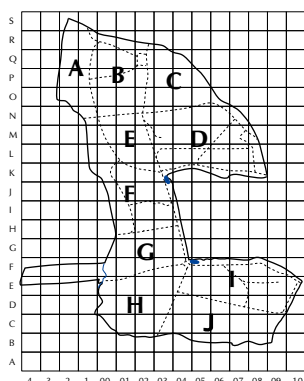


TWITTER



Treswell Wood - Information To Tell Every Recorder

July 2010 Treswell Wood IPM Group

(Integrated Population Monitoring)

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Project leaders:

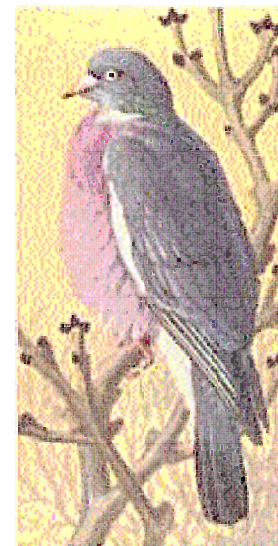
CBC Pat Quinn-Catling

Nest Records Chris du Feu

Ringing John Clark & John McMeeking

2010/3

Number 78



The 2010 breeding season

After the long, hard winter small-bird populations are lower than they have been for some years. At first glance, that might seem bad news for birds. However, the natural world is not simple. Lower populations give more resources per remaining breeding pair and less time need be spent on defending territories. The cold winter has also been fatal to many small mammals, including nest-depredating wood mice and weasels. The result has been that those tits which have survived have been able to enjoy much higher success rates than they have in recent years. There are exceptions - the length of the winter meant that the early nesting birds had a poor start - Long-tailed Tits are still very few in number and we have not yet seen any of this year's juveniles. Coal Tits were absent from the nest boxes and, from the few juveniles we have retrapped subsequently, it seems that only late broods were successful. The age structure of the Blue Tit population, as judged by the nesting females we trapped, had a much higher proportion of first-breeding season birds and also a much higher proportion of birds new to the wood than usual. Is it possible that older birds, who knew the wood, tended to remain in the wood through the winter and suffered high mortality? Woodland may be colder and have less food than villages and towns where food is artificially provided. Young birds from elsewhere may have survived in these human habitats and dispersed after the winter to a prime breeding habitat, now largely free from former residents. Woodland provides the caterpillar crops that are vital for successful rearing of the young. Possibly, with the later spring, the timing of nesting, leafing and caterpillar hatching may have been more helpfully synchronised than in recent years with their short, mild winters.

Events in Nestboxes - Treswell Wood, 2010

Species	Nests		Eggs laid	Birds			% Success Rate	
	Recorded	Successful		Adults caught on nests	Nestlings fledged	Nestlings recaptured (to Sept. 1)	Nests	Eggs
Stock Dove*	8	3	17	.	5	.	38	29
Tawny Owl	2	1	5	2	1	.	50	20
<i>Green Woodpecker</i>	1	1	(4)	.	(4)	1	.	.
<i>Wren</i>	3	1	6	.	6	.	33	100
<i>Song Thrush</i>	5	0	18	.	0	.	0	0
<i>Blackbird</i>	3	1	12	.	4	0	33	33
Marsh Tit	3	3	25	2	23	9	100	92
Blue Tit	24	19	214	15	161	15	79	75
Great Tit	63	51	477	6	335	121	81	70
Totals								
2010	112	80	778	25	539	146	71	69
2009	118	54	648	26	300	38	46	46
2008	108	29	589	22	139	17	27	24
2007	129	64	922	52	313	35	50	34
2006	175	37	885	31	225	33	21	25
2005	153	49	852	47	245	22	32	29
2004	141	94	917	41	538	41	67	59
2003	133	41	769	29	213	17	31	28

Notes: Nests of species in italics were open nests found incidentally during the nestbox rounds. The numbers of nests recorded, for all species, exclude nests which were abandoned before any eggs were laid.

* Some Stock Dove nests still active.

Great Tits have enjoyed an unprecedentedly successful season in the wood. Unlike Coal and Blue Tits, the number of breeding attempts in boxes is slightly higher than last year and continues the long term trend of increase relative to Blue Tits. This slightly increased number of attempts has had an 81% success rate - much higher than last year's rate of only 47%. The resulting number fledged is the highest ever and vastly greater than the niggardly 65 fledged in 1979 when we first had nestboxes. Great Tit juveniles seem to use the feeding station in the wood very soon after fledging, unlike Blue Tits which do not use it so rapidly or in such great numbers. We have had some spectacularly large captures of flocks of juvenile Great Tits - many of our nestbox-ringed birds but also some unringed birds from other nests either in the wood or elsewhere nearby. The proportion of our nestlings retrapped, 36%, is very high. The only year in which we enjoyed a higher proportion of our nestling ringed Great Tits recaptured was 1980 when we retrapped nearly 60% of them. However, in that year only 57 fledged and the nestboxes were not spread as far from the feeding station as they are now. It is noticeable, from the recaptures, that birds from the south of the wood do not reach the feeders in such great numbers as those raised nearby. A number of individuals have already built considerable recapture histories, giving an excellent picture of the timing and nature of post-juvenile moult.

Our Tawny Owls have not fared so well. Their staple diet of small mammals has been much reduced by the winter. Breeding success has been very low with only one owl chick fledging in total from two nests. Because Tawny Owls are long-lived, one poor breeding season is not a matter of great long-term concern. Meanwhile, the rodent prey with its short reproductive cycle and relative freedom from weasel predation, should be recovering rapidly.

And the future of the Treswell Wood nestbox bird populations? Peter Wilkinson, well known ringer and former treasurer of the BTO advises 'Never predict; especially the future.'

Consistency of measurements

In an ideal world, all ringers would be absolutely reliable in their measurements of wing length. The world is not ideal and there is both between- and within-ringer variation in measured wing length. Some ringers tend to be 'long' measurers (e.g. JM and RD) and others 'short' (e.g. CD). If all goes well, long and short measurers should not differ, on small birds, by more than 1 mm. We do often compare wing measurements, particularly with newer ringers to try and standardise our techniques. However, doing this does involve increased handling of the bird. Because of the amount of recaptures we have, there is another approach to assessing our own consistency. After the data processing is done, we circulate details of the day's captures to ringers. These details include wing lengths. It is worthwhile to look at your measured wing lengths and compare them with others. If, all other things being equal, your measurements are no shorter than the short measurers and no longer than the long measurers, that is good. If not, then remedial action can be taken. If your measurements vary a great deal and are sometimes above, and sometimes below the long and short respectively, that indicates a need for more consistent measuring technique. Do not be afraid to ask for whatever help is needed.

But, before handing in the permit and saying that wing measurement is something you will never be able to achieve, just remember a few things about wing lengths. Before their first primary moult, birds tend to have shorter wings than full adults. A tit-sized bird might easily be 2 mm longer after its first primary moult. Thereafter wing lengths are likely to creep up very slightly with age. Feathers also wear, so a feather may be a millimetre or so shorter just before moult than it was when new. If a feather is clearly shorter than it should be - very abraded or the end broken off - then it should not be measured. Some measurements may be just wrong. It is very easy to measure very carefully and misread the scale - often this will lead to an error of exactly 5 or 10 mm - or there could be mis-recording or mis-entry. And, of course, the long and short measurers do have their moments and can be wrong too. So, have a look at your measurements and see how they compare with others' measurements of the same bird at about the same time. And, if you happen to find one of the old hands appears to have a problem, do not be afraid to have a quiet word in the ear (preferably an ear that works).

Sexing Great Spotted Woodpecker juveniles

After our extensive recaptures of adult woodpeckers we have shown that most individuals cannot be aged on plumage characteristics after post juvenile moult. Our findings will go into the new BTO Ageing and Sexing guide. Disappointing, perhaps, that they cannot be aged reliably, but it is better to have a correct unknown than a possibly incorrect known. Donald Rumsfeld would probably agree. Recently we trapped a juvenile with a very short red cap. We have measured and photographed the cap. On consulting BWP we see that juvenile females have a shorter crown with some grey parts of feathers visible even when the feathers are unruffled. Males have longer red caps and the red is solid, or nearly so. Happily we do have several photographs of juveniles but, with the all pervading power of Murphy's Law, only one of them is of a bird we have later retrapped as an adult. That bird certainly had a long cap and was a male. So, while the juveniles are about, measure the length of the red cap from the base of the bill backwards. Take two photographs, too, if possible. One from above and one from the side - just in case the amount of black and white above the eye is useful too. We hope to catch some of these birds once they have moulted into adult plumage and are sexable.

Separating Marsh and Willow Tits

Marsh and Willow Tits have been the subject of some recent papers in Ringing and Migration (December 2008), Ringers' Bulletin (summer 2010) and on the Ringers' Forum. Most have referred to sexing Marsh Tits on wing length. (Our data show that this is not an advisable thing to do. Richard and Chris have a note in preparation.) As far as separating the two species, the use of an additional feature - the colour of the edge of the upper mandible - is recommended. However, as with any other method, we have found it not absolutely reliable - we know of at least one of each species with the 'wrong' colour. There is one additional feature which we are not aware has been mentioned before - the colour of the nasal feather tuft. In the 1980s we noted that some Willow Tits had chocolate coloured nasal feathers and, for some time, recorded their colour. Why? We thought it was a feature that might prove interesting. Surprise - they were all chocolate. It seems that this is another feature of plumage that is not noticed because it is not looked for. After a time we stopped recording the 'chocolate' on Willow Tits. It might seem obvious now that we should also have looked at Marsh Tits. Why did we not? Because, at that time Marsh Tits were absent from the wood and we had stopped looking at the nasal feathers by the time they reappeared four years later. On close examination of a juvenile Marsh Tit recently, we were struck by the blackness of its crown, even in juvenile plumage. The nasal feathers were equally black. We have examined most of those captured subsequently and they all have black nasal feathers. This could be another method of separation. What about the Willow Tits? They are now in short supply - but do look at nasal hairs of any birds of either species you catch (and make a note too).

Treecreeper sponsorship for the BTO Atlas Project 2007 - 2011

The Atlas project is now three-quarters of the way through the fieldwork. For the latest national results, look at www.bto.org/birdatlas. You will recall that we are sponsoring the Treecreeper for which we have promised to raise £2,000. Donations can be made directly to the BTO at www.justgiving.com/bto_atlas. The web site total is not completely up-to-date at the time of writing this, but we still have not reached half way. All contributions (electronically or by cheque to the BTO) will be very welcome. If you send a cheque to the BTO please state it is for the Treecreeper sponsorship and mark it for the attention of Graham Appleton.

We are not worried about not eventually meeting the required £2,000 but we would hope that all our members, past and present, will make a contribution. Please do not treat this as an eBay auction where many bidders leave it until the last few seconds. Time wasted is time lost. Do it now, please. Many thanks, in advance.

Nest lining - foraging distances

For the last ten years we have provided artificial nest lining material of various colours and recorded in which nests it has been used. The aim was to quantify the distances over which tits will forage for nesting material. Some preliminary results were given in Twitter 42 of May 2003. We now have records of over 200 nests. Jo, in collaboration with Charles Deeming at Lincoln University, has set about the task of analysis. Initially we had just wished to look at distances moved. However, with the number of records we now have, Jo may be able to examine other things - colour preferences, comparison between species, individual preferences, success rates of nests using the material to name a few.

Noteworthy Captures

Species	Age/sex	Ring	Date	Grid
Sparrowhawk	5F	EL87433	14/7/2010	Q02

It is 4 years since we netted a female Sparrowhawk. She seems to have been chasing a large party of Great Tits when she was netted. It is a curious fact that, of all British bird species, this one has the greatest difference in size between the sexes and, unlike most species where there is sexual dimorphism, in this case it is the female which is so much larger. We have, overall, captured 60 Sparrowhawks. The table shows the numbers of the two sexes broken down by age at ringing. Numbers are small overall but, even so, the proportion of females captured as adults is far lower than that of males. Why? The larger female finds it much easier to escape from a net than does a male. It could be also that females spend less time hunting in the wood or that female mortality is higher than that of males, or a combination of these, and other, things.

Sparrowhawks Caught or ringed in Treswell Wood

	Nestling	Adult
Female	5	15
Male	2	38

Tawny Owl	6F	GF37963	5/5/2010	Q-1 On nest
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Probably the mate of GK18355. She was ringed as a first-breeding season female in her 2009 nest, just north-west of the pond.

Tawny Owl 6F GM61012 19/5/2010 J-1

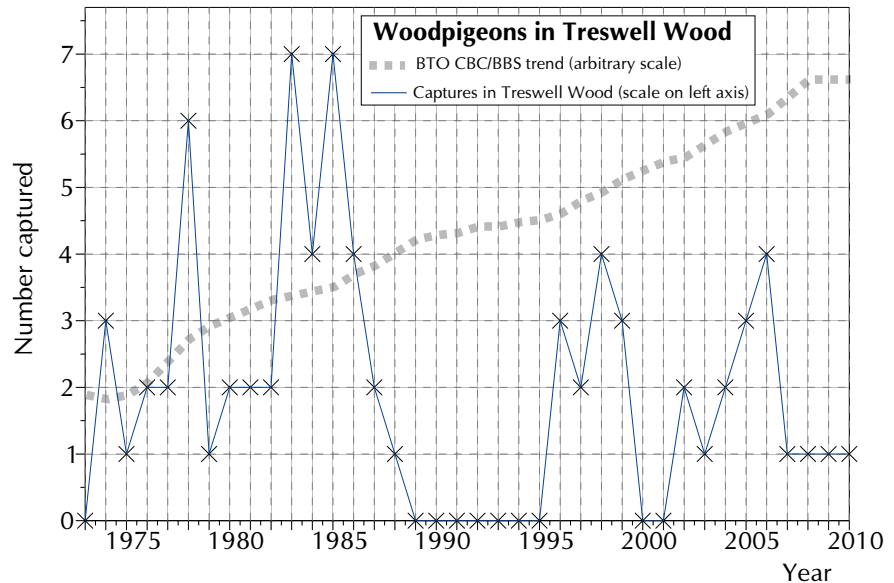
An old friend - caught on the nest in 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009 and this year. Alas, this year's nest failed.

Tawny Owl 8 GK18355 27/6/2010 N01

We very rarely catch Tawny Owls in our mist nets. Quite apart from their generally nocturnal behaviour, like most larger birds they are not held well in a mist net. We are more likely to see a Tawny Owl escape from a net as we approach it than to be able reach it and extract it. We ringed this bird as an adult in December 2007, having lured it with recorded Tawny Owl calls, about 50 metres from where it was retrapped. Tawny Owls are very sedentary so it is not surprising that we retrapped it so close to where it was before. It is probably the male holding the north-west territory in the wood. Had it been the female we would have caught her on the nest.

Woodpigeon 4 FS55219 27/6/2010 Q02 Feeder

Woodpigeons are becoming very much more abundant and now have become the third most frequently recorded species in the BTO Garden BirdWatch survey (compared with 11th in 1995). The graph shows the national population trend (CBC/BBS from 1973 onwards). The massive increase is thought to be driven largely by changes in agricultural practice, particularly the increase in oilseed rape cultivation. Like other larger birds, they are not held well in nets but, even so, it is not at all obvious why our capture rates in the wood should not be increasing too. In fact, they are lower than in earlier years. Unfortunately for us, this species is not one which has been monitored by our own Common Bird Census so we have no record of any changes in breeding activity within the wood.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker 3 CT95979 8/7/2010 Q02 Feeder**

In the first Twitter, 15 years ago we adopted a policy of reporting all captures of non-passerines. What a change in woodpecker captures since then. This is the tenth individual captured during the last ten weeks. Of these, four have been retrapped adults and six were juveniles. This particular bird is the one with the noticeably short crown which prompted our investigations into using the crown as a means of sexing juveniles.

Robin 4 V475260 2/6/2010 Q02

There are still a few colour-ringed Robins in the wood. This is our most recent sighting of one - with food for young - near the car park. Keep your eyes open for any surviving colour-marked birds.

Chiffchaff 4M BYP668 4/7/2010 C03

Ringed as a breeding male in July 2007 and retrapped in March 2009 as one of our first returning birds, it is now in at least its fourth breeding season. A good achievement for such a small bird.

It has been a good year for the species in the wood with some unusually large numbers caught including what looked like a family party of five juveniles on July 11th and with good catches on other days too. It seems likely that these summer visitors have arrived to find a wood relatively free of other-bird competition after the cold winter, and have consequently bred very successfully. Overall we have captured 13 adults including 3 recaptured from last year, one control (ringing details not yet known) and 17 juveniles.

Willow Warbler 3J CXN251 11/7/2010 F04

The first Willow Warbler to be caught in the wood this year. It was in post-juvenile moult so could well be a bird already moving away from its natal place rather than being a Treswell Wood native. We trapped a second juvenile on August 15th. Whether either of these birds was reared in the wood or not, the species is certainly far less common in the wood than in former years.

Coal Tit 3J X649553 30/5/2010 O00

Coal Tits, unusually, did not use any of the nestboxes this year. However, it seems that they did breed in the wood or, at least, nearby. This is one of 17 juveniles we have caught, still in full juvenile plumage and not yet starting moult - usually a sign of not having moved far from the natal site. Coal Tits are usually the earliest of the true tits to nest. This individual was the only one caught at what would normally be expected to be the first capture time of fledged birds. We had to wait a further month before any more appeared. All the young Coal Tits we have captured this year have been very late to start post juvenile moult. This suggests that they are from very late broods.

Blue Tit 3J L327522 13/6/2010 I04

In contrast to the vast number of nestling-ringed Great Tits we have retrapped, mostly at the feeding station, this was the first of our very few Blue Tits. To the end of July we have retrapped only 14 Blue Tits compared to 120 Great Tits. Blue Tit juveniles do not seem to come to the feeder in the month or two after fledging. Great Tits, on the other hand, are there in vast numbers. Blue Tits wait until the autumn before frequenting the feeders more heavily.

Nuthatch 3JF TR47545 25/7/2010 Q02 Feeder

Richard Johnson, who does the CBC in the south-west part of the wood, noted that Nuthatches have been absent from his part of the wood this breeding season. With their distinctive, loud and far-carrying call, they are not easy to miss. We have caught very few anywhere in the wood. This is one of only two juveniles we have caught and the only adults we have caught in the last three months have been in the north of the wood.

Chaffinch 6F P400853 27/6/2010 Q02 Feeder

Not quite as old as the 9-year old Chaffinch reported in the previous Twitter, but at 8 years since ringing this certainly is an old bird. We ringed it in 2002 and, unlike many of our old Chaffinches, it has been recaptured at least once in every year since ringing.

Bullfinch 6F R353167 4/7/2010 D04

We ringed this as a juvenile in 2005 and did not retrap it until October 2007. It has not been seen between then and this, its third, capture. Bullfinches are fairly sedentary and its previous adult capture was only 100 metres from this one and in a part of the wood which we cover reasonably often. Where has it been?

Controls and Recoveries

Species	Age/sex	Ring	Date	Grid
Green Woodpecker	3	DA20236	28/7/2010	Darlton 6 km SSE

We managed to ring two nestling woodpeckers from a brood of, we think, four. These are the first ever ringed in the wood. Given our record of catching the species in the wood - a total of two adults - we did not have much hope of hearing from either of these two nestlings. It was a surprise to hear from Peter Cobb of this capture. More interestingly, a neighbour of his had seen two juvenile Green Woodpeckers in a garden in East Drayton a few days before. Were these both from the Treswell Wood nest, still together, moving gradually further from the wood. Whether from the same brood or not, this movement is very early for Green Woodpecker dispersal and a fairly long movement at this stage of life.

Great Spotted Woodpecker 3 CT95963 19/6/2010 R02

Newly fledged birds generally have short life expectation. Death comes from starvation through lack of skill at finding food, inexperience in avoiding predators, sudden bad weather, competition from established adults or various other causes. This bird was ringed just two weeks earlier as a fairly newly fledged bird. Its body was found by Dave Valentine, near the main gate. Cause of death likely to be starvation, weather or just an accident rather than predation. A short life but, with the ring, one which adds to the overall picture of post-fledging mortality.

Blackcap 4M X649043 8/4/2010 South Rauby, Lincolnshire, 42 km SE

Ringed as 5M 10/5/2009 and not seen since. Our Blackcaps generally seem to be very site faithful, returning not just to the wood but to the same small part of the wood the next year. Was it still en route to Treswell Wood when it was captured or had it shifted its breeding territory between years?

Blackcap 3J X649264 2/8/2010 Maumhill Wood, Sturton-le-Steeple 4 km N

Not a distant movement but it demonstrates the beginning of the dispersal and exploratory phase of the juvenile's life. We ringed it in the wood five weeks earlier as a very young juvenile.

Blackbird 2 CT95946 26/5/2010 Q-1 Ring in Tawny Owl nest

This is one of a brood of four Blackbird nestlings ringed in the traditional nest site in the roof members of the worker's shelter near the main cross roads. It also seems to be a traditional place for the Tawny Owl to hunt for nestlings. This is the eighth recovery of a Blackbird ring in a Tawny Owl nest or pellet. Five of these have come from nestlings in the shelter.

Jay 2 DA51891 26/5/2010 Q-1 Ring in Tawny owl nest

The Tawny Owl diet is varied. This is the second Jay ring recovered from a Tawny Owl nest or pellet. This bird was ringed in October 2008 and retrapped later that month. It has not been seen by us since but will have fallen victim to the owl only during the 2010 breeding season.

Great Tits - movements to Hillcrest Farm Treswell

A number of our nestling-ringed Great Tits have ventured away from the wood to the village nearby where John (Clark) has been at work courtesy of the Bower household. In the table below, all the escapees are listed with their recapture dates and information about their nest and sibling's captures. The birds are listed in chronological order of fledging date, earliest first.

Ring number	Box	Number fledged	Number recap. in wood	Number recap. at at farm	Estimated date of fledging	First recap. date in wood	First recap. date at farm
TJ49668	5	9	4	1	24 May	23 June	28 July
TJ49925	A52	9	4	1	29 May	8 July	6 August
TJ49751	B31	5	0	1	3 June	-	14 July
TJ49984	A30	8	0	2	6 June	-	14 July
TJ49988	A30	8	0	2	6 June	-	14 July
TR47517	C24	7	0	1	9 June	-	6 August

Recaptures of nestling-ringed birds are unpredictable - in some cases we eventually retrap several, or all, birds from one brood but in other cases we never retrap any. In these latter cases, it might appear there had been massive and rapid post-fledging mortality. These recaptures suggest another explanation - rapid post-fledging dispersal. Five nestboxes are represented in this Hillcrest Farm cohort. Of these boxes, nestlings from only two have been recaptured in the wood - these were earliest two of the nests, and the Hillcrest birds from these already had a capture history in the wood. Overall then, a picture of rapid dispersal out of the wood in some broods (possibly the later ones) and less rapid in others (possibly the earlier ones).

10 Week Summary 2010 Interval 3, Captures in Standard Sites

	New Birds			Recaptures			Total
	Adult			Adult			
Tawny Owl	.	.	.	1	.	.	1
Wren	.	2	4	4	2	.	12
Dunnoek	2	1	4	2	.	1	10
Robin	2	5	9	.	2	3	21
Blackbird	3	.	4	11	1	.	19
Song Thrush	1	1	1	.	.	.	3
Blackcap	3	6	3	3	2	.	17
Chiffchaff	4	.	9	5	.	.	18
Marsh Tit	.	.	2	2	.	6	10
Coal Tit	.	.	1	.	.	.	1
Blue Tit	.	.	3	1	1	2	7
Great Tit	.	.	.	2	3	4	9
Treecreeper	.	.	4	1	1	.	6
Chaffinch	.	1	1
Bullfinch	1	4	.	2	2	.	9
Totals	16	20	44	34	14	16	144