

Treswell Wood

Nestbox Report - 1987

Introduction

This year's report is mainly concerned with events in Treswell Wood, Table 1 gives details of these. Sadly Gamston Wood boxes suffered an early attack by vandals which was, thankfully, an isolated occurrence. Following that, the nest recorder was unwell and unable to visit the boxes at the crucial times. We hope for a better time next year. We are still short of volunteers to assist with looking after boxes. The duties of a nestbox inspector are varied and interesting (but no pay) and include maintenance of boxes and recording of events. We like to support the BTO Nest Record Scheme by recording nests on the BTO cards and submitting them to the BTO. Training (including training for ringing birds) of volunteers can be arranged. Apply now.

Looking back on the summer of 1987 we will remember perhaps, most of all, the rain. In fact, there were some prolonged spells of hot dry weather early in the season and these prompted early nesting attempts by the tits. The fine weather broke just before fledging time but did not prove to be the great disaster feared. Only later nests suffered a little. So far there has been a good number of young recaptured indicating a high post-fledging survival. Only three nests in Treswell Wood boxes were waterlogged, and even in these some of the birds survived. Spotted Flycatchers which are about the latest of the summer visitors, were delayed by the weather. They arrived too late to exploit the fine spell and some delayed for two or three weeks after arriving before attempting to nest. This illustrates an advantage that resident birds have over migrants - if they endure the winter, they can make the most of early fine weather. In contrast, migrants which avoid the winter weather can be at a disadvantage when they return.

Table 1 Treswell Wood nestboxes 1987 (to 30.09.87)

Species	Failed Nests	Successful Nests	Young Fledged	Recaptured
Tawny Owl	0	1	2	0
Wren	1	4	26	3
Spotted Flycatcher	0	4	>11	0
Marsh Tit	0	1	8	2
Blue Tit	6	28	272	35
Great Tit	5	15	133	32

Species Notes

Tawny Owl

Treswell Wood's faithful owl pair (presumably it has been the same pair for some time) nested again. Over the years these owls have become much more tolerant of humans. In the good old days they would fly from the box when a human came near the tree. This year the owls sat tight in their box overlooking the unsuspecting Manpower Services Commission (MSC) work party just below them. To the party's surprise and pleasure, one of the young left the nest and spent a day 'supervising' from its perch in the tree, apparently unconcerned at the number of people below.

The owl nest provided, as usual, a number of interesting prey items. Two half grown Song Thrushes were seen in the box; these had been taken from a nest by the owl. Three rings from other Song Thrushes were found. Of these, two were birds taken from their nest before they fledged, the other was from a Song Thrush which had been out of a nest for perhaps a week or so. The nest from which the two ringed birds were taken held two more young. Of these, one was found dead below the destroyed nest and the other never recovered. Curiously another Song Thrush which built a very obvious nest in a tree adjacent to the owl nest raised her brood

successfully. The other two rings in the owl nest belong to a Great Tit ringed as a nestling in 1986 and to a Chaffinch. This bird had been ringed in 1983 and during 1985 became very tame, living partly from the scraps of food given by the MSC party. It had become tame enough to read the ring number with binoculars as it fed on the ground.

Spotted Flycatcher

Three boxes were successful in Treswell Wood - an improvement on recent years. One box held two broods, two other boxes each held one brood. Unfortunately two of these broods occurred at holiday time and the young fledged unringed. Another nest was not discovered until after the young had fledged - the parents were so late in starting to build the nest that I had stopped inspecting the box.

Wren

Treswell Wood boxes fared well again - our birds are well trained. One Wren nested inside the MSC portable toilet hut, perhaps mistaking it for a very large nestbox.

Marsh Tit

Treswell Wood Marsh Tits have an interesting history. They were slightly less common than Willow Tits until 1978, when the population declined rapidly, and disappeared completely in 1979. Only one Marsh Tit was captured between 1979 and 1985. In the autumn of 1985 a Marsh Tit was captured amongst a mixed flock of juvenile tits being chased by a Sparrowhawk (which was also caught). This Marsh Tit has been captured several times since then. Unlike the previous population of Marsh Tits which were very sedentary, this bird has roamed all over the wood, presumably taking advantage of a wood free from other Marsh Tit territories. This year it was found nesting in a box from which eight young fledged. Two have since been recaptured (together with some more unringed young). This brood was the one in Box 13 mentioned in Radio Nottingham's coverage of the sponsored bird watch. Marsh Tits are very sedentary birds and so are not quick to recolonise areas any distance from existing populations - we hope the Treswell Wood population is now re-established.

Coal Tit

One brood was recorded in Gamston Wood. This was in a box at ground level in a heap of boxes waiting to be put up, lying next to the MSC cabin.

Blue Tit

The best year in Treswell Wood so far. In spite of the weather only six nests failed, none of them because of rain. One was depredated, two abandoned and the other three all belonged to a single bird in her first breeding season. Her first nest was commandeered by an older female which had used the box in a previous year. I think, however, that at least one of her eggs was successfully hatched by the older bird. The younger bird nested again in a vacant box nearby, but after laying three eggs the nest was pirated by a bumble bee. Still persistent, and only five weeks late the bird made a third nest. This was abandoned after seven eggs had been laid. It is doubtful if a nest that late would have succeeded, even if she had not abandoned it. Perhaps her end of term report should read 'Not talented but tries hard.'

Table 2 Great Tit nests and nestlings - Treswell Wood 1979 - 1987

Year	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Nesting attempts	10	8	16	6	24	14	24	18	20
Young fledged	65	53	56	50	48	61	104	126	133

Note: these figures include all nesting attempts, both successful and failed.

Great Tit

The increase in numbers in Treswell Wood continues as shown in Table 2. Great Tits nested slightly later than did Blue Tits and suffered more because of torrential rain. Boxes which, during ordinary wet weather remained dry, were unable to cope with prolonged very heavy rainstorms. In spite of this only three boxes were affected and in each of these some of the young survived. The three affected boxes were ones which had failed in previous years, but for different reasons. Why these particular three boxes are like this is unknown, most boxes which are selected are successful in most years. Boxes 71 and 75 were moved after the failures in 1985 and 1986. Next year they will be replaced with new boxes. Table 3. gives the unhappy histories over the last three years.

Table 3 Histories of three unsuccessful boxes.

Box	1985	1986	1987
38	successful	young died	waterlogged
71	abandoned	abandoned	waterlogged
75	depredated	depredated	waterlogged

Only one nest was depredated this year. The young had been ringed and were ready to fledge. When I inspected to check all was well I found the dismembered remains of all the young but one. I assumed this bird had been removed by the predator and eaten elsewhere. However it turned up, alive and well, in late August - caught in a mixed flock of juvenile tits.

It is clear why Great Tits continue to increase in numbers. In the early years they suffered competition from Tree Sparrows, then predation by grey squirrels *Sciurus carolinensis*, Great Spotted Woodpeckers and humans. Since 1984 they have been free from all these. What is unclear is why the first three of these species have stopped affecting Great Tits. The vandals, I think, have been deterred by the regular MSC presence in the wood.

Birds from previous years.

Table 4. shows the numbers of Blue and Great Tit nestlings ringed in Treswell Woodland recaptured or found elsewhere since 1979. Several points are noteworthy. First observe the very high return rate in 1979 compared with the much lower rate in subsequent years. It is probable that the young birds which emerged in 1979 found a wood which could hold many more tit territories than it had done in previous years when there were no nestboxes. In 1980 the tit population was much higher and so newly fledged young faced more competition from established birds as well as from greater numbers of young birds. Many more, therefore, would have been forced out of the wood to find territories elsewhere. This would lead to fewer birds being recaptured in the wood. Although many probably went to neighbouring areas, relatively few have been recaptured because recapture is much more likely where bird ringers are present. Blue Tit return rates have stabilised in the 25%-30% range and it seems likely that this will remain fairly constant. Great Tits on the other hand, have a very variable return rate. It can be seen from the 'E' rows in the table that very few birds which are not recaptured in the first fifteen months after fledging are ever seen again. This means that the current year return rate is artificially low, but that figures for earlier years are not likely to increase significantly. In the light of this the 21% of Great Tits retrapped so far is exceptional - both the percentage and number of recaptures are already more than those for most past years. I hope this portends another good year for Great Tits.

Table 4 Numbers of nestlings ringed in boxes then recaptured, Treswell Wood 1979 - 1987

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Blue Tit									(to 30 th Sept.)
N	101	240	231	171	117	155	189	233	272
R	63	91	81	56	29	45	50	48	35
P	62%	38%	35%	33%	25%	29%	26%	21%	13%
E	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	30	.
Great Tit									
N	65	53	56	50	48	61	104	126	133
R	34	10	10	10	13	19	18	8	32
P	52%	19%	18%	20%	27%	31%	17%	6%	24%
E	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	.
Note	N	nestlings ringed and fledged							
	R	recaptured and/or recovered							
	P	recaptured and/or recovered as % of total							
	E	first recaptured during the last year.							

A few of our birds are caught some distance away. Table 5 gives numbers of all our nestbox birds from Treswell which have been retrapped or found dead since 1979. A few of these birds have moved elsewhere and returned to the wood. The numbers of these are given in brackets.

Table 5 Distance of recapture and recovery of Treswell Wood nestbox birds

Species	Distance, d, in km	d < 1	1 ≤ d < 5	5 ≤ d < 10	10 ≤ d < 20	d ≥ 20
	Number ringed					
Stock Dove	3	0	0	0	0	0
Tawny Owl	11	1	1	0	0	0
Wren	95	13	0	0	0	0
Spotted Flycatcher	30	2	0	0	0	0
Robin	25	4	0	0	0	0
Marsh Tit	8	2	0	0	0	0
Coal Tit	50	4	2	0	1	0
Blue Tit	1709	436	37(7)	23(4)	0	2
Great Tit	596	137	2	11(4)	2	2
House Sparrow	20	0	0	0	0	0
Tree Sparrow	473	30	0	0	0	1

An interesting recapture was of Blue Tit A213873 from box 21 in 1980. It had been retrapped in the wood in July 1980 then not seen again in the wood. On 28th November 1986 it was captured in East Drayton. Birds had been captured regularly in this village during all these years and it is surprising that such an old bird should suddenly appear without previous captures in the village.

Other Species

Tree slugs *Lehmannia marginata* are often seen in nest boxes, but this year were absent during the early dry period. Once the wet weather began, tree slugs were very quick to return to the boxes. At the end of September, white-lipped snails *Cepaea hortensis* appeared in three boxes. This was the first time I had ever seen snails of any species in boxes.

Casual visitors to the boxes have included the hornet *Vespa crabro*. This handsome creature used a box top as a sun trap to catch early morning warmth. The box was one holding an abandoned Wren nest and I hoped the hornet would nest in it. Hornets were seen again in the wood, but the box was not used for nesting.

Wasps have again used some boxes. I removed one wasp nest in a box, late in the season. A week later a pygmy shrew *Sorex minutus* was found in it, perhaps feeding on remaining larvae or other invertebrates on the box floor.

Acknowledgements

Andrew Goodhall for looking after Gamston Wood nestboxes, E.C. Walton & Co. of Sutton-on-Trent for materials, Gordon Davenport for nestboxes.

This was originally published in October 1987 for the Nottingham Trust for Nature Conservation as the **North Notts Nestbox Report 1987**. It was produced on the BBC microcomputer using Wordwise. It contained photographs of spring nestbox maintenance, a Wren nest, a tree slug in a nestbox and a wasp nest. A BTO nest record card for a Spotted Flycatcher nest was also illustrated. The front cover was drawn by the young Adèle du Feu and the 'birdy' part of this has been scanned for posterity.

This edition has been produced from the original Wordwise computer files using Techwriter on the Acorn RISC PC.

Chris du Feu, December 2000