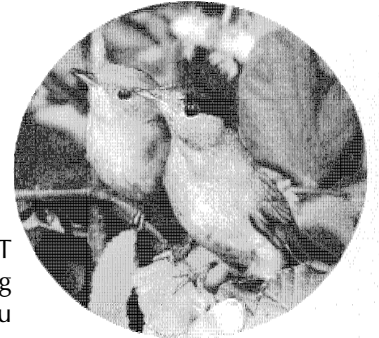


# TWITTER

1996/3 - Number 8

**Ringling:** By permission of NWT  
**Project leader:** John McMeeking  
**Editors:** Richard & Chris du Feu



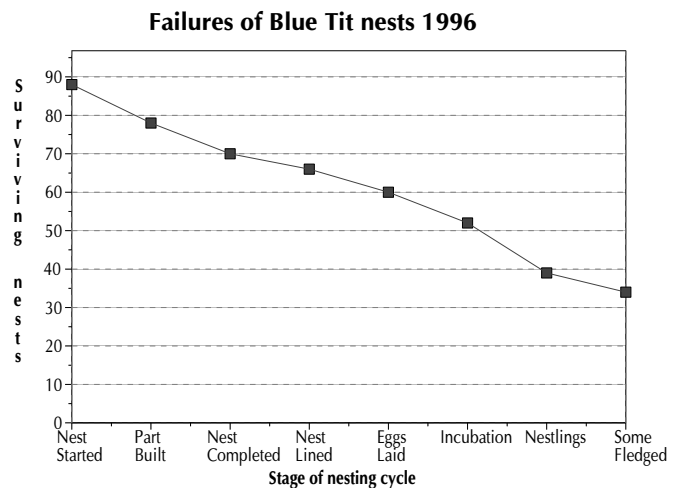
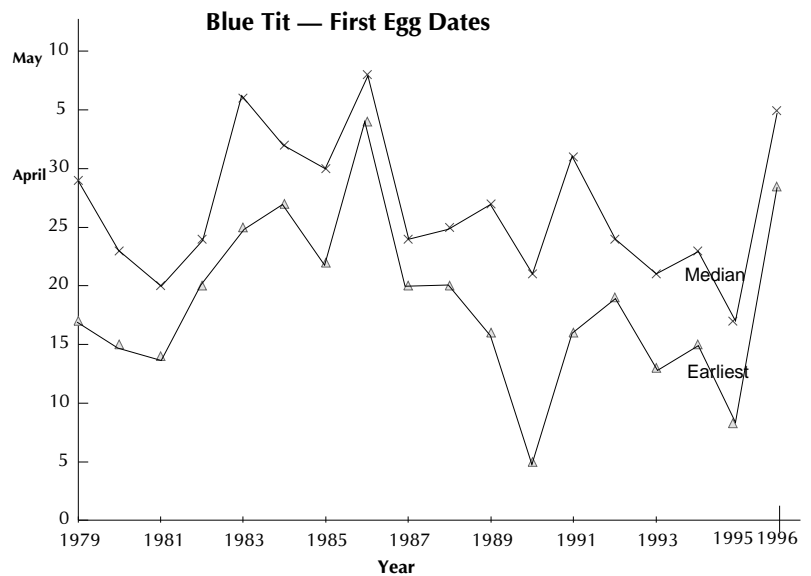
## Treswell Wood - Information To Tell Every Ringer.

The breeding season of 1996 will go on record as one of the worst ever. There are only two consolation prizes. First is that (as Shakespeare said) 'We are not alone unhappy'. Ringers around the country have found the same as we have. Second is that our data, few that they be, are valuable because they are from constant effort netting. The purpose of constant effort methods is to be able to estimate various population parameters such as survival rates, productivity and abundance even when the values of these parameters are very small! Perhaps a mark of the widespread nature of the lack of birds is the exhortation from Will Peach in the 1996 CES News for us all to keep at it in spite of the low captures!

Our season has been marked by a lack of captures of juveniles. If all birds have fared as well as the tits in boxes this is not surprising. Nests of Blue Tits were very late in starting - amongst the latest since we put up boxes in 1979. There was a high failure rate at all stages with many nests being abandoned before eggs were laid. The lateness of the season led to small clutches and in many cases several eggs did not hatch. To have one brood of two Blue Tits is unfortunate but to have two is careless! We have had five. The table overleaf shows the very small clutch and brood sizes for our three commonest nestbox-using species. Typically we would expect Blue Tits to have an average clutch size of about 9 and Great Tits 8. Wrens are only slightly down - normally we would expect the odd clutch of 7 eggs. Blue Tits almost never raise broods of only 2 to fledging. Nests generally have either a high fledging rate or else are complete failures. Relatively few young birds died in the nests, so it seems that hatching failure was the main problem.

Many birds suspended laying for a few days when weather was bad - perhaps this led to some eggs failing to hatch. Two extra columns in the ten-week summary table on the back page give productivity estimates for all species with a total of 7 or more captures. These figures, based on our small samples, are not reliable comparisons but even so there are obvious differences between the two years.

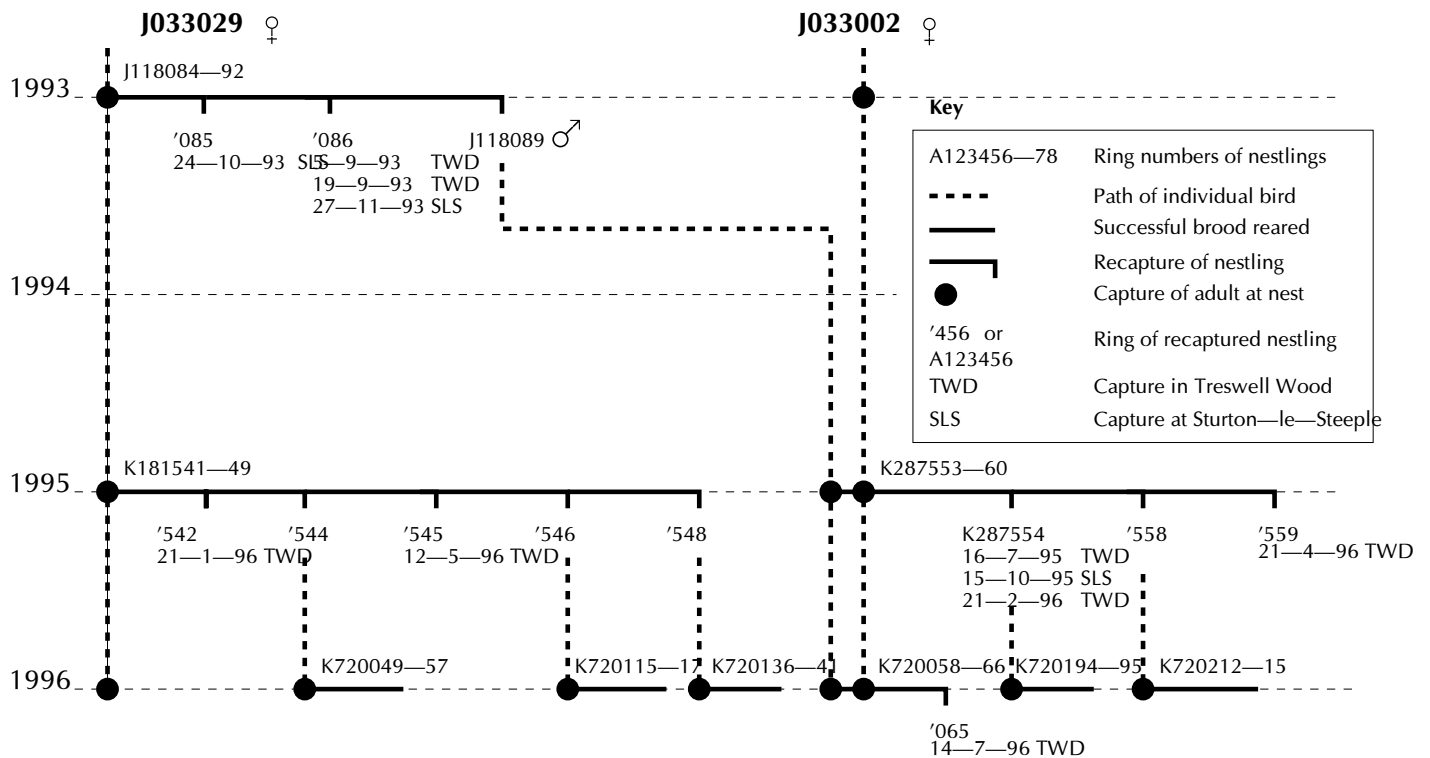
One place where we have continued to trap many birds is at the feeders which we have kept stocked throughout the season. There are no longer any Yellowhammers feeding there, but tits are coming in very large numbers, together with some few other birds. It may be asked whether the feeders are reducing the captures on the standard sites - we have yet to catch even a moderate tit flock in non-feeder nets. However, the feeders do not draw in warblers, Wrens or Treecreepers and it seems unlikely that the low standard site captures of these birds are caused by attendance at the feeders. It may be that, even with tits, the feeders are attracting extra birds from outside the wood rather than reducing the numbers of birds caught at the standard sites.





- Long-tailed Tit** **5F5341** **11/8/96** **N06**  
 Ringed 28/11/93, this aging bird has never been captured in the breeding season. Its 7 captures have been in March (1), August (1), October (1) and November (4). Where does it breed?
- Marsh Tit** **J118035** **7/6/96** **D03**  
 A 1993 nestling-ringed bird from block D which has lived in the Nightingale Ride area for its adult life. On 19/6/94 it was caught with a broken leg which has since healed and the break is no longer apparent.
- Marsh Tit** **K463445** **23/6/96** **D07**  
 This was a surprising capture for a species which is so sedentary - it is an adult male which had evaded capture since its arrival in the wood in spite of this capture being on a standard site. It was also well into moult (our first recorded bird in moult for the year, P score 16). Had it bred in the wood or is it a new arrival, having tried to breed elsewhere? It was captured again nearby on 18/8/96. Its moult score by then was 48 - about two weeks ahead of other tits captured on the same day. Evidence for it being a failed breeder which was able to start moult early?
- Marsh Tit** **K720106** **11/8/96** **Q02 Feeder**  
 One of the first brood to be ringed this year, it has travelled from E05 to make use of the feeders - as have many other juvenile tits.
- Willow Tit** **J033388** **4/8/96** **L01**  
 Currently one of our older known Willow Tits, although it still has a long time to go before it is reportable on age grounds. It was ringed in N06 on 28/8/93 as a 3. Its 11 subsequent captures have all been in the north of the wood.
- Coal Tit** **H623772** **18/8/96** **D07**  
 Ringed 20/9/92 in D07 this bird elusive has only been captured 4 times; the previous capture being on 3/5/94 not too far distant in B04.
- Coal Tit** **K181569** **21/5/96** **F08 On nest**  
 A 1995 nestling ringed in G01, recaptured in Nightingale Ride in February and April, now nesting in one of the dormouse boxes.
- Blue Tit** **F253405** **26/5/96** **C09 On nest**  
 This ancient bird was ringed on 30/12/90 in D03 and not recaptured until 4/2/96 in D09 near where she is now nesting. Where has she been all this time?
- Blue Tit** **J118030** **16/6/96** **N05 On nest**  
 Where has she been? Ringed on 16/5/93 in I01 as a nestling and not captured since then until today. Her nest was very late and at first I assumed it was a replacement clutch for a female whose nearby nest had failed. On capturing this bird on the nest it now seems more likely that the first female died (or less likely moved away) leaving a vacant territory to be taken by this bird. Any better theories?
- Blue Tit** **J522564** **21/5/96** **F05 On nest**  
 Ringed as a 3J in C04 on 16/7/95, this female seems to have settled into a territory very early on - she has been retrapped in F07 & F05 in December 1995 and February 1996 with no recaptures at our feeders. This early appearance is in contrast to many Blue Tits which do not appear at their breeding sites until the early spring.
- Blue Tit** **K181827** **18/8/96** **D06**  
 A nestling of 1995 which has evaded capture until now, only 150m from its natal box.
- Blue Tit** **K287554** **26/5/96** **H02 On nest**  
 This bird featured in Twitter No. 6 after travelling to Sturton-le-Steeple and returning. She has now been found breeding. Meanwhile her mother, J033002, is looking after this year's brood in the same box as last year in K00. This individual has a long known pedigree (shown below) with some interesting family connections. Is there some genetic predisposition for them to head for Sturton-le-Steeple?
- Blue Tit** **K720224** **6/7/96** **N05**  
 The first 1996 nestling-ringed tit to be recaptured - although its capture circumstances do not bode well for its future. It was found, newly fledged, on the ground near its nest box with no sight nor sound of its parents. A late fledging runt?
- Great Tit** **J033352** **21/5/96** **Q02 Feeder**  
 A 1993 bird and a veteran of Jose's colour ringing campaign. He is breeding in the same box as last year in block D.
- Great Tit** **VN47628** **21/5/96** **D07 On nest**  
 A 1994 nestling ringed female, colour ringed in March 1995 but only seen or captured at the feeders until 14/4/96 when she was mist-netted in D07. Did she breed in the wood in 1995?
- Great Tit** **VV34004** **7/7/96** **Q02 Feeder**  
 The first mist-net recapture of a nestling ringed tit this year. It was ringed within 10m of the southern edge of the wood and has already found its way to the feeders in the north.

## K287554 Known family history and connections.



### Treecreeper

**5F5116**

**16/6/96**

**N06**

Ringed as an adult in 1993, this bird ranges over much of the northern third of the wood. It is probably the female from the nest at Treswell End which was, sadly, depredated.

### Jay

**DA51822**

**26/5/96**

**R99**

Our second Jay of the year and our first recapture. This one was ringed on 23/10/94 a mere 2 nets away from its recapture place.

### Greenfinch

**VJ35002**

**26/5/96**

**Q02 Feeder**

This is our first between-year Greenfinch recapture this season. No plumage abnormalities were noted although when it was first captured it had the most unusual pattern of moulted primary coverts described in Twitter No. 1.

### Greenfinch

**NN18130**

**16/6/96**

**Q02 Feeder**

A second between year recapture, this bird was ringed at the feeders in December 1994.

### Bullfinch

**J033211**

**16/6/96**

**O06**

An aged Bullfinch, first captured in April 1993 in M07, retrapped in N06 two months later and not seen again until this capture, two nets further down the Treswell End standard site.

### Bullfinch

**J522883**

**23/6/96**

**D09**

The second capture of this bird, which was first caught a year earlier in L05. On both occasions she was in breeding condition. A large shift of territory!

### Yellowhammer

**K463118**

**16/6/96**

**Q02 Feeder**

Our longest time Yellowhammer retrap for the year. It was ringed on 1/1/96 at the feeders and, clearly, still finding the supply of food important this far into the breeding season.

## Look out for...

### Great Tits

### Colour ringing cock-ups

Since the last issue of Twitter, some mysteries have been solved and errors corrected. Unfortunately we seem to have reached an equilibrium point with new errors occurring at the same rate as old ones are corrected!

**J033061** and **J522856** both have the combination **Light Blue Right, Green Left**. If you catch either, replace the colour rings with a new combination. Likewise **K463304** and **VN47637** share the colours **Right Red, Left Light Blue**, **K463363** and **J522446** have the same single ring two-colour combination (**Green1Red**) and **K463364** and **K463249** share **Black1Green**.

**K463214** was captured and the colour ring combination - if any - not noted. One unknown Great Tit has been reported with **Green Right, Yellow Left**. Make particular note of any of these you capture, recording both colour ring and BTO ring number or colour ringing them if they have only the metal ring.

## Controls & Recoveries

### Chiffchaff

6S7619

21/7/96

Q01

This is only our fourth Chiffchaff control, its ringing data have not yet been found. The others were from Birklands (1973), Gamston Wood (1985) and Beachy Head (1988).

### Marsh Tit

H229133

26/5/96

L05

A sad loss - this bird had bred in our boxes for 5 successive seasons, always successfully until this year. She was found dead with her brood in the nest. The cause of her death was not obvious - there was no sign of predator damage.

### Blue Tit

J522635

21/5/96

C03

Another unexplained nesting death. This bird was ringed a year earlier, breeding in an adjacent box. She died before her clutch was completed.

## Alarm at Forwood Farm - a warning

The farm now has an alarm which may be set off automatically if you approach Nightingale Ride across the farm and through the green lane. If you are to use this approach, telephone David Hill at Forwood Farm to arrange it.

## Data recording in the field

As ever, thanks to all of you who are grappling with the coding system for activity, sexing method and moult. It does require care and thought but it is very worthwhile in enhancing the value of our data. Keep up the good work! There are a few small points worth mentioning. We have, so far, only given a sexing method code of C or P to birds to which we have also assigned the activity code B for breeding. It was apparent on the ringing course at West Burton that some birds can still be sexed on the basis of the remains of brood patch or cloaca for some time after they have finished breeding and may have left their breeding grounds. It would be wrong to give a code B to such birds (at West Burton it was often Reed Warblers in this category). Therefore, in future, only record code B in the activity column if the bird is clearly engaged in breeding activity. If it is only the remains of the patch or raised cloaca, then assign sex using the code P or C but do not give the B for breeding.

Please would you record the age code for all same day retraps - it makes it much easier for the data processors (and serves as a check on earlier aging).

Sometimes when there is pressure on, it may be better not to record all details of all birds. The following is a suggested order of priority. Always record capture type, ring, species, age, sex and time. Activity, sexing method, moult codes and other details of identification method are next most useful, followed by biometrics. After this record any other extra detail. Examples of identification method include wing formulae for Willow Warblers, patterns of spots for Wrens and tail details on Marsh Tits. Extra detail includes primary moult scores, peculiarities of plumage etc.

## Sexing Treecreepers

After a suggestion from a ringer, we looked at the Treecreeper biometric data we collected in the days of the Biometrics Review Group. A pity we had not looked at it before! Although there is only a very small sample of 9 birds, there appears to be some sexual dimorphism. Any bird with head+bill above 30.5 was male and below 30.5mm female. It is too early to use this as a method for sexing these birds but it is certainly worth recording more head+bill measurements on Treecreepers. It does not matter if you cannot determine their sex at the time because it is quite likely we will have sexed them in the past or may be able to in the future. There will be some callipers in the ringing kit by the time this is in print.

## The thoughts of Chairman John

- 1 **Blue and Great Tits** do not compete directly for much except nesting sites. If you flood an area with nestboxes which are only suitable for Blue Tits, will the Great Tit population increase because there is less competition for other holes now that Blue Tits are more than catered for, or will it decrease because of increased competition for other resources from the additional Blue Tits or will it remain unchanged as the two species interact very little?
- 2 **Blue Tit nestlings caught at the feeder.** Is a higher proportion of birds from the north of the wood than from the south caught at the feeder. If so, what does it mean?
- 3 **Is the proportion of Great Tits with territories in the south of the wood** which are caught at the feeders the same as the proportion from the north of the wood?
- 4 We often seem to catch **relatively old Chaffinches**. Is the proportion of 'old' Chaffinches much higher than the proportion of 'old' birds in other species?
- 5 Does the proportion of **Blue Tit nestlings which survive the winter** bear any relationship to the age of the hen? Does experience in rearing birds compensate for any decline in nestling production with age?
- 6 At the feeder we have 3 nets around the nuts and table. Two other nets reach beyond the immediate feeding area. Is the **species composition of the catches** in these two nets different from that at the other three?
- 7 Do **older tits** start laying their eggs earlier than younger birds?

## Nestbox events summary

### 1996

### 1995

	Nests started	Clutches laid	Successful broods	Adults on nest	Nestlings ringed	Successful broods	Nestlings ringed
Wren	18	12	10	.	46	14	71
Marsh Tit	4	4	2	2	16	4	34
Coal Tit	2	2	2	1	10	3	31
Blue Tit	88	58	34	45	187	55	467
Great Tit	30	26	11	3	62	19	103

## Ten-week Summary May to August 1996

1996 Interval 3: Visits 1259, 1261, 1256, 1257, 1260, 1258, 1262 (Standard Sites only)

	Adult	New Birds		Adult	Recaptures		Total	Productivity (% juv)	
		5	3		5	3		1995	1996
Woodpigeon	1	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.
Wren	4	6	1	1	2	.	14	80	7
Dunnock	2	3	1	3	2	.	11	28	9
Robin	.	3	4	3	2	.	12	63	33
Blackbird	3	2	6	10	2	.	23	24	26
Song Thrush	.	3	2	2	.	.	7	.	29
Whitethroat	1	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.
Garden Warbler	2	1	.	1	.	.	4	.	.
Blackcap	11	3	4	.	.	.	18	19	22
Chiffchaff	2	1	1	1	.	.	5	71	.
Willow Warbler	1	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.
Long-tailed Tit	.	.	1	1	.	.	2	100	.
Marsh Tit	.	1	.	1	.	2	4	.	.
Blue Tit	.	.	2	1	.	1	4	81	.
Great Tit	.	.	2	1	1	1	5	29	.
Treecreeper	1	.	1	3	1	.	6	.	17
Jay	.	.	.	1	.	.	1	.	.
Chaffinch	2	1	.	1	.	.	4	.	.
Bullfinch	1	2	.	2	.	.	5	.	.
<b>Totals</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>128</b>	.	23

## Treswell Wood Standard Site Totals in 10-week Periods

Year	1	2	3	4	5	Total
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	-----	-----	-----
Max	124	145	288	253	177	865
Min	64	57	99	68	88	422
Mean	89	110	177	149	132	659