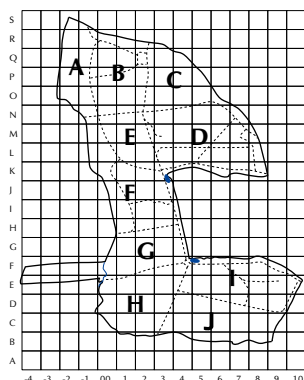


# TWITTER

2003/3

Number 43



Treswell Wood - Information To Tell Every Recorder

**August 2003 Treswell Wood IPM Group**

(Integrated Population Monitoring)

All projects by permission of NWT

**Project leaders:**

**CBC** Margaret Price

**Nest Records** Chris du Feu

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## Nestboxes 2003

The prolonged nesting season has now finished except, perhaps, for some late Stock Dove attempts. Below is a summary of the year's recorded events.

Species	Nests		Eggs laid	Birds			% Success rate	
	Recorded	Successful		Adults on nests	Nestlings fledged	Nestlings recaptured	Nests	Eggs
Stock Dove	14	3	22	-	5	-	21	23
Tawny Owl	3	1	5	-	1	-	33	20
Wren	9	3	39	-	11	1	33	28
Blackbird	3	0	13	-	0	-	0	0
Marsh Tit	1	1	7	1	7	2	100	100
Coal Tit	6	3	54	2	24	-	50	44
Blue Tit	41	12	299	24	68	7	29	23
Great Tit	57	18	327	2	97	7	31	30
Treecreeper	1	0	5	-	0	-	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>7</b>

**Notes:** Nests of Blackbird were open nests found incidentally during the nestbox rounds.

There may be a few later records of Stock Doves or Wrens.

The numbers of nests recorded, for all species, exclude nests which were abandoned before any eggs were laid.

'Nestlings recaptured' includes any recoveries.

## WMD - The Treswell Wood connection

The nesting season began well. All the decaying old dormouse boxes were replaced with a greater number of new boxes, giving a better spread throughout the wood. To match the new boxes, an augmented team of inspectors has been employed (not paid employment, of course). The winter was mild and all was set for a wonderful season of productive nestbox recording, including full recording of the mammal nests in boxes. The team of inspectors was enthusiastic, easy to train, willing and competent. As noted in the previous Twitter, the season started early with our earliest ever ringling of a Stock Dove nestling. What could go wrong?

First, Blue Tit numbers were well down on normal with very few attempting to nest in boxes. Compare this year's total with that of 1995 when the first dormouse boxes were installed in the south of the wood. In the those boxes alone, we recorded a total of 35 Blue Tit nests of which 32 were successful. Other nestbox recorders and ringers in the area also noted the low number of Blue Tits although, like us, they noted a larger number of Great Tits attempting to nest than is usual. Some have also noted the smaller clutches. All other things being equal, low numbers of Blue Tits nesting will lead to larger clutches of eggs. Sadly, all things were not equal and there seemed to be an inadequate food supply even for the low numbers of Blue Tits. This led to far smaller clutches than usual. David Glue wrote some kind words of consolation giving us news from other recorders around the country. He describes a year of mixed fortunes but with many negative points. As far as tits are concerned the dry spring - driest since 1976 - limited growth of some plants and the abundance of some invertebrates. The cold, and often wet, weather in May affected some of the unusually early broods - nestlings demand more work from their parents to keep warm than do eggs. Never mind, smaller clutches will lead to more food for each of the nestlings which hatch and, all other things being equal, nestlings will each have a better chance of survival. Again, all other things were not equal. Enter the Weasels of Mass Destruction. A keeper near to the wood notes that he mounted defensive measures when he found a Grey Partridge nest with 17 eggs - the first nest of this declining species which he had

found for some years. He trapped a total of 17 weasels in this operation. Other ringers locally have not suffered the same massive weasel predation as we have.

Our Prime Minister is right to be concerned with the threat posed by WMD. Although our weekly visit regime did not allow us to determine whether they could be deployed within 45 minutes we can confirm the utter devastation that they can cause. About 70% of our tit nests failed of which 60% fell victim to the WMD compared with a typical 35% failure rate with under half the failures resulting from predation of all sorts. The only real area of disagreement between us and the politicians is the place where WMD would be deployed. They believed it would be Iraq, we know it was Treswell Wood. Perhaps the UN inspectorate would have been better deployed here than in the Middle East. Should we name the keeper who was so effective in hunting the 17 WMD in order to protect the Partridge nest? Would our Prime Minister find use for his talents in the Middle East? Coalition forces were issued with packs of playing cards featuring the supposed villains. To this collection we must add the Brooke Bond tea card featuring our own WMD - it adorns the front cover of this issue.

Why have the weasels had such an impact? Normally we find several bird nests destroyed by wood mice, and these rodents nest in some of our boxes. This year we have had none. The mouse/vole count in the owl nests has been low and owl productivity very low indeed (only one fledged young from three nests). Reports from other ringers in the area tell the same story with low Tawny Owl productivity. If there is a shortage of small rodents, the weasels will have to turn elsewhere for food - small birds and their eggs may not be as heavy as small rodents, but are better than starvation. The future? In the past it was thought that predators controlled prey populations. The reverse probably is more true. If the weasels are suffering a shortage of their normal food, they will suffer low productivity and high mortality. Next year we might have the reverse situation - few weasels but a good year for small rodents and, hopefully, for our box-nesting birds.

Of course, in spite of the depressing nature of recording the death and destruction, it is important that the events are recorded systematically. We will submit a large number of high quality nest records to the BTO Nest Record Scheme. All well documented nest histories - whether recording success or failure - are equally valuable, adding to our knowledge of our bird population processes. In addition, we have recorded very thoroughly the lack of dormouse nests, and have collected used nests for the National Nest Reference Collection and for two researchers who will be examining the invertebrates which inhabit bird nests. All the observations we have made are computerised. Thanks to all those who have contributed to this effort.

In spite of the depressing nest histories, at least one of the inspectors has been inspired to creativity and his thoughts are attached.

The increased number of dormouse boxes (240 in place of 140) and their wider spread (into blocks G, H, Crabtree Holt and in places in blocks A to F) might affect the numbers nesting in the main set of boxes in various ways. John Clark is examining what affects there have been (if any) and we hope to report on this in the next issue. He also hopes to give an account of the success rates of our boxes over the years.

## Publications and analyses using Treswell Wood data

Although ringing birds is undoubtedly enjoyable in itself, the real justification for it must be to gain further understanding of bird populations and their interactions with their environment. With our long-term systematic, computerised dataset we are in a good position to have data which can be used to further this understanding. Fortunately there are other people who are able and willing to use our data in a variety of ways (though we are also doing various analyses ourselves). David Thompson, at the Netherlands Institute of Ecology, has access to a number of long-term data sets about European tit populations including our own. He and his colleagues at the institute are engaged in the European Tit Project which is examining many aspects of tit life processes from a pan-European perspective.

### Set C Dormouse boxes in high summer

*I wandered lonely as a clot*

*What I found, was not a lot.*

*As I stumbled through the bramble,*

*Taut and trippy, 'gainst my scramble,*

*My thoughts turned oft' to Chris du Feu*

*Chief Nest Inspector, as you know.*

*Tits were sometimes on my mind -*

*None of these was I to find -*

*But, so I should not waste the time,*

*I studied close some slug-like slime.*

*"Quails in Wales do not occur" -*

*So birdy twitchers will aver -*

*But slugs in boxes, I have found*

*Like wasps in summer do abound!*

*What a new world to delight!*

*"Molluscs of the world unite"*

*Forget the dormice, flying past*

*Slugs and snails are here to last.*

*John Bartley*

Good news from David is that another paper from the institute - *Climate variation and regional gradients in population dynamics of two hole nesting passerines* - has been accepted for the Proceedings of the Royal Society. He says: *Very pleased to tell you that the latest version of the paper for Proceedings of the Royal Society has been accepted. This is really good news. Proc. Roy. Soc. is a very good journal so this is certainly cause for celebration, and getting Treswell Wood into such journals on two consecutive occasions is a great tribute to all your work over the years. I'm not sure exactly what the publication date will be but we are probably talking about on-line publication within six months and paper publication following shortly after. Will let you know in any case. Best wishes, David.* (The previous paper, which used Treswell data, to be accepted in the Proc. Roy. Soc. was *Variable responses to large-scale climate changes in European Parus populations.*)

But there was more to follow. *Hi Chris - I just returned from holiday and was very pleased to see that Bernt Erik Saether has written a manuscript on another, theoretical, aspect of the project - Time to extinction of bird populations. Treswell Wood has again been included together with a very large number of other studies. Good to see this work all coming to fruition. The intention is to send this in the first instance to Nature. Our chances with Nature are always quite slim, but one must try these things. It will be really excellent if we succeed this time, so fingers crossed. Extinction rates are quite topical at the moment, and this paper has considerable breadth, so we may succeed.*

*Hope life is fine with you folks, and that your season has been going well. We've had a really good summer this year but we had a few days of bucketing rain right at the time when all the chicks were at their most vulnerable so I think not many have broods fledged successfully. Cheers, David*

Coincidentally, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service have, at last, assembled the papers from their conference, some years ago, on Constant Effort Monitoring. Publication is imminent. Our paper, *The relationship of Juveniles Captured in Constant Effort Netting with Local Abundance*, is included in that collection.

## Spots on Wren primary feathers

Ringers will be aware of the copious notes they have made concerning the spots on the fourth primary feather of the Wrens we catch (see Twitter 5). Our aim is to discover whether the number and pattern of spots can be used to determine the age of the bird reliably. Robin Ward (a ringer who works with the Wildfowl Trust) is rather sceptical about the value of the spots and has accepted the challenge of looking at our several years' worth of data. We (and he) await the outcome with interest. With datasets such as ours where there are many retraps, we can be absolutely sure of the age of many of our recaptured birds. Those ringed as nestlings, or those first trapped in their unmistakable fluffy, warm brown juvenile plumage will be of known age when captured in later years. Birds first ringed as adults captured in later years will also be known to be wearing non-juvenile primary feathers. This means that, for a good number of our recaptured birds, we will know that they are either wearing definite juvenile spots or definite adult spots. Thanks to Robin for rising to the challenge.

## TRAMS II

Neil has produced a supplement to his aide-memoire service which recounts the difficulties of ageing some Dunnocks (watch out for R123871 which is a bird of 2002), R353010 (ringed 2003 but agreed to be aged as 6), R123923 (a bird of 2002). He concludes the notes with these wise words - *These highlight the necessity of referring to the Bible when in doubt. There is no shame in doing this - we can all make mistakes.*

The supplement also compares Marsh and Willow Tits and has a particularly helpful photograph showing the side views of the heads of the two species. It draws attention to the upswept black edge to the Marsh Tit crown, behind the eye and contrasts it with the horizontal edge on the Willow Tit. If you ring in the wood ask Neil or John for your copy.

## Noteworthy Captures

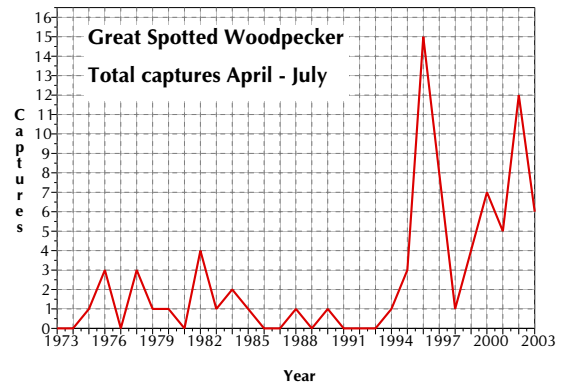
Species	Age/sex	Ring	Date	Grid
<b>Sparrowhawk</b>	<b>5M</b>	<b>DA87115</b>	<b>27/07/2003</b>	<b>H04</b>

Although we see now Sparrowhawks fairly frequently in the wood this is our first capture of a bird of this species since 31/12/2002. It was an unringed male.

<b>Great Spotted Woodpecker</b>	<b>4M</b>	<b>RR11975</b>	<b>23/07/2003</b>	<b>Q02 Feeder</b>
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We have enjoyed a large number of Great Spotted Woodpecker captures, mostly at the feeder although some elsewhere. Indeed, this bird's previous capture (25/05/2003 as a breeding female) was further south in the wood (I04). All her 10 other previous captures were at the feeder, beginning in November 2001. This suggests she is a frequent user of the feeder but her nesting area is further south in the wood. We have evidence of a number of passerines - mostly tits - which commute long distances within the wood to use the feeders. This is the first non-passerine to be found doing so.

Our other Great Spotted Woodpecker captures have included breeding adult males and females together with a number of juveniles. During the season we have observed at least 3 of their nests around the wood - it looks like being a good year for them. In earlier issues of Twitter we tried to include details of all non-passerines captured. The rather larger number of this species which we have captured has caused a revision of this practice. The numbers we have caught from April to July are illustrated. Although we have not had a record number of captures, the general trend is certainly strongly upwards. Great Spotted Woodpeckers have played only a small part in the tit nest failure with the destruction of one Great Tit nest in a box on a tree close to a tree holding a Woodpecker nest.



**Wren**                                **5F**                **1M1284**        **22/06/2003**        **N07**

Because we ring only a few Wrens in the nest, it is always rewarding to retrap one of them. This bird was ringed in the nest (box 23, Q00 in 2002) and is now in breeding condition under 500 metres from her natal site.

**Blackbird**                            **6F**                **RR11953**        **22/06/2003**        **N01**

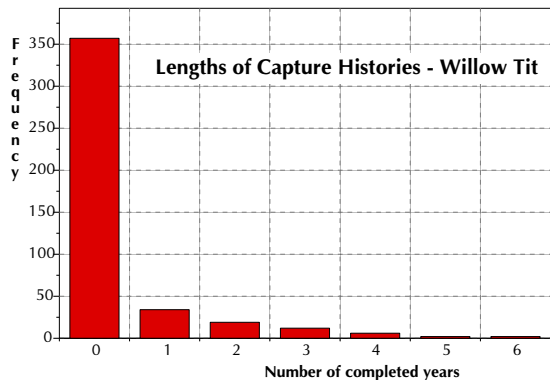
We ringed this bird in February 1999 and retrapped her in May of that year. Since then she has eluded capture until now - a gap of over 4 years. She was retrapped again on 06/07/2003. All her captures have been within 100 metres of her first capture.

**Marsh Tit**                            **3J**                **R558036**        **08/06/2003**        **Q02 Feeder**

Our very first recaptured nestbox bird of the year, one of its siblings (R558037) was also retrapped at the same time. These were very pleasing recaptures, not just for being the first but also because we have only enjoyed a single Marsh Tit nest this year. These captures confirm the survival of at least two in the most dangerous immediate post-fledging period.

**Willow Tit**                            **4M**                **N305744**        **08/06/2003**

Our sixth longest capture history for a Willow Tit. He was ringed 4 years and 311 days earlier and now has a 30-capture history. Ringed as a juvenile in August 1998, he has always been recaptured in blocks A or B. Today's capture was in R-2, in the far north-west corner of his known range. This is a rather smaller area than some of our Willow Tits rove around, perhaps he could range into the hedgerows to the north west of the wood. The Treswell Wood Willow Tit longevity record of 6 years 120 days is held by A213029 who was present from 1979 to 1985. The lengths of capture histories are illustrated in the figure.



**Blue Tit**                                **6F**                **P400700**        **14/05/2003**        **P00 On nest**

The second year in which this female has nested in box 32. In addition she has also been found roosting in the same box and mist netted nearby too. Her nest this year was destroyed by predators although last year's was successful. In both years she laid 10 eggs of which 9 hatched. On average, clutches this year have been much smaller than usual. This bird, however, managed to maintain her egg laying performance.

**Blue Tit**                                **3J**                **R558054**        **15/06/2003**        **L04**

The first recapture of one of our relatively few fledged Blue Tits of the year. Unlike the juvenile Great Tits, which seem to take advantage of the feeders, Blue Tits seem to be retrapped more widely in the wood. This bird was ringed in H03, fairly close to this recapture position.

**Great Tit**                              **6F**                **P400741**        **20/07/2003**        **F07**

We first trapped this bird in spring 2002 and noted her very grey plumage. This was described in Twitter 37 (May 2002). This is her second recapture this year. Although it was noted that her plumage was less colourful than typical on a female Great Tit, it was not outstandingly obvious as it had been the year before. Most of the tits moult into a brighter plumage in their first complete moult at the age of about 15 months. It seems that only her first adult plumage was almost grey. Her full adult plumage is more nearly normal.

**Great Tit**                      **4F**                      **VV92989**                      **25/05/2003**                      **D08 On nest**

Birds ringed as nestlings can throw light on our understanding of post-natal and breeding dispersal. Compare the history of this bird, which moved all of 600 metres from her natal nestbox to her first breeding site with the movement of VT30912 which moved nearly 200 times as far (see page 6). VV92989 is the only one of our nestling-ringed Great Tits which we have recorded on a nest this year.

**Blackcap**                      **4F**                      **P400433**                      **08/06/2003**                      **R00**

Returning Blackcaps are often retrapped very close to their original point of capture. This bird is an exception having been ringed in E00 in 2001, not caught in 2002 and now retrapped in the far north of the wood.

**Blackcap**                      **4M**                      **R123919**                      **06/07/2003**                      **N01**

We ringed this as a juvenile nearby (K04) in August 2002, still in its juvenile plumage. Often birds disperse some way from their natal site - this one has returned or else had already dispersed rapidly by the time we ringed it last summer.

**Garden Warbler**                      **4**                      **R502606**                      **25/05/2003**                      **F04**

This was our first capture of this species this year. It was an adult in breeding condition - the sex of the bird was not certain as both sexes in this species develop large brood patches and the plumages are also indistinguishable. Although Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps continue to be caught in good numbers, this warbler seems to be down in numbers.

**Willow Warbler**                      **3J**                      **AJD221**                      **27/07/2003**                      **K03**

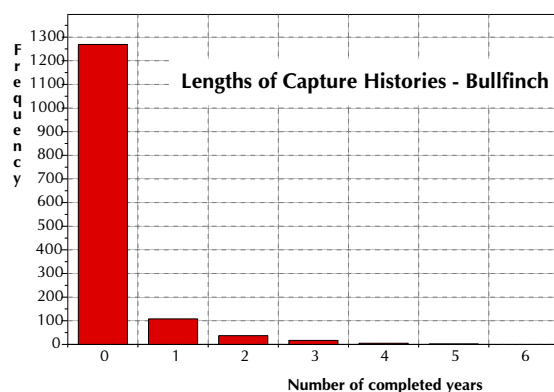
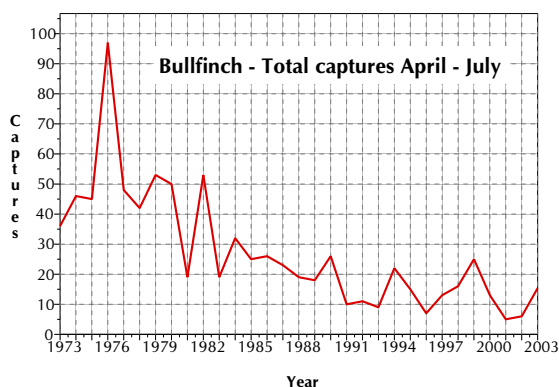
One of three juvenile Willow Warblers trapped today. These were our first captures of this species this year. Although they were in the area of the wood where adults had been singing earlier, it is by no means certain that they are juveniles reared in the wood. They were well grown and already in post-juvenile moult (by which time post-fledging dispersal is under way). We have yet to catch an adult Willow Warbler this year. This is in line with other places where this species (and Garden Warblers too) appear to be down in numbers. Treswell Wood has little prime Willow Warbler habitat at present, so our numbers have been very badly reduced - there have been only a handful of singing males within block G.

**Chaffinch**                      **4M**                      **N305552**                      **27/07/2003**                      **G04**

Although apparently a very old bird, this is only our 9th longest recapture history for any Chaffinch. Unusually it had not been retrapped at all since it was ringed by Ulli as a juvenile in November 1997 under 150 metres from where we retrapped it. (The Chaffinch was the juvenile, not Ulli.) Only one of the other very long lived birds has so few captures. The interval of 5 years and 240 days between the two captures, however, is the second longest of any of our Chaffinches. For the record, our longest recapture history is for KR03217 ringed in 1978 and last retrapped in 1987, 8 years and 168 days later.

**Bullfinch**                      **4M**                      **N305809**                      **01/06/2003**                      **D04**

After their serious decline over recent years, there seems to be at least a halt, if not a slight recovery. The sad history of our Bullfinch numbers is illustrated below. On the brighter side, this is a golden oldie at 4 years and 248 days since ringing with no recaptures in between. It was ringed in September 1998 as a juvenile and has the third longest recapture history for any of our Bullfinches (although with only two captures it cannot be described as a very full history). We have retrapped a handful of other vintage Bullfinches recently, but none quite as old as this. The lengths of capture histories of all our Bullfinches are illustrated in the second figure.



**Jay**                                **6F**        **DA20230**    **01/06/2003**    **D04**

Our first Jay since January 2002. It was ringed 18 months earlier a mere 150 metres away in G04.

## Controls and recoveries

**Species**                                **Age/sex**                                **Ring**                                **Date**                                **Grid**

**Blue Tit**                                **6F**                                **P400563**                                **28/05/2003**                                **O03 On nest**

A casualty of WMD. We ringed her as a juvenile at the end of 2001 and she nested in a box in O03 in 2002, where her brood was destroyed by a weasel. She escaped but was killed this year on her nest. Two seasons' hard work for a total lifetime productivity of zero.

**Blue Tit**                                **5F**                                **R558024**                                **21/05/2003**                                **F07 On nest**

Another WMD casualty. Unlike P400563, this bird was ringed at her nest only a week earlier in her first breeding season. Like P400563 she also departs with a lifetime production of zero.

**Great Tit**                                **4M**                                **P400739**                                **31/12/2002**                                **Lound, near Retford**

This bird was ringed on 14/04/2002 apparently one of our spring influx of birds. Members of North Notts. Ringing Group recaptured it at Lound in the winter and, since then, we have retrapped it again in the wood (09/02/2003). It appears that it is behaving as a short-distance migrant.

**Great Tit**                                **VT30912**                                **5F**                                **06/04/2003**                                **B03**

Although we have enjoyed a number of reports of our nestling ringed Great Tits from elsewhere, this is only the second nestling ringed bird from elsewhere that we have trapped in the wood. Like its predecessor, it has travelled some distance to be with us. It was ringed at Pitsford Reservoir, Northamptonshire in May 2002, 109 km away. The last BTO Annual Ringing report (for 2002) noted that few Great Tits have been recorded as moving over 100 km and listed the year's 'bumper crop' of only four nationally. The previous nestling-ringed Great Tit we trapped in the wood was in 1985, an export from Chris Whittles in Shropshire.

**Greenfinch**                                **VX04600**                                **6M**                                **30/03/2003**                                **Q02 Feeder**

This bird was ringed in Bray, County Wicklow, Eire as an adult male on 09/12/2000. It is worth studying the species account for Greenfinch in the Migration Atlas in order to appreciate the unusual nature of this movement. Of the 5000 Greenfinches which have been recorded in the south-eastern quarter of the UK in the breeding season and ringed, controlled or recovered in an earlier or later winter, the vast majority have been recorded within the same region or close to it. Only two other Greenfinches in this cohort have been recorded in the winter in Ireland.

## 10 Week Summary - Captures in Standard Sites

2003 Interval 3, Visits 1597, 1591, 1592, 1593, 1590, 1594, 1596

	New Birds			Recaptures			Total
	Adult	5	3	Adult	5	3	
Gt. Spotted Woodpecker	.	.	.	1	.	.	1
Wren	2	4	9	2	6	.	23
Dunnock	5	2	.	6	3	.	16
Robin	.	6	18	2	4	1	31
Blackbird	3	2	2	5	1	.	13
Song Thrush	.	2	.	.	2	.	4
Garden Warbler	2	.	.	.	.	.	2
Blackcap	2	6	.	3	3	.	14
Chiffchaff	.	5	1	1	.	.	7
Long-tailed Tit	.	.	2	1	.	.	3
Marsh Tit	.	.	1	.	.	.	1
Willow Tit	.	.	.	1	.	.	1
Coal Tit	.	.	2	.	.	.	2
Blue Tit	.	1	.	.	2	1	4
Great Tit	.	1	1	2	1	1	6
Treecreeper	.	.	6	2	.	.	8
Jay	.	.	.	1	.	.	1
Chaffinch	1	1	.	.	.	.	2
Bullfinch	.	5	.	1	1	.	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>146</b>