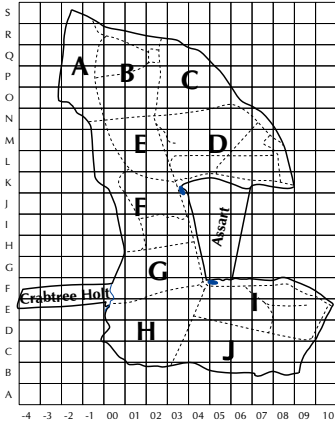


# TWITTER



Treswell Wood - Information To Tell Every Recorder

## October 2024 Treswell Wood IPM Group

(Integrated Population Monitoring)

Project leaders:

2024/4

CBC

Ellen Marshall

Number 149

Nest Records

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Ringling

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[www.treswellwoodipmg.org](http://www.treswellwoodipmg.org)



Once again weather has not been particularly favourable. Some visits have been cancelled because of rain or high winds and occasionally a visit postponed until the Monday. These weekday visits are more difficult to operate because of the ringers who do not yet enjoy retirement. Nevertheless, all the standard site visits have been completed but with no weeks to spare.

Captures in the standard sites, and elsewhere including feeding stations, have been generally very low. This was unexpected after the high capture numbers in the previous 10 weeks which we supposed portended high numbers of birds in the following weeks. In fact, unlike the June-August standard site captures which have increased over the past few years, the August - October captures have decreased in recent years. It is hard to understand why this is happening. It cannot be high early Autumn mortality. If that were the case the following spring and summer would not see increased numbers of birds in the standard site captures. It could be that food supply is changing with the changing weather patterns we have seen recently. The only other environmental change we do know about is Ash Dieback. We know from the frass collection that ash is not a good provider of caterpillars for tit nestlings, but does it have higher value in the autumn? Are there other changes driving birds from the wood in the autumn?

By the end of the 10 weeks the wood was, at last, drying out with no liquid mud so wellington boots were not mandatory. Just in time for winter rain?

Murphy's Law, aka Sod's Law, would have predicted a dismally low catch of very ordinary birds on October 6<sup>th</sup> when we were to host a visit from various NWT donors accompanied by the chief executive. Amazingly the weather was just right, the birds behaved with 90 captures during a relatively short time and we (and the visitors) enjoyed a very good day which included late-departing (or early arriving?) Chiffchaffs, a memorable Great Spotted Woodpecker together with Nuthatch, Treecreeper and Marsh Tit. It was an enjoyable session for all concerned and excellent to be able to discuss our operation in the wood with them.

## Events in Nestboxes - Treswell Wood, 2024

It has been a very difficult season with unexpected shortages of 'nestbox inspectors' for a variety of reasons and with high winds preventing visits on a couple of occasions. We hope that 2025 will bring more consistent inspections - but who can tell what the future holds? In a few cases visits to nestboxes were made too late to be able to ring the birds. This was particularly regrettable in the case of our one Marsh Tit nest. The birds fledged successfully but without rings. Note that the figures in the table may still need to be revised a little if we find some nestlings failed to fledge once we are able to break through the rampant brambles and reach the remaining boxes to clean them.

In spite of the problems, we have recorded a slightly better year than last year. The numbers of nests recorded and eggs laid are only very slightly higher but the overall success rates of eggs turning into fledged birds (55%) and nests fledging at least one bird (69%) are noticeably higher. In spite of the lower capture numbers this autumn, the numbers of fledged Blue and Great Tit re-encountered by the middle of October is slightly higher. Twenty Great Tits have been retrapped (the same number as in 2023 albeit from a greater number fledging) but 14 Blue Tits have been recaptured instead of only nine last year.

We noted that early broods grew quickly with hardly any runts in spite of the frass record which suggested a low caterpillar crop.

Of the 34 individual Blue Tit females found in nests, 13 were birds in their second or subsequent breeding season. The oldest was in her 6<sup>th</sup> breeding season and we have found her in one of the nestboxes for the last four years. Had we not suffered lockdown in 2020 that could well have been five years. It brings to mind one of John McMeeking's sayings: *What is recorded is history; what is not is mystery.*

## Events in Nestboxes - Treswell Wood 2024

Species	Nests		Eggs Laid	Birds		Fledged	Success rate	
	Recorded	Successful		Nesting adults			Recaps	NestsEggs
Stock Dove	12	7	27	4	13	.	58	48
Tawny Owl	2	2	9	2	5	.	100	56
Marsh Tit	1	1	8	1	7	.	1	87
Coal Tit	1	1	11	0	10	.	1	91
Blue Tit	60	41	533	35	289	14	68	54
Great Tit	38	28	268	.	160	20	74	60
Wren	6	2	26	.	6	.	33	23
Blackbird	1	1	4	.	4	.	.	.
<b>Totals</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>494</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>55</b>

## Frass in 2024

Ken Smith, who does the weighing of the frass (caterpillar droppings) that we, and other sites in the country, collect, has sent us this note:-

*I have processed all the fleeces and here are the results. Not all that much frass I am afraid but I wonder whether the wet spring has affected the results. It looks like the frass was increasing in the period May 5-12 but dropped back down again only to pick up in early June. Comparing it with other sites this year, I would have expected the peak period to be May 12-19. We often have some problems with the rain and wetness breaking up the frass in the trays but I think it was so wet this year for so long that it has had an effect on the overall results.*

*The post doctoral researcher, Jamie Weir, has been making great progress on the frass/breeding success analysis. I was hoping to have some graphs to show you all by now but they are not quite ready. The basic story is that both Blue and Great Tits have the highest productivity when they time their nest to match the frass peak, and that Blue Tits are far more sensitive to any mismatch than Great Tits. All this is what we expected but it is good to be able to demonstrate it on such a large data set with a wide geographic distribution. The overall relationship between frass abundance and tit productivity is not yet clear but I think we are now nearly there with this analysis. I guess the only advantage of the delay is that we have been able to include data right up to 2023 which has made the analysis more powerful.*

Our thanks to Ken for his work.

## The value of recaptures

Ringling allows the study of individual birds, sometimes over a long period of time. Recaptures often provide interesting insights, as we see in the Noteworthy Captures section. A recaptured bird has at least some known history. Sometimes it is salutary to see that we have a discrepancy in our ageing or sexing of an individual. These instances are instructive and are used to improve our ageing and sexing techniques. Sometimes captures of individuals reveal things about birds which show that not all birds obey the rules. October 27<sup>th</sup> was a day for non-conformists and these are all described in Noteworthy Captures. Three Robins in the same small part of the wood had exceptional patterns of moult. Because we have pictures of the wings of these birds we know that it was exceptional moult rather than our mis-ageing. One resident Blackbird was large enough to be regarded as large even for a Scandinavian bird. A group of four Long-tailed Tits, caught together, showed very little of the expected previous togetherness.

There is no doubt that most birds follow conventional patterns of behaviour and morphology but, as we see, there are always exceptions. Recapturing ringed birds can highlight these exceptions and lead to better understanding.

## Noteworthy Captures

Species	Age/Sex	Ring	Date	Grid
<b>Great Spotted Woodpecker</b>	<b>2F</b>	<b>LK39407</b>	<b>22/9/2024</b>	<b>H04</b>

One of two woodpeckers caught this autumn. It was caught in a standard site net. This is unusual. Over the years only about 6% of their captures are in these nets, with 85% being caught at the feeders and the rest in extra nets set away from either standard sites or feeders. The second woodpecker of the autumn was caught at the feeding station on October 6<sup>th</sup> and, happily, caught just in time to show to the visitors on that day.

<b>Marsh Tit</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>AEZ3739</b>	<b>1/9/2024</b>	<b>E06</b>
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Unlike Blue and Great Tits, Marsh Tits do not show any obvious contrast between unmoulted juvenile greater

coverts and those which have moulted. The safe criterion for assessing age after post-juvenile moult has been the shape of the tail feathers. This bird was aged as an adult by tail feather shape but reference to its history shows it was ringed as a recently fledged juvenile in July. Can any of us remember finding a juvenile Marsh Tit moulting its tail feathers? Memory can be fickle so a look at the records shows that of 117 juvenile Marsh Tits which we have encountered during post juvenile moult, seven have been moulting their tail feathers. That is a far lower proportion than that of Blue Tits and Great Tits but still enough to give over 5% error rate in ageing of juveniles encountered after their post juvenile moult.

What we should do is only age Marsh Tits as juvenile (code 3/5) if the tail feather has the pointed juvenile shape. Birds with rounded, adult, tail feathers will have to be recorded as unknown (code 2/4) unless there are other pointers such as obvious contrast within the greater coverts. Based on plumage characteristics we cannot safely assign adult age codes (4/6) any longer.

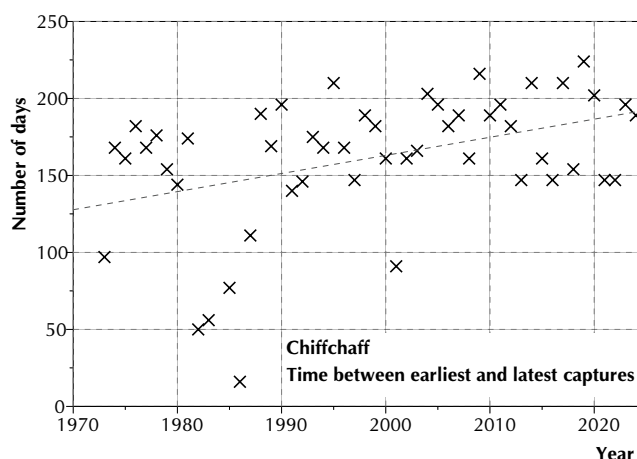
### Long-tailed Tit                      2                      DRA483                      27/10/2024                      K00

One of a party of four. We know how birds of this species move around in groups. Do they always stay together? Looking at the capture history of this one and the other three we see that they have not always appeared on the same day. Of course we do not always catch all birds in any one party (although they do have a habit of coming to a net when one is caught and calling). Look at the diagram. The red squares show the dates on which individuals were encountered. Does it provide convincing evidence for a coherent Long-tailed Tit party?

Date \ Bird	15 Oct 23	7 Jan 24	28 Jan 24	20 Feb 24	21 Apr 24	22 Sep 24	6 Oct 24	21 Oct 24	27 Oct 24
DRA394	■	■				■	■		■
DRA455		■		■					■
DRA460			■					■	■
DRA496					■			■	■

### Chiffchaff                                      2                                      PNR084                                      6/10/2024                                      M03

Most Chiffchaffs should have left us by now. We have captured a total of 10 later in October than this but never before caught as many as three birds in October, more notably three on the same day. We have caught three in very late November and one in December but we regard these as wintering birds rather than late-departing birds. It does seem like a year of late departures. Migrants are also arriving earlier in spring so what about the length of the Chiffchaff year in the wood? The graph shows the number of days between the earliest and latest capture each year. In the early years Chiffchaffs were not very common so the chances of early or late captures were low giving a less reliable measure of season length. Overall, however, there is evidence for a lengthening of their time here by about one week every five years.



### Treecreeper                                      4                                      JTE447                                      29/9/2024                                      G04

Five years and 86 days is a long time for a small bird to survive but, as we know from our paper of 1995, this species does survive far longer than the similarly sized Wren. Even at this age it is only our 10<sup>th</sup> oldest Treecreeper, well over two years short of our oldest bird.

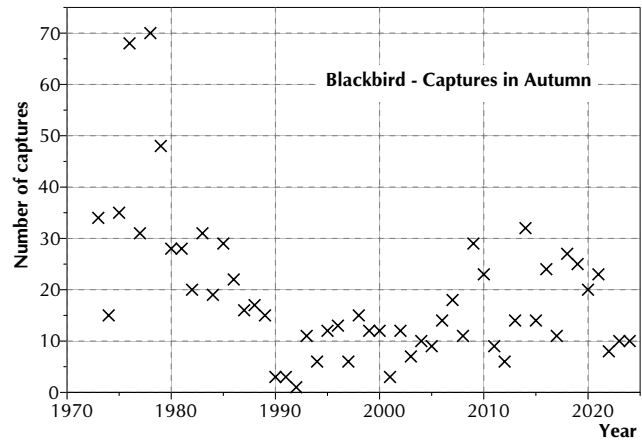
The ageing information in Svensson suggests using the size and shape of the pale tip on the outermost long primary covert but also says the method should be tested more thoroughly before being unhesitatingly recommended. We have been working on this and now have over three hundred pictures of Treecreeper wings taken over the last seven years. These include many pictures of some birds in known juvenile plumage and the same bird after its first (or second) moult. We now have started to analyse these images and hope to be able to add to the ageing information available to ringers. As for JTE447, we have three pictures, two as a juvenile and one from today as an adult. Happily it is not one of the non-conformists but shows very clearly the difference between the large outer primary covert tip of the juvenile and the much smaller one of the adult.

### Blackbird                                      LK39290                                      4M                                      27/10/2024                                      L01

It is well known that Scandinavian Blackbirds are, generally, larger birds than British ones. When we caught this one it did seem it should be a continental by its wing length, even more so when the data entry software demanded confirmation that it had been correctly entered. It was a wing larger than almost all Scandinavian ones. Surely it must be the first visiting Blackbird of the winter or else an incorrectly measured or recorded wing length. Not so. It is 'one of ours'. It was ringed as a young bird in December 2022 with a long wing for a juvenile so could have been a migrant. But, not so. We retrapped it twice in 2023 including once in breeding condition. It was with us

during the winter 2023/24 and caught again in June in breeding condition. Its wing measured in previous captures this year was 141mm. On today's capture, with a newly moulted, unworn wing, it measured 142mm. Best not to make assumptions about single individuals based just on wing length.

We had felt that Blackbird captures were becoming less frequent in the Autumn than in earlier times. The graph shows that this is, indeed, the case. It would be easy to suggest the cause was a decline in Blackbird numbers generally. However, other factors might be present - later arrival of Winter migrants, birds finding more food in gardens so not coming into the wood or perhaps other reasons. It is easy to detect a (statistically) significant decline in Autumn captures. It is not so easy to determine its cause.



#### Robin AEZ3686 4 27/10/2024 K00

One of three very difficult Robins, all from the same set of nets. This one was obviously difficult so needed some discussion and, eventually we agreed that we could not age it. It had very large tips on the outer greater coverts, as would a juvenile, but it was not clear whether they became gradually, or suddenly, smaller towards the body. Certainly the initial impression was that it was an obvious juvenile. The second bird was similar but we agreed on it being an adult with unusually large buff tips to the outer greater coverts. Finally AEZ3222 seemed to be a juvenile with the large tips, although not quite as large as on the other two. We have taken pictures of these so we can compare them with pictures in the past. Reference to recapture histories revealed them all to be adults. We later compared the pictures which those in Jenni & Winkler's book *Moult and Ageing in European Passerines*. There was just one adult Robin shown with the large-tipped greater coverts, although not quite as large as on the first two of today's Robins. It was described as an exceptional bird. Of course there are always exceptional birds - but three in one morning?

#### Bullfinch AEZ3319 4M 4/8/2024 K04

Bullfinches are known for their fairly sedentary behaviour and this one is no exception. This one was ringed in May 2023 and has been recaptured three more times in the same set of nets, where it was caught today. Its fifth capture was elsewhere in another set of nets all of 150 metres away; not far at all, just about 10 seconds flying time.

### 10-Week Summary: 2024 Interval 4, Captures in Standard Sites

	New Birds			Recaptures			Total
	Adult			Adult			
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
Marsh Tit	.	.	.	1	.	2	3
Blue Tit	1	.	2	2	.	4	9
Great Tit	.	.	1	3	.	2	6
Long-tailed Tit	4	.	.	8	.	.	12
Chiffchaff	1	.	2	1	.	.	4
Wren	.	.	9	1	1	.	11
Treecreeper	.	.	2	2	.	.	4
Blackbird	1	.	4	4	1	.	10
Song Thrush	.	1	1	.	.	.	2
Robin	.	.	12	4	.	1	17
Dunnock	1	.	2	1	.	.	4
Bullfinch	.	.	.	1	.	.	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>84</b>

### Treswell Wood Standard Site Totals in 10-week periods - Summary table

Summary Data since standard site netting began in 1978:

Interval	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Maximum	128	198	288	253	177	864
Minimum	57	33	89	66	59	364
Mean	92	115	159	130	126	611

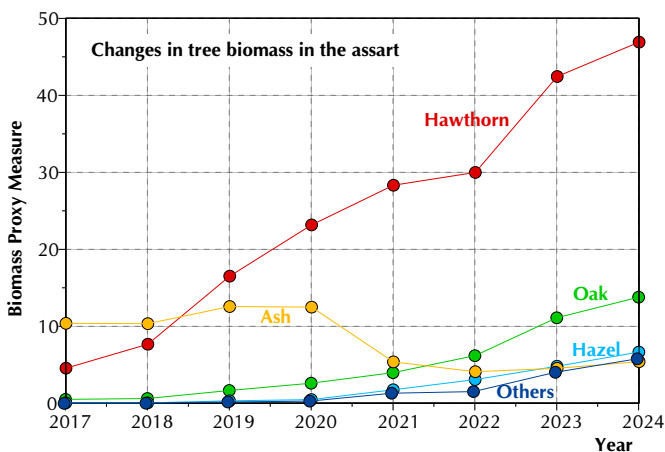
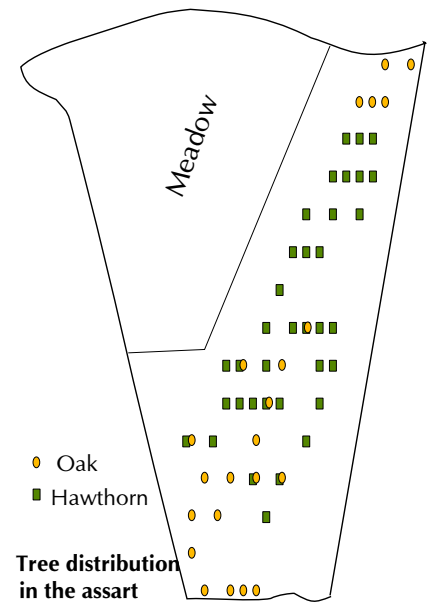
## Assart regeneration

We described the results of the 2023 annual survey of tree regeneration in the assart in issue 145 (December 2023). The developments over the previous year had been surprising to us and we were encouraged to write a paper about it. This was submitted to *inpractice*, the Bulletin of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management. By chance the September 2024 issue was to have a theme of habitat restoration and our work fitted this exactly. We are grateful to the editor for the very rapid refereeing of our paper and to the staff who were most helpful in expediting the publication process. A Decade of Natural Woodland Regeneration In Spite of Ash Dieback. du Feu, C.R., Gillman, N., & Bowler, N. *inpractice*, issue 125, September 2024.

When we were planning the assart regeneration, John McMeeking insisted that we had a unique opportunity to record natural regeneration provided we resisted pressures to plant trees to hasten the return to woodland. We all expected it would take a long time before we had worthwhile data to show. Events have proved otherwise with the unforeseen arrival of Ash Dieback and the remarkably vigorous growth of those trees which have germinated naturally. In a mere decade we have two published analyses. What a pity that John did not live to see these results of his foresight and hard work in securing the assart for the Trust.

We have now completed this year's survey. No great surprises, apart from two thorny trees of different species which we did not instantly recognise and had not seen before. They were not in the sampled quadrats but now tall enough to be noticed in passing. We will, of course, check but we think these trees are *Malus plumila* and *Pyrus pyraeaster*. Browsing deer seem to select less common species preferentially - perhaps it is to vary their diet. We suspect the reason that these two trees have survived and flourished is that they are thorny. In the sample plots there has, again, been very little germination. Only Oak showed a slight increase. Other species have declined slightly, although it is possible that we have missed a few very small seedlings under the thickening mass of herbaceous vegetation. We have never done a full survey of the plant life, not just recording species but also recording where in the assart species grow, how dense they are etc. and how this related to germination of trees. We hope to be able to start addressing this next year.

The spatial distribution differs between species. Overall few trees have germinated in the shaded, damp south-east section which is now dominated by herbaceous growth including much knapweed. Oak and Hazel tend to be found near the edges of the assart whereas Hawthorn dominates the central parts.



The image we have chosen at the top of page 1 is that of the only Ash we have found in the assart more than five years old with no sign of Ash Dieback. We hope it will eventually provide the wood with resistant seeds. Look, though, at the twin trunks. Free of disease it may be but it is likely the two trunks result from deer browsing in earlier years.

Over the year, in spite of little germination and continued death of Ash the other species are growing well. Our measure of wood regeneration is a biomass proxy measure, based on the number of trees and their size. The graph shows how this is continuing to increase. If you visit the assart you will appreciate that we now do have established trees rather than just a few little saplings. The gradual loss of ash is now contributing to increased biodiversity by increasing the evenness of the community. The graph shows yet another increase in the measure of diversity (Shannon-Weiner Index).

