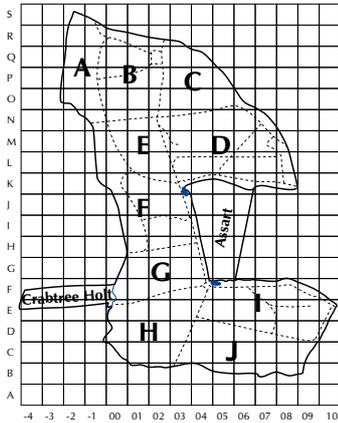


TWITTER

2019/4
Number 124



Treswell Wood - Information To Tell Every Recorder

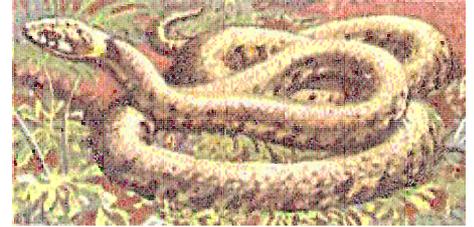
October 2019 Treswell Wood IPM Group
(Integrated Population Monitoring)

Project leaders:

CBC Pat Quinn-Catling

Nest Records Chris du Feu

Ringling John Clark



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The weather remained favourable for ringing throughout most of the last few weeks, although often we found the ground very hard and dry - very difficult for making holes for the mist net poles. As soon as our sequence of standard site visits was completed, the rain began. Nightingale Ride, which had been walkable in strong shoes will now be back to its normal wellington-essential state.

The total number of birds caught in the standard sites was comfortably above average for the time of year. The total was boosted by the arrival of a large flock of, mostly, juvenile birds on one occasion. This is the first such flock we have caught for some time. These roving bands of juveniles in autumn used to be fairly common - on one occasion I recall two such flocks being caught on one day. They seem to be a rarity in recent years. The top three species - Blue Tit, Wren and Robin - have just over 20 records each. Whereas the Robin and Wren captures have been fairly well spread through the time, the Blue Tits were largely caught in the flock. Dunnock numbers - still lower than in former years - have held up well as have those of Blackbirds, Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps.

We continue to make records of other species and we think this time we have a first for the wood. We have anecdotal reports of 'snakes' seen by visitors - these are most likely to have been grass snakes. However, none have been positively identified. There is no doubt about this one. It was an immature grass snake about 20cm long on the green lane at the south edge of the wood. Sadly it was dead - but that did make identification of this normally fast-moving species somewhat simpler. Another species to add to the wood's list and another species record to add to the 18,000 we have already made and submitted to the NWT.

As for all organisations who depend on volunteers, we have sometimes run short of manpower. We have just had a few visits from someone who was keen and had the right aptitude and attitude, only for her to find a job taking her away from the area. The good news is that we have two more visitors in line over the next few weeks. However, if anyone knows someone who always wanted to learn more about birds and to try some ringing, let us know - they will be welcomed.

John McMeeking Memorial Event

The NWT, quite rightly, decided to make a memorial to John. As John had been so very involved with Treswell Wood from the beginning, that would be the place for the memorial. The event was planned for October 6th and family, friends and ringers would be welcomed. It was hoped that the ringers could put on a demonstration particularly for John's family members. Some of these, remarkably, had never visited the wood - John's second home. The weather forecast was dire - continuous rain through the previous night and all morning. The forecast remained the same during the previous day. Remarkably, though, there was a dramatic and sudden change. The overnight rain stopped soon after dawn and the day became bright and mild.

The memorial is a plaque on the gate to the assart and the assart has been dedicated to the memory of John. He did so much for the wood including, in recent years, a great deal in the negotiations for the purchase of the assart and planning of its long-term return to woodland.

Although the day was obviously tinged by the sadness of John's death it was described by one ringer, who had been a trainee under John in the 1970s, as a very happy event. We agree.

The Treswell Wood Conference - February 29th 2020

Preparations for the conference are going ahead. Bookings will be opening soon via the NWT web site - we will inform you as soon as it happens. There should be room at the conference for posters and other displays. If you have any relevant material you would like to display, please let us know. Jo and Andy are organising the natural history book stall - proceeds will go to the group. If you have any natural history books you wish to donate to this, please pass them to Jo or Andy direct or via any of the ringers. The word 'book' is being loosely interpreted so pictures, puzzles or other natural history related things would be welcome.

State of Nature report

The UK State of Nature report, published in early October, paints a somewhat dismal picture of the Country's wildlife. The woodland section (apart from the uncertainty of the effects of Ash dieback) is not quite so gloomy. As you would expect, most observations are similar to our own. In the woodland section (P23), the report notes the decline of species such as Willow Tit and Spotted Flycatcher, but also finds that Nuthatch, Blackcap and Chiffchaff have become more abundant. This reflects the same changes that we have seen in Treswell Wood. Conversely, Marsh Tits are in 'strong decline' nationally whereas the Treswell Wood population appears healthy. On climate change the report shows Great Tits laying their eggs 11 days earlier than in 1968. The Treswell Great Tits have managed 13 days earlier since 1979 which is broadly comparable but, like all other places contributing to the overall figure, subject to its own peculiar local circumstances. Why this reference to the report here in Twitter? The CES ringing and nest recording that we do and submit to the BTO is a part of the input data used for this report. You have all contributed to this important document. Have a look at the summary at www.nbn.org.uk/stateofnature2019 and maybe take time to follow some of the links to dig a little deeper. Think about what we can do to discover what enables the resident Marsh Tits to do so much better than elsewhere in the country.

Frass - results

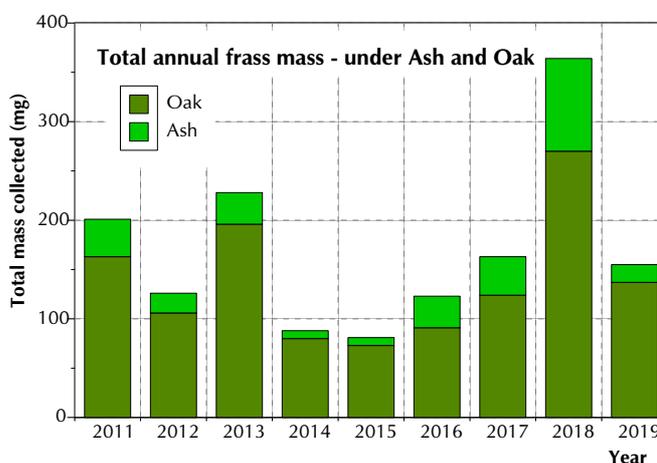
Ken Smith has dealt with this year's frass and sends some comments to us:

Here are the the frass results for 2019. I'm sorry these have taken a while but processing the Hertfordshire samples (trays run by a volunteer since we left the county) have taken an age because there was so much frass. It looks like the Herts. woods are heading into a period of high defoliation again. The last period was 2007-09.

Your results are interesting. Firstly the frass started very early by the end of April - I think related to the warm weather. It then turned cold and the frass was lower until peaking in mid May. We've seen this pattern in Herts. and Sussex this year so I am sure it is real. The net effect was a long period when there was significant frass around.

Second point of interest is that for the trays under oak trees it is only F3 that had significant frass. I wonder whether this is something to do with genetic variation in first leafing date between individual trees. In Herts. this year trees with leaves open in late April when the caterpillars first emerged were heavily defoliated. Adjacent trees with late leaf opening were hardly touched. Presumably when the caterpillars first emerged on these trees there was nothing to eat so they either died or moved on. In Herts. many caterpillars moved on to hornbeam which opens its leaves early but is not normally touched. I have only seen this happen twice now in 30 years.

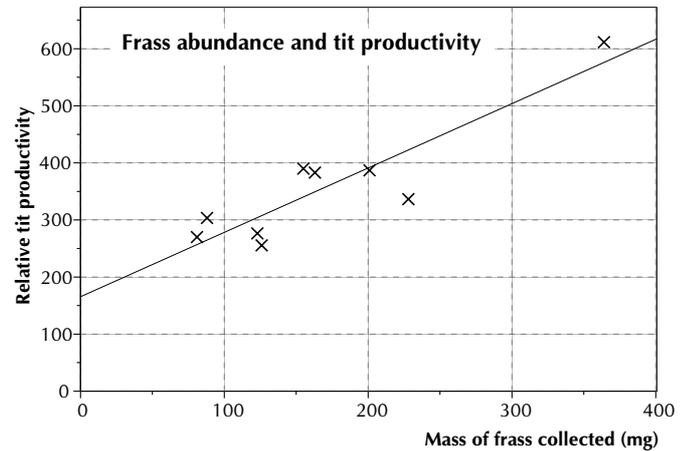
This year, as last, we sited an additional frass trap under ash as far from any oak as we could manage - in fact we found a slightly better spot than we did last year. The result was much the same - frass under the oak-free ash was negligible - only on one occasion was even a minute amount found. This adds further weight to our feeling that the frass we have collected under ash trees in the past is blown from nearby oak. The frass under oak is lower than the real value because wind-blown frass from the oak is not replaced by wind-blown frass from the frass-free ash nearby. The graph illustrates the total amounts of frass collected under ash and oak since we began in 2011. It is clear that there is considerable between-year variation and that oak provides by far the major part of the total (and, as explained, it might well be nearer the truth if all the frass were assigned to oak).



Ken and Linda have a paper in the current issue of Bird Study (May 2019). In this they relate frass not to tit nesting but to Great Spotted Woodpeckers. The paper examines relationships between timing of the caterpillar crop and that of the food demands of nesting woodpeckers. (The predation on tit nestlings will come later, after the caterpillar peak and as the tit broods increase in edible biomass).

In addition to looking at the timing, the paper examines nest productivity in relation to total frass abundance. Ken has encouraged us to do the same with our tit nesting data. Our nine years of frass collection should provide a sufficiently long data set to make a start. Clearly very many things influence tit productivity - not just food availability. Predation varies between years; the timing of caterpillar crop may not synchronise well with the tit nesting; heavy rain at the wrong time can have major impacts in the wood; competition between and within species can reduce food availability. A full analysis will require addressing all these things. But it is worth initially taking a simple approach. Numbers of nesting Great and Blue Tits do seem to interact with one species becoming less numerous as the other increases. Between them these two species comprise most of the wood's tit population

and we have to assume the numbers nesting in boxes reflect the total number nesting in boxes and natural sites together. Because of the interaction between the two tit species, it would be naive to expect that the productivity of either species would rise and fall in response to caterpillar availability alone. Together, though, the productivity of the two species might be related to the caterpillar crop. As a measure of productivity the total number of fledged birds have been combined giving Great Tits a weight of 1.5 times that of a Blue Tit (which is approximately the ratio of the weights of full grown birds). Thus the 'Relative productivity' in the graph equals $BT + 1.5GT$. The graph shows a remarkably close relationship between this productivity figure and the total annual mass of frass which we are using as a proxy measure for caterpillar crop. Yes, well worth deeper probing.



CES Feedback

Treswell Wood was one of three pilot sites (with Theddlethorpe Dunes and Marsworth Reservoir) where the BTO CES scheme was developed. Thanks to the continued efforts of our ringers we have contributed to the CES every year since the formal launch in 1983. Our contribution comes from the standard site visits during April - July but, of course, we continue the standardised system throughout the year. Thanks are due to all who have helped with the visits this year (and in previous years too).

Initial feedback on our data came from the BTO.

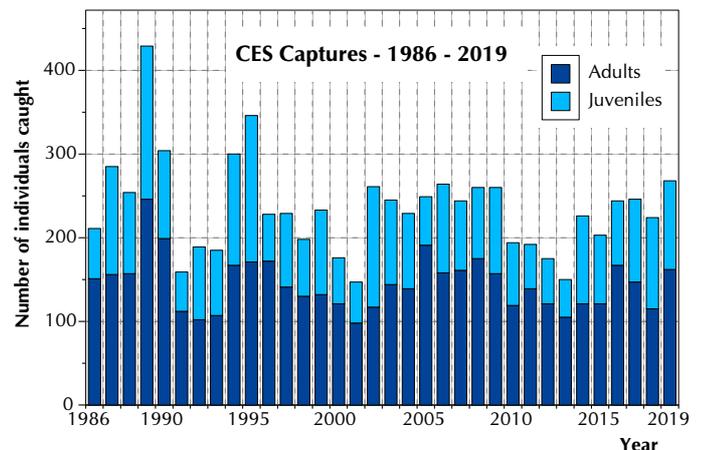
Thank you very much for your CES submission. Nice to see you had a pretty good year, particularly for adults. Must have been a bit of a surprise to see a Tawny Owl in the net.

Anecdotal reports from CES ringers suggest that 2019 has been a mixed year, with some ringers reporting very low numbers of birds and others quite high and some people reported broods affected by the continuous rain after the hot weather. It will be interesting to see what the final totals will be once all the data for the year is in.

Thank you for your continued support for project ringing.

I do not think we have ever produced any analysis of our annual contribution to the BTO CES scheme - so here is our data set running from 1986 to the present. In our first three years - 1983 to 1985 - we made repeated visits to Nightingale Ride rather than using our own rotation of standard sites. It proved far too demanding to visit Nightingale Ride 12 times in the season in addition to visiting the other standard sites. The BTO agreed we could operate a constant effort system based on our system rather than the normal CES operation. Our 1983-1985 data are incorporated in the BTO analyses and act, in effect, as a short-lived CES site but the data are not really compatible with the system we followed thereafter.

In the graph we can easily see two of the features which CES measures - adult and juvenile abundance - the dark and light blue bars respectively. Another important aspect - productivity - has to be inferred from the ratio of the light to dark bars. Perhaps most important are the between year changes in abundance and productivity. These are not quite so easy to infer from the graph and, in any case, the random nature of bird captures on one site can often obscure underlying patterns. This is one strength of the BTO scheme where these small-sample effects are outweighed by the the picture from all sites combined. We will leave it to you to think what the graph tells us.



Noteworthy Encounters

Species	Age/sex	Ring	Date	Grid
Marsh Tit	3	AVC1821	08/09/2019	Q03

This is, so far, the only one of this year's nine nestling-ringed Marsh Tits to be retrapped - this is our third encounter with it since it fledged. We have caught a total of nine other Marsh Tit juveniles so far this year, retrapping all but one of them at least once. Because the first ones were caught while still in very fresh juvenile plumage we

Long-Tailed Tit 2 JTE490 18/08/2019 M00

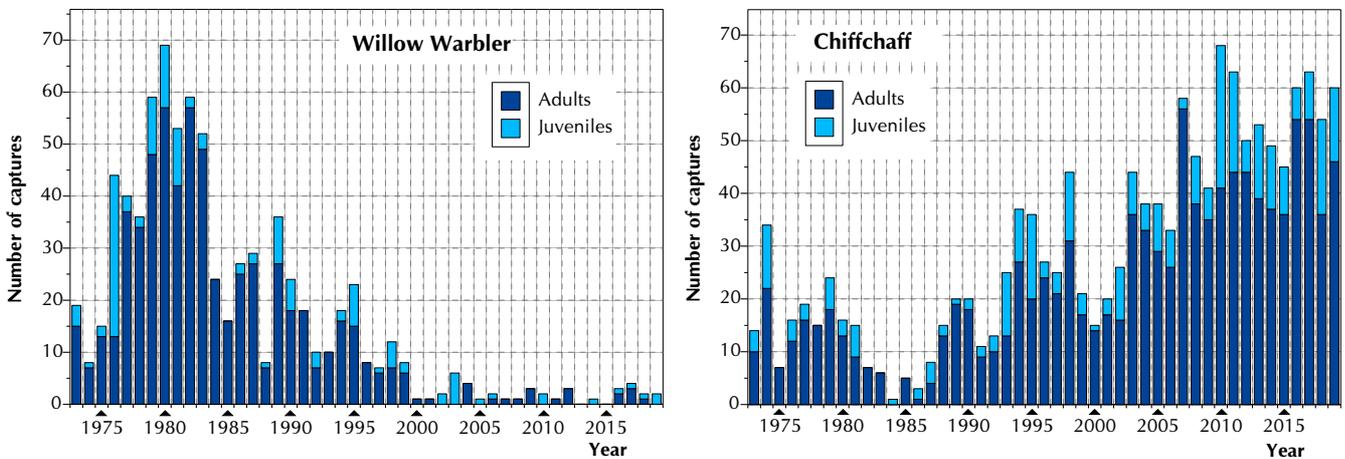
It has apparently been a dreadful year for Long-tailed Tit breeding in the wood - poor weather at a critical time seems to be the cause of the problem for this early-nesting, single-brooded species. We caught just eight birds up to the middle of March. After that we caught none until a party of nine, of which this bird was one, landed in a net. This party was in a mixed flock of largely juvenile tits and others. All these nine Long-tailed Tits were unringed and all so far into moult that they could not be aged. The result is that we caught no Long-tailed Tits still in juvenile plumage this year - another pointer to little or no successful breeding in the wood.

One month later we caught another party of six which included just one retrapped older bird ringed in November 2018, and, with a few other singletons this brings the autumn total to 16 birds.

Willow Warbler 3 JTE513 01/10/2019 F04

The Willow Warbler - once one of the wood's common summer visitors is now a rarity. This year we have caught only two, both juveniles and most likely just passing through the wood as they move south rather than being products of the wood. In the early years when it was a common breeding bird, the numbers of juveniles caught were generally a relatively small proportion of the total. The only exception was in 1976 when juveniles far outstripped adults. the reason was not massive within-wood productivity but the drought of that summer which brought young birds from, presumably, a wide area to drink at the pond which remained with water throughout.

Annual captures of Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs - adults and juveniles



Chiffchaff 4 JTE510 01/10/2019 E02

What a complete contrast to the picture painted by the Willow Warbler. Since the mid-1980s there has been a sustained overall increase in numbers with relatively more juveniles in many years than were typically seen with Willow Warblers. Before we ask what changes in management practice have benefited the Chiffchaff at the expense of the Willow Warbler, we should look at the BTO Bird trends graphs on the BTO web site. In both cases, our graphs very strongly reflect the picture in the whole of England.

Goldcrest 4M JTE333 22/9/2019 D08

Most of our Goldcrests are autumn or winter visitors, some apparently just passing through the wood on their migration southwards through Britain. It is not known if they are site faithful between winters; indeed it is not known if individuals which migrate in one winter and survive to the next will migrate again (or vice-versa). Being so small, they are also short-lived birds, so the chances of retrapping a bird in a subsequent winter is very small indeed. Out of 2,375 Goldcrests we have encountered, 641 have been retrapped at least once but only 29 retrapped after surviving from one winter to the next. This bird is one of those, having been ringed as a juvenile in October 2018. But it throws no light at all on whether migrants return, for it was retrapped in the wood as a breeding bird in May 2019 so is a resident rather than migrant.

It was caught at the same time as a juvenile Goldcrest and it was very useful to be able to compare the tail shapes of a known adult and a juvenile. The Migration Atlas notes that analyses of survival are very difficult for this species because it appears that ageing on the tail shape tends to assign the juvenile age code, 3, to many birds which are, in fact, older.

Treecreeper 4 JTE262 6/10/2019 H03

On the day of the memorial event to John McMeeking, it would have been a pity if we had not caught at least one of this species which is the centrepiece of the group's logo. As it was we caught a second one too. The ringing on that day was on Norman's Ride - the ride which cuts across the wood from east to west at the narrowest point. For some reason, this ride seems to be a demarcation line for Willow Tits (when we had them), Marsh Tits and

