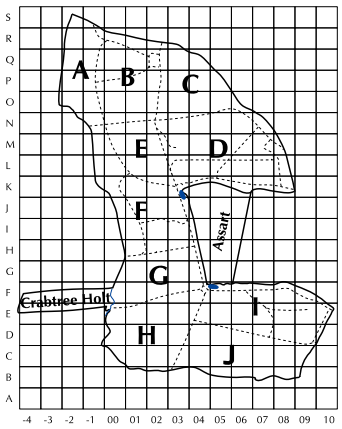


TWITTER

Treswell **W**ood - **I**nformation **T**o **T**ell **E**very **R**ecorder

May 2025 Treswell Wood IPM Group

(Integrated Population Monitoring)

Project leaders:

CBC	Ellen Marshall
Nest Records	Chris du Feu
Ringing	John Clark

2025/2

Number 152

www.treswellwoodipmg.org

Once again it is weather that is having a disruptive influence. Two weekends were missed in late March because of wind and rain. Catches initially seemed to be on the low side but did improve so that the total of 121 captures in the standard sites is just a whisker above the long-term average. In spite of the rain, we completed the necessary standard site visits with one week in hand. After the rain and wind came the lack of rain. What effect this will have on the breeding birds is unpredictable and it could well be different on the early, single-brooded tits and other species which nest later and are multiple brooded. The immediate consequence for ringers is that wellingtons are no longer needed in Nightingale Ride - it is walkable in trainers.

Drought conditions are widely predicted for the summer. During the drought of 1976 very large numbers of birds were caught coming to drink at the pond. Many were juvenile warblers and finches. Whether the same could happen this year will depend on how much water remains in the pond. In 1976 it had been newly excavated. Now it is far shallower because of growth of the various plants such as yellow flag present in abundance. The pond now does not have the same large open surface area and not so easy for birds to see.

Nesting by tits seemed to be early and with rather more nests than usual. Broods seem, on average, both large and healthy. Perhaps most noticeable is the compactness of the season with large numbers of nestling tits needing to be ringed within the space of a very few days. It will not be until the end of the nesting season that we can be sure what the real picture has been.

We did find one Tawny Owl nest but it seems that, most unusually, that nest has been usurped by Stock Doves. Normally there is little contest - the Tawny Owls win.

Feedback from readers, the Assart and an apology

Rob Atkinson, who used to manage Treswell Wood, pointed out that the last issue of TWITTER contained some mis-information which he thought should be corrected. In this Trumpian era, I think it should be called 'alternative truth' rather than mis-information and Rob, below gives the non-alternative truth. My apologies for the inadvertent promulgation of incorrect information and thanks to Rob for his contribution.

Rob wrote:

Interesting to read the Twitter as ever, a fine publication. However, I noticed it is following a modern trend of spreading mis-information which I thought I would correct for you. The two oak trees in the mown section of the assart were not planted. These trees were self-set and already present when the Trust purchased the land. I placed a protective fence around them to prevent them from being mowed. I intended these trees eventually to become wide open-crowned trees on the open ground as there are no such trees in the wood and those on the rest of the assart will eventually be crowded out. Open grown trees give another dimension to the site and attract a different suite of invertebrate and other wildlife. I hope these trees will be allowed to flourish in the location they chose themselves.

I thanked Rob immediately:

Dear Rob, Many thanks for pointing out that grievous error. I had always understood they had been planted. I will correct it in the next issue. I realised they were not all that likely to grow as tall and straight as trees in a more closed situation. Even so, the odd thing is how they still do not appear as vigorous as those in the non-meadow assart. I wonder if they suffer from the wind as it sweeps across the vast plain which is the meadow whereas the other trees are protected to some extent from the wind by the annual plant growth?

Chris

Rob, quite rightly could not resist replying and said:

Yes I agree they seemed to have grown very slowly, although the far one seemed better established when I last saw it.

These trees germinated when David Bell had the land and originally there were hundreds of them spread across the field, about 3 or 4 years before the Trust acquired the land. I believe they took advantage of the open soil from his last crop and successfully covered the field with the help of Jays. David Bell did not seed the area. He just left it to the weeds, such as these oaks and grasses etc. However, he did mow it and I believe this mowing must have killed many of the young oaks as I only found about 4 on the currently mowed area, of which two are the ones we are discussing and are protected and remain. The mowing may also have retarded these trees as I am sure he ran over them at least once with the mower.

The majority of the diversity on the assart has found its own way there, but I did spread some seed collected from Ashton's Meadow on it on one occasion and some green hay from a very diverse strip of grassland on the edge of Gamston Wood.

Most of the oaks on the rest of the assart are from the same period as the ones we are discussing. New oaks would have been unlikely germinating at the period the Trust got the land as they would struggle to establish through the thick grass sward that is there. Others may come if bramble thickets establish and protect them. None of the trees on the assart are planted, except the hedge along the east boundary.

I should also mention that mowing grass around trees is well know to inhibit their growth. Cut grass takes more water and nutrients as it regrows. While uncut grass also competes with the trees, it has much less need to replace itself and take resource in the process.

John McMeeking used to say *What is recorded is history; what is not is mystery.* Thanks to Rob for turning this mystery into history.

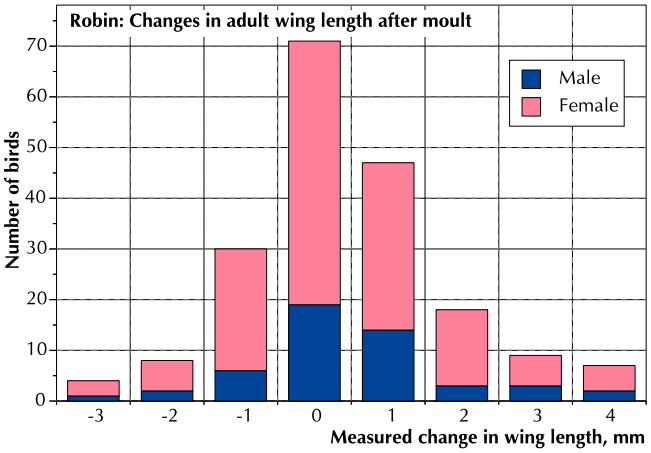
Wing length changes over time

John Marchant, who used to prepare our CBC territory maps before he retired from the BTO, raised some very simple questions in the previous issue of TWITTER. It is well known that juvenile wing lengths tend to be noticeably shorter than those of adults and the increase in length takes place at the first full moult which, for most small passerines, is in the summer of their second calendar year. John wondered if wing lengths of adults tend to become longer with successive moults.

Many things determine the wing length. One major factor is the food supply at the time of moulting. For example, Ted Cowley found that Sand Martins returned with newly moulted, shorter wings if there had been a drought year in their wintering quarters. Typically changes in wing length in adults will be very small at best. Even small between-person variation in wing measuring technique may be greater than an actual change in wing length. What is needed is a large data set which includes wing lengths of individuals measured with two successive suits of primary feathers.

Naturally we have the data accumulated in our half century of ringing. What is lacking is time to do a full analysis. We have looked at just one species - Robin. It was probably useful to use birds of known sex only because males are, on average, larger than females. What do we find?

Of over 9,000 Robin captures we are only able to use those where an adult of known sex had been captured on at least two occasions with a full moult in between, and where the wing had been measured on both occasions. First we checked to see how much difference the time of year made - wings become abraded as time passes so can be shorter in the summer than when newly moulted the autumn before. We do not record wing lengths where feathers are so badly abraded as to affect the measured wing length. Happily the changes caused by abrasion were so small that we did not need to make any correction for date of capture. Captures of juveniles and those in their first breeding season were excluded because John's question was about changes in wing length after birds have undergone their first full adult moult. Data for repeat captures of the same bird with the same suit of feathers had to be removed. The data set was reduced to 50 female and 144 male differences. And, yes, on average they do grow longer feathers after their first complete moult. The difference was statistically significant but, probably, not at all significant as far as the bird is concerned. The average increase in males was a little over 0.4mm per moult and females by a little under 0.4mm.



Whereas differences between juvenile and adult wing lengths are often noticeable these small average adult differences are masked in individuals by variations caused by environmental conditions at the time of moult

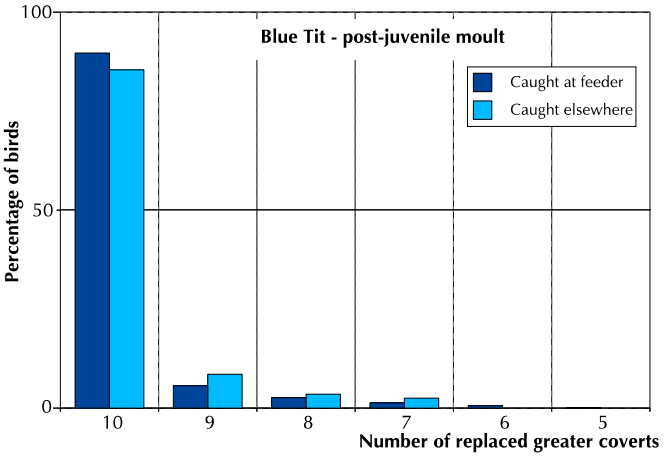
and are all subject to measurement error by ringers.

It is worth noting how few records were available for analysis compared with the 9,000 encounter records we hold. Large, long-term data sets are required for this sort of analysis. Of course, Robin is not the only species we record so the way is open for a student project to look at the question for other species.

Bird feeders and bird condition

John Marchant had also wondered whether bird feeders tended to attract less-fit birds because the fitter birds could find adequate natural supplies and might prevent less fit birds from using them. How do you measure fitness? One approach is to look at birds in their first year and see how many of the 10 juvenile wing covert feathers had been replaced during the autumn moult. The underlying assumption is that the fitter birds would replace more feathers. Beyond the greater coverts is the alula - three small feathers which serve the same purpose as leading edge slats on aircraft wings (but have been used by birds for rather longer than they have been used on aeroplanes). Again, more replaced alula feathers would go with fitter birds. All that need be done is compare the numbers of these feathers replaced on birds caught at the feeding station with those caught elsewhere.

Some years ago a Nottingham student project using our data showed, to our surprise at the time, that feeder tits tended to breed and survive less successfully than non-feeder tits. That was in line with John's thoughts about use of feeders. The result of this examination of moult of these covert feathers is not very clear at all. The differences between the two classes of birds in the number of these moulted coverts are not statistically significant. Feeder birds, in fact, had moulted slightly more greater coverts, on average 9.83 compared to 9.77 for non-feeder birds. The alula feather replacement is a number in the range 0 to 3. Again the feeder birds scored slightly higher, on average 1.21 compared to 1.18 Does artificial feeding increase the fitness of birds? It is not clear even from this long-term data set, even if more covert replacement does indicate fitter birds.



This inconclusive result is much in line with a larger, but short term, national study a few years ago. More investigation is needed into the cause of variation in the extent of moult of these coverts and the value to individuals of undergoing more extensive moult.

Noteworthy Encounters

Species	Age/Sex	Ring	Date	Grid

Sparrowhawk **5M** **DT21921** **27/04/2025** **N07**

The third non-passerine species to add to this spring's catch. As usual for this species (although any capture of this species in the wood can hardly be called 'usual') it was a young male.

Woodcock **6** **DT21920** **16/03/2025** **R-2**

We see Woodcock from time to time particularly in the autumn and winter when birds migrate from north-eastern Europe. We rarely catch them - this is only the 13th adult we have ringed. Sometimes they breed in the wood and we have ringed eight pulli over the years. Of these 21 birds we have had subsequent reports of four of them, three shot very locally and another shot in Wellow Park, 14km SSW. This is a shooting recovery rate of 19% - legal, but very sad.

Woodpigeon **6** **FS5233** **04/05/2025** **G04**

Woodpigeons usually stick to the tree tops in the wood so captures of this very familiar, and to many people unwelcome, species are very few. Woodpigeons are large, obvious and a legal quarry species often shot in the cause of crop protection. We should really expect a fairly high recovery rate for the species. However of 130 ringed in the wood only five have been recovered through shooting. This rate of under 4% compares badly with those I ringed in Beckingham with a 30 out of 302 reported as shot - a recovery rate of 10%

Marsh Tit **5F** **AEZ3747** **20/04/2025** **M03**

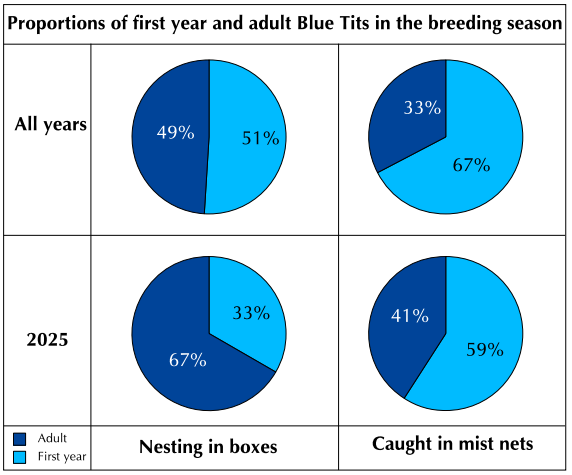
Marsh Tits have become disappointingly infrequent over the past 18 months - this is just one of two we have caught after October 2024. However since being ringed as a juvenile in July 2024 we have retrapped this one frequently. On this occasion it was in breeding condition, probably on eggs somewhere. Alas it is not nesting in one of our boxes but, at least, it is nesting.

Blue Tit 6F AKX1238 06/04/2025 K03

We last saw this bird in late March last year and it had been ringed in Finningley, 22km NNW from the wood, in October 2023. Apologies for omitting to report it in the subsequent issue of TWITTER. However, after not seeing it again it is still here and in breeding condition.

Blue Tit 6F ANA7640 30/04/2025 E02 On nest

We have caught 27 Blue Tits incubating eggs this year. Our feeling was that there was a higher than normal proportion of older birds in boxes. This is the oldest Blue Tit we have recorded this year now seven years since it fledged and over six since we first caught it. It has nested in boxes in the far south of the wood every year from 2019 except possibly in 2022 when we did not manage find it sitting. This year is rather different from typical. The proportion of first year birds is much lower than average - that suggests low over-winter survival of juveniles, or high winter survival of adults which are well-enough established in the wood to deter newcomers. It seems that the proportion of older birds is always higher in boxes than in the general woodland. Again this suggests older birds are enjoying security of tenure at the expense of younger birds. Typically about half the nesting birds are adults. This year it is two thirds. That contrasts vividly with the picture from mist netting with only 40% of the birds being adults.

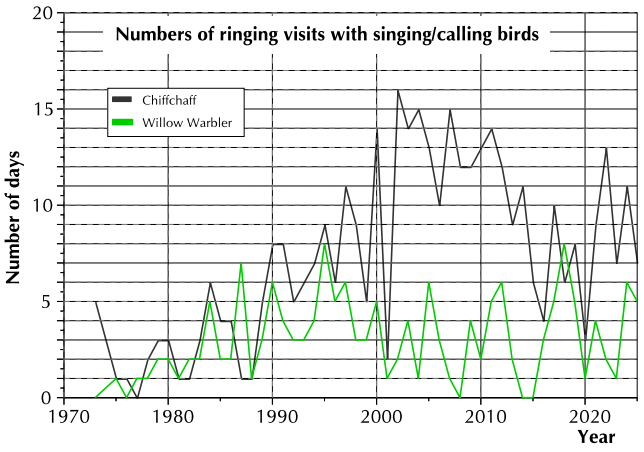


Willow Warbler 4 RCA540 13/04/2025 B03

With this single capture we equalled last year's totals captures for this species. In recent years our very few captures have generally been of juveniles in early autumn as they gradually filter southwards through the country. This one is an early arrival, not yet in breeding condition. Maybe some will remain to breed rather than being just migrants on their way further north. Below is a graph showing how many times have recorded them in the wood during our ringing sessions. (A pity we do not catch as many as we hear.)

Chiffchaff 4M PNR016 06/04/2025 M00

Our first Chiffchaff retrap of the year. We ringed it last June as an adult. This year it was captured a mere 5 nets along the same standard site. We also retrapped PNR007 first caught just under a year ago about 350m away. Chiffchaff numbers in the wood have mirrored Willow Warbler numbers. Note that numbers in the very early years are probably unrepresentatively low because we were not so thorough at recording birds seen or heard as we have been since. The increase during the 1990s coincided with the decrease in Willow Warblers with a subsequent decline. After the decline from the mid 1990s it seems they may be increasing again. It would be tempting to suggest that the two species fill the same ecological niche and so compete with one another, keeping the total population fairly constant. It is far more likely that the numbers in the wood are governed by regional and national trends.



Blackcap 4F AEZ3937 20/04/2025 M03

The first Blackcap of the year is always a special moment. John McMeeking used to take special delight in it so we ensured he always processed the year's first. (Possibly his affection for them resulted from a capture in1977 of a bird he had ringed in his garden in Bleasby the year before. In those days rings used in the wood were John's personal rings so it was not realised until some time later that the ring had not been used in the wood.) Often our first Blackcap is also a retrap from an earlier year - alas not so this year. We had to wait until May 4th for AEZ3663 to arrive having been ringed a year less a day earlier and, of course, captured in the same run of nets as last year.

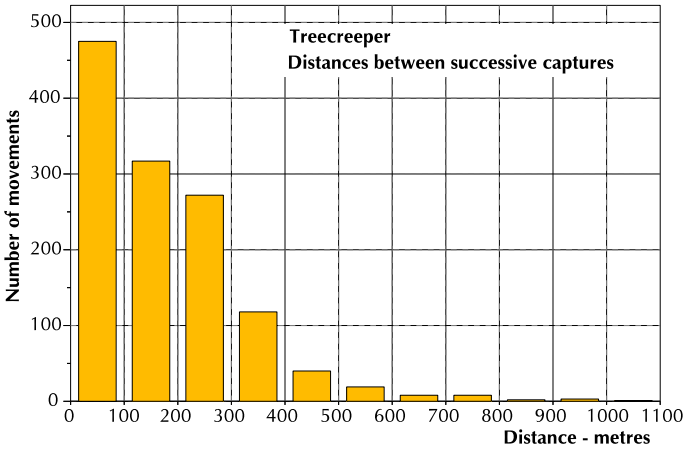
Blackcap 4M AEZ3665 11/05/2005 D07

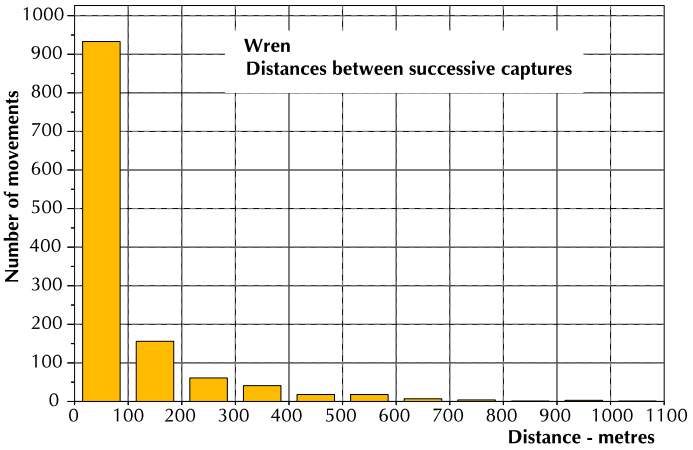
Our second retrapped Blackcap from a previous year. It arrived with buff rather than grey alula feathers and a very worn tail. In the past those were often regarded as clear signs of a bird in its first breeding season. A quick check of

the ringing history showed it not to be so. The new edition of Svensson still shows the tail feather as an ageing criterion but qualified with the word 'generally' and notes that some individuals cannot be aged. On the other hand Demongin and Jenni & Winkler all say that tail feather shape is no guide to ageing and is very variable in adults and young alike. Just as well we looked up this one's history as other birds on the same day showed the same features - all unageable. Perhaps the faded alula resulted from exposure to unusually strong sunlight in their wintering grounds further south. Certainly pointed tail feathers in Treswell Wood seem to be no guide to ageing Blackcaps. Perhaps rounded tail feathers might still be used to indicate adulthood?

Treecreeper 6M DRA462 11//05/2025 D09

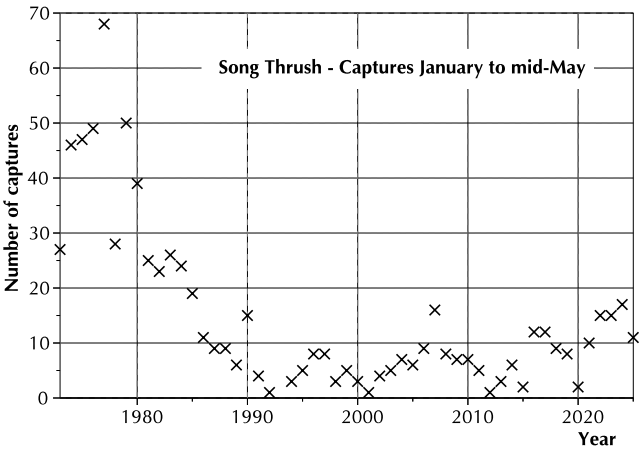
Treecreepers normally range widely but within a restricted area of the wood. Like Marsh Tits and Willow Tits in the past, Norman's Ride (grids H00 to H04) seems to be a demarcation line between the northern and southern birds. However, unlike the similarly sized Wren,Treecreepers do not normally restrict their movement to a small area of the wood. The charts show what we call the movement profiles of Treecreepers and Wrens. This is the distribution of all movements between one capture and the next for all non-juvenile birds since we began ringing. The average movements are 55 m for Wrens and 129 m for Treecreepers. If we looked just at movements within or between, breeding seasons the Wren average would be even lower. But birds are individuals and this particular Treecreeper behaving more like an extremely sedentary Wren. Three captures last year were under 100 metres apart and this years capture is under 100 m further down the ride.





Song Thrush 6M RX91285 11/05/2025 D09

Song Thrushes seem to be more common now than they have been over recent years. So far this year we have caught 12. Of the 12 birds only two have been recaptures. This one is a retrap from Spring 2022 with a several captures to its credit in 2024. It is now in its 4th breeding season. Our capture numbers over the years, for January to mid-May are shown in the graph. The general slow recovery since the very low numbers after 1990 seems to be continuing. Will we ever again see the numbers rise to what they were like in the 1970s?

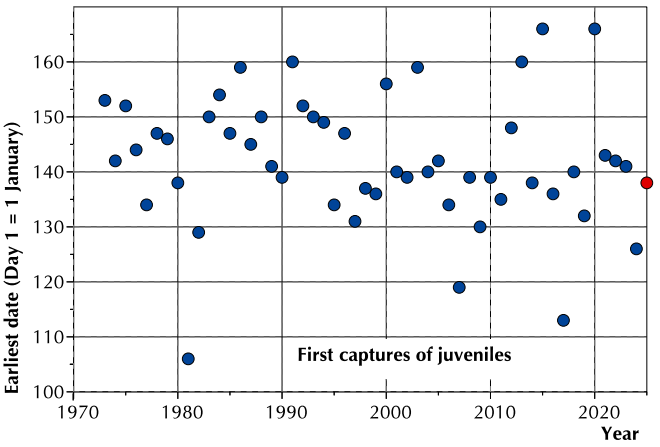


The graph probably underestimates the recovery because these numbers relate to all mist-net captures, not just standard site captures. In recent years we have not managed to set as many extra nets as in the past and that must have reduced numbers caught. Including only standard site captures would exclude the early years before we began standard site operations when Song Thrushes were far, far more numerous.

Mistle Thrush 5 LK39433 16/3/2025 R-1

How often do we catch Mistle Thrushes and Woodcock on the same day? Just once in over 50 years. This was one of two caught together. Catching a Mistle Thrush is special - a once every three years event. They are very handsome birds in the hand and the variety they bring is excellent for trainees (and for experienced ringers too). But two on one day? How common is that? Our records show that if we catch one then it is quite probable that we will catch another on the same day, indeed like these two, they may often be caught at the same time. We have caught Mistle Thrushes on only 18 of our 2,757 ringing visits. However, on six of these we have caught two birds.

Robin 3J AEZ3962 18/05/2025 H01



The first juvenile capture of the year is always an eagerly awaited event. This bird is the winner. We know so well how climate change is bringing events forward as time goes on. This bird was caught on May 18th which is day 138 of the year. The graph shows our first juvenile dates from our first full ringing year in 1973 with this bird's point standing out in red. The line of best fit shows a very shallow decline but is not plotted as it barely registers on the statistical significance scale. In fact this year is the 13th earliest. What is far more obvious from the graph is the immense between-year variation with no consistent runs of more than three years. Why? The first capture event is a single point, as opposed to an average value. This point is influenced by many factors - changes in breeding populations, short periods of cold weather in a generally early spring which may delay nesting by several days, predator activity particularly in the early part of the season when open nests are easier to find and the fact that we tend to mist net no more than once every seven days. There is a great deal of statistical truth in the saying *One Swallow does not make a summer*. Similarly, but less memorable, *One juvenile does not indicate the earliness of the season.*

Our usual, useful measure of earliness of season is that of the median first egg date. Use of the median eliminates the variation caused by the exceptionally early individuals. Unlike the mean it is not affected by the long statistical tail of very late breeders or the occasional second clutches. However we can only use this as a measure for the Blue and Great Tits for which we have sufficient data.

10-Week Summary: 2025 Interval 2, Captures in Standard Sites

	New Birds			Recaptures			Total
	Adult	5	3	Adult	5	3	
Sparrowhawk	.	1	.	.	.	.	1
Woodcock	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
Woodpigeon	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
Blue Tit	1	.	.	3	7	.	11
Great Tit	.	1	.	1	5	.	7
Long-tailed Tit	.	.	.	1	.	.	1
Willow Warbler	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
Chiffchaff	9	.	.	2	.	.	11
Blackcap	10	3	.	2	.	.	15
Wren	1	7	.	4	4	.	16
Nuthatch	.	.	.	.	1	.	1
Treecreeper	.	1	.	5	2	.	8
Blackbird	3	.	.	5	1	.	9
Song Thrush	1	5	.	3	.	.	9
Mistle Thrush	1	1	.	.	.	.	2
Robin	2	7	.	7	1	.	17
Dunnock	2	2	.	3	.	.	7
Chaffinch	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
Bullfinch	.	2	.	.	.	.	2
Totals	**34**	**30**	**.**	**36**	**21**	**.**	**121**

Standard Site Totals in 10-week periods - 10-year Averages

Standard site netting began in 1978

1978 - 1987	90	113	182	140	130	655
1988 - 1997	86	107	170	149	127	637
1998 - 2007	99	107	134	134	125	597
2008 - 2017	93	133	151	109	120	606
2018 - 2024	97	133	174	113	129	658