner is not out). This array allows us to monitor the test bird's movements during the experiment. The sound signals are recorded simultaneously on 4 tracks of a tape recorder and time differences in the arrival time of the acoustic signals at the different microphones make it possible to calculate the location of the sound source by cross correlation. One of the advantages of this passive Acoustic Location System is that the test bird is disturbed as little as possible. Playing back some Great Tit song with the help of a portable computer, loudspeaker and amplifier will normally attract the attention of the intended male - and now the real experiment starts.

Depending on what the test bird is singing, we will interact with the Great Tit in a certain mode. We choose a similar song type (ie the motif that the test bird sings) to match the bird's song. One of the variables we are interested in is the number of phrases (number of repeated elements) that a male sings per song when interacting with our 'computer-male'. The whole experiment is driven by the test bird and we change our playback sound output throughout the experiment according to the bird's singing activity. For example, if our intended treatment is to interact with an increasing number of phrases per song, we count the number of phrases the test bird sings in each song and reply immediately with a song that is a certain number of phrases longer than the bird's previous song. Other treatments involve alternating with the test male or overlapping it. 'Alternating' means that we wait until the Great Tit has finished one song before we start broadcasting our next song, whereas 'overlapping' means that we start our next song while the bird is still singing. The test bird is of course free to do the same with us (no arrangements possible...). Increasing the number of phrases in a song and overlapping are possible ways of escalating a song contest. How the males differ in their response to a (simulated) song duel is what we are interested in. Information on the breeding success of a test bird, provided by nest records and recaptures of nestling-ringed birds, adds pieces to the puzzle.

Noteworthy Captures

Species	Ring	Date	Grid
Sparrowhawk	DA20223	20/10/96	R98
Our first recaptured Sparrowhawk since 1994. It was ringed in Windy Ride on 14/1/96			
Great Spotted Woodpecker	RR11846	21/12/96	Q02 Feeder
A young female, ringed in Windy Ride on 10/11/96.			
Great Spotted Woodpecker	XE21661	21/12/96	Q02 Feeder
One of the regulars at the feeders during the 1996 breeding season, indeed this individual has never been caught anywhere but at the feeders. This is its first capture there since May.			
Wren	OY5885	23/12/96	P00 Roosting
Our first Wren found roosting this winter. It was ringed as a nestling in C07 and retrapped in September in P99 a few metres away from its roosting position. It seems as if it is already carving out a territory for itself.			
Dunnock	J522133	8/12/96	G04
Ringed in 1994 in G04 as a breeding bird and not retrapped since 10/7/94. Today it was caught at a pheasant feeder near Piccadilly Circus only 50 metres away.			
Redwing	RX57609	15/12/96	M02
A welcome visitor. Unlike most of the few we catch, it was well away from the edges of the wood. It also provided a challenge on the ageing front. We eventually agreed that it was better to be sure we did not know than unsure that we knew - age code 2!			
Long-tailed Tit	8T5839	15/12/96	M02
A ripe old age for a Long-tailed Tit - ringed on 29/8/92 in J03. It now has a history 11 captures long, always in the northern half of the wood.			
Coal Tit	H229064	15/12/96	Q02 Feeder
Our oldest known Coal Tit, ringed as a 3♂ on 13/10/91 and has since been captured regularly in the north west quarter of the wood. If it lasts the winter (and is recaptured thereafter) it will qualify as reportable on geriatric grounds.			
Coal Tit	J118004	29/12/96	P02
Another ageing Coal Tit - ringed as a nestling in 1993 and retrapped regularly since then. Curiously, although its post fledging captures have all been in the north west quadrant of the wood, it has never been caught at the feeders.			
Coal Tit	K181569	8/12/96	D08
A fine little history building up here. This is a 1995 nestling ringed bird (Box 60, G01) which nested in a dormouse box (F08) this year. Its mate (K463143), which was also trapped at the nest box during the breeding season, was with it in the net today.			
Blue Tit	J522418	23/12/96	L06 Roosting
Ringed as a juvenile in L07 on 16/10/94. This bird has never been retrapped in a mist net although it has been retrapped three times roosting and three times on the nest. All these captures have been within the eastern part of block D.			
Blue Tit	J522436	21/12/96	Q02 Feeder
Like J522448 (below), this bird has been AWOL for two years. Unlike J522448, however, it does know about the feeders - today's and one 1994 capture were there.			
Blue Tit	J522448	8/12/96	D09
Ringed in Bower's Ride on 27/11/94, this bird had not been retrapped until today. This is a long time between captures for Blue Tits, so many of which are caught at the feeders. Does this one know about a different food supply in winter?			
Blue Tit	K181919	23/12/96	N06 Roosting
A 1995 nestling-ringed bird, recaptured only at the feeders (6 times over two winters) and roosting (4 times over two winters). It has always been found roosting in the same box very near Treswell End ride but never mist netted there.			
Blue Tit	K463161	8/12/96	E03 Feeder
This Blue Tit was ringed and retrapped twice at the car park feeders last winter. It has not been captured anywhere else until today when it appeared at a pheasant feeder where we had sited a peanut feeder temporarily.			

Colour ringing of Great Tits in 1997 - Field Instructions

We have revised paperwork for recording colour rings. One sheet contains a list of the next colour combinations to use. As you use these combinations, please write down the bird's ring number on this sheet. When the sheet is nearly full, another will appear with the next batch of combinations to be used. This list also includes details of birds which have combinations which need to be changed for various reasons. Whenever you catch a colour ringed Great Tit, look to see if it is on the wanted list! From now, males will have two single-colour rings on one leg and females will have one two-colour ring on one leg.

On 21/12/96 we captured Great Tit K463306 with no colour ring. Previously it had carried a single light blue ring. This is the first bird which we know has lost its ring. Some birds have carried colour rings for over two years - it will be helpful to check each retrapped Great Tit to ensure it is wearing the right combination. You will find a second document in the ringing kit which lists colour ring combinations of birds, in BTO ring number order. If you find a bird which has lost a ring, do the decent thing and issue a replacement free of charge!

Sexing Wrens

Bird Study Vol 43, Part 3, November 1996 (J J Sweeney & P Tatner) has a paper about sexing Wrens on biometric data. The conclusions are based on Wrens from a site in Renfrewshire and the paper ends by suggesting that the method should be tested in other areas on Wrens of known sex. Their suggestion is using a discriminant function $D = 0.75w + 0.72h - 58.71$ (w = wing length, h = head plus bill length). Positive D values should be male and negative values female.

We can use our data because we do eventually know the sex of a good proportion of our adult birds from previous or subsequent captures. The paper has used data for all age classes combined. We manage to age most of our birds either as first year or older so we should be able to throw considerable light on their question. Use the callipers in the ring box to measure $H+B$ on Wrens if you have the time. If you only sometimes have the time, then birds in breeding condition or retrapped birds are likely to be the most valuable. The paper uses data for about 90 individuals. With our rate of captures we should be in with a chance (77 new and 53 recapture events in 1996). It is a good idea for two people both to measure the same birds sometimes to help develop standardised measurements within the group.

Biometric data - back entry

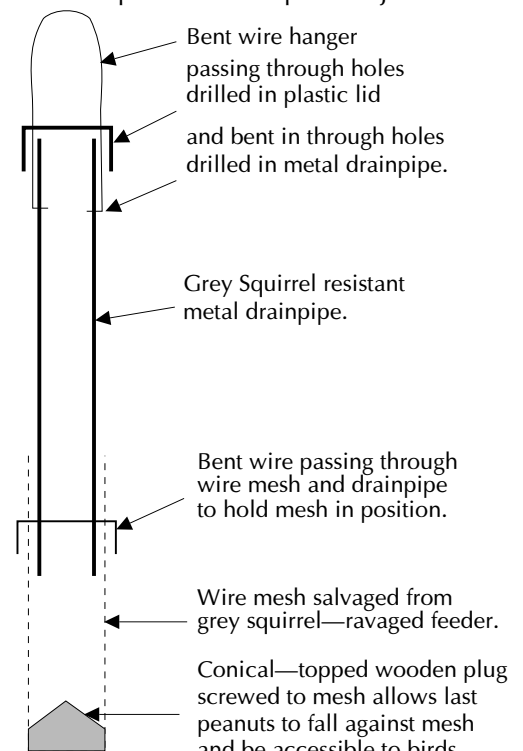
All being well, the BTO will begin accepting data for new birds on disk during 1997. Once the system is working smoothly they will then accept retrap data. After that they plan to accept data from the past. We will naturally submit all our data, but before we do we must have all the biometric data entered. Data prior to 1990 did not have wing/weight/time or initials recorded on computer. Chris intends to write software which will allow anyone to enter these biometric data from the past and we are looking for volunteers to help with the important job of data entry. Training will be given if needed. Ignorance need be no obstacle. Once all the biometrics are entered, our data set will make possible more analyses similar to that which Andy Gosler carried out on Great Tits in relation to presence of Sparrowhawks. In fact, Andy has given us very strong encouragement to proceed with this biometric data entry because our records go back well into the time before Sparrowhawks were present in the area.

The long-life feeders

One problem we have suffered in the past was that the peanut feeders could run out during the week. We suspect that birds unable to feed here later in the week went wider afield and by the end of the week might be feeding, and perhaps wintering, elsewhere. A solution is the high capacity feeder with low feeding area. We now have two of these in place together with two of the ordinary type. They are working well with neither of the two running out between weekends. We have arranged one to have a lower area of mesh exposed which further reduces the rate at which nuts can be removed ensuring that there is a continuous supply (although hardly a fast food outlet!).

Who's who - 1997 edition

Steve has printed the complete histories of all birds captured in the last four years. Make use of it in the field to look up capture histories of birds in the hand and as an aid to confirming your ageing/sexing decisions! (Some Coal Tits are proving difficult, so do not be afraid to look up their histories whilst they are still in your hand.)



Have you read ...?

Recent ornithological journals contain several papers of relevance to our operations in Treswell Wood. John and Chris have copies if you want to see them.

IBIS Vol 138, N3, July 1996

Prey preparation by adult Great Tits feeding nestlings (Barba, Lopez & Gil-Delgado)

Social dominance in Willow Tits (Lahti, Koivula, Orell & Rytkonen)

Effects of population growth on Crested Tit post-fledging settlement (Lens & Wauters)

Marsh Tits use tools to store food (Clayton & Joliffe)

IBIS Vol 138, N4, October 1996

Winter survival & breeding success of dominant & subordinate Willow Tits (Koivula, Orell & Rytkonen)

Food and male's rôle in Treecreeper broods (Kuitanen, Jänthi, Suhonen & Aho)

Surprise as a winter hunting strategy in Sparrowhawks etc. (Creswell)

Variable effects of the hen flea on the breeding success of Great Tits in relation to weather conditions (Dufva & Allander)

Annual Summary - 1996

All records from mist-netting, nestbox and sight record files.

	Ctrl.	New Birds		Pulli	Rt	Retraps		Sight	Recvs.	Other	Total
		Adult	Juvnl			SDR					
Sparrowhawk	.	2	1	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	4
Woodpigeon	.	3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	3
Gt. Spotted Woodpecker	1	.	1	.	20	.	.	.	.	.	22
Wren	.	42	35	47	53	12	.	3	1	.	193
Dunnock	.	21	31	.	76	9	.	1	.	.	138
Robin	.	30	36	.	76	16	.	.	.	.	158
Blackbird	.	38	16	.	36	5	.	.	.	.	95
Song Thrush	.	12	4	2	5	.	.	.	.	.	23
Redwing	.	2	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	3
Whitethroat	.	2	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2
Garden Warbler	.	5	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	6
Blackcap	.	33	13	.	7	3	.	.	.	.	56
Chiffchaff	1	14	2	.	5	3	.	.	.	.	25
Willow Warbler	.	7	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	8
Goldcrest	.	6	3	.	8	1	.	.	.	.	18
Long-tailed Tit	.	16	1	.	48	10	.	.	.	.	75
Marsh Tit	.	3	6	16	71	6	.	1	.	.	103
Willow Tit	.	2	3	.	33	3	.	.	.	.	41
Coal Tit	1	6	15	10	60	13	.	.	.	.	105
Blue Tit	3	63	30	198	524	53	1	4	11	.	887
Great Tit	1	50	22	62	267	90	146	.	4	.	642
Nuthatch	.	4	3	.	7	1	.	.	.	.	15
Treecreeper	1	6	8	.	37	5	.	1	.	.	58
Jay	.	1	1	.	2	.	.	.	.	.	4
Chaffinch	2	70	9	.	40	3	.	.	.	.	124
Greenfinch	.	108	9	.	21	2	.	.	.	.	140
Bullfinch	.	11	18	.	5	3	.	.	.	.	37
Yellowhammer	.	74	.	.	11	2	.	.	.	.	87
Totals	10	631	268	335	1415	240	147	10	16	3072	

Key

Ctrl. Controls to the wood.

Juvnl. Birds aged as 3 or 3J

Other Any other types of record.

Pulli All birds ringed as nestlings and any as 1J

Recvs. Recoveries during mist netting & nestbox visits, includes pulli dying before fledging.

Rt. Retraps, including retraps in nestboxes (breeding and roosting).

SDR Same day retraps

Sight Birds identified in the field by coloured ring combination.

Ten - week Summary - October to December 1996

1996 Interval 5 - Visits 1282 1284 1276 1278 1283 1280 1285

	New Adult	Birds 5	3	Adult	Recaptures 5	3	Total
Sparrowhawk	.	.	.	.	1	.	1
Gt. Spotted Woodpecker	.	.	1	.	.	.	1
Wren	1	.	1	1	.	3	6
Dunnock	.	.	4	3	.	.	7
Robin	.	.	5	4	.	3	12
Blackbird	5	.	4	.	.	.	9
Goldcrest	.	.	3	1	.	1	5
Long-tailed Tit	11	.	.	11	.	.	22
Marsh Tit	.	.	.	2	.	.	2
Willow Tit	.	.	.	2	.	.	2
Coal Tit	.	.	1	3	.	.	4
Blue Tit	.	.	.	3	.	1	4
Great Tit	.	.	.	6	.	.	6
Treecreeper	.	.	2	3	.	1	6
Jay	.	.	1	.	.	1	2
Chaffinch	.	.	1	.	.	.	1
Bullfinch	1	.	5	.	.	1	7
Totals	18	.	28	39	1	11	97

Treswell Wood Standard Site Totals in 10-week Periods

	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Year						
1978	101	131	243	223	131	829
1979	97	115	180	91	123	606
1980	86	102	211	147	170	716
1981	102	110	288	188	177	865
1982	66	113	142	89	110	520
1983	82	140	143	185	128	678
1984	91	114	110	82	106	503
1985	103	88	135	118	88	532
1986	77	104	153	68	141	543
1987	95	112	196	209	124	736
1988	92	143	180	137	119	671
1989	124	137	282	145	103	791
1990	99	145	204	130	175	753
1991	65	57	99	74	127	422
1992	64	64	115	223	159	625
1993	81	70	112	158	126	547
1994	88	109	209	155	157	718
1995	91	124	240	253	104	812
1996	95	121	128	116	97	557
Max	124	145	288	253	177	865
Min	64	57	99	68	88	422
Mean	89	110	177	147	130	654

A Happy New Year to all group members and other readers. Our thanks to all who have put in work again over the year - and we look forward to enjoying your help and your company in 1997.