

A newsletter for supporters of the NEST RECORD SCHEME, forming part of the BTO's Integrated Population Monitoring programme funded by a partnership of the British Trust for Ornithology and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Countryside Council for Wales, and the Environment & Heritage Service in Northern Ireland).

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Number 23

Spreading the word about the NRS

Welcome to the 23rd edition of Nest Record News. In 2006/7 we have been delighted to see that your support of the NRS is as strong as it has always been. Our annual nest record total has hit the 31,000 mark for the third year running and we have seen promising increases in the number of records submitted for a number of our target species. Our thanks, as ever, are extended to all NRS participants - we never cease to be amazed by your dedication and support!

This past year, we have been very pleased to note flickers of interest lighting up in new corners of the birding world, which we hope mark the beginning of an increase in the profile of the Scheme. Back in December, the NRS held meetings at both the Swanwick and Braemar conferences, and Dave and I were pleased to see a good turnout at both, with a healthy enthusiasm in evidence from both long-time recorders and many new people who 'collared' us for a chat. Shortly before spring, I attended the Devon Regional BTO Meeting, intending to run the first of many nest-recording workshops. Alas, the weather stopped any outdoor activity that day, but we are very keen to try and organise more for the future- so watch this space!

In February, the NRS was heavily involved with the development and launch of Nest Box Challenge, an exciting new garden nest box survey that accompanied National Nest Box Week and the BBC's Breathing Places campaign (see page 2 for more info). National Nest Box Week was even featured in



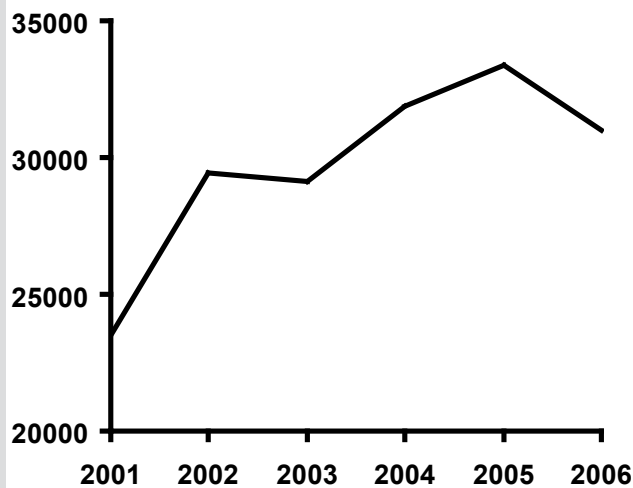
A well lined Treecreeper clutch. We currently receive around 30 Treecreeper nest records per year. If you want to monitor your own, you can find out how on page 15. Photo by Richard Castell

an episode of the BBC television programme 'Nature's Calendar'. The Nest Box Challenge survey has attracted an astonishing 5,300 participants, with over 10,000 nest boxes being monitored as I write. As well as raising awareness of nest recording in general, the survey has attracted a steady stream of new recruits to the NRS, as participants have been eager to find out more about monitoring nests.

The NRS has also been well promoted in print over the past year, featuring in articles for the magazines 'Green Parent' and 'NFU Countryside Magazine'. Most recently, Dave had the opportunity to write an article on nest recording for the British Wildlife journal, which generated many responses from people looking to get involved.

This issue of Nest Record News is packed full of your own contributions, and we are delighted at how willingly people have put pen to paper in order to tell us what nest recording means to them. If there is anything in these pages you want to find out more about, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us here at the BTO. And please remember, if you have any ideas or thoughts for the Scheme, or articles you would like us to include in Nest Record News, then let us know - monitoring nests is not the only way you can contribute to the NRS!

Carl Barimore



NRS submission totals over the past six years have shown an encouraging return to form

News from the Nest Records Unit

Nest Box Challenge

National Nest Box Week has now become a traditional date in the BTO's calendar, and hopefully in yours too, but this year the week-long celebration of nest boxes for garden birds was taken to an entirely new level with the involvement of the BBC's Breathing Spaces Campaign. By the time Valentine's Day arrived, National Nest Box Week had been featured on the BBC's Breathing Spaces web site and promoted all over the UK at BBC local radio events. National Nest Box Week even got a mention on the BBC television programme 'Nature's Calendar', broadcast the weekend before the activities began. To compliment National Nest Box Week, the BTO and the BBC have set up a completely new on-line survey known as 'Nest Box Challenge', which allows participants to register boxes they have erected in their gardens and then to monitor them over the season, reporting their findings via the Nest Box Challenge web-pages.

So far, the survey has been a fantastic success, with over 5,300 participants registering more than 10,000 nest boxes for a variety of species. Maps showing the distribution of registered boxes, and the stage of nesting activity across the country are updated live on our web-pages, so if you have not yet visited the Nest Box Challenge web-pages, do have a look at <http://www.bto.org/nbc/index.htm>

Those of you who were already aware of the survey may have wondered why the BTO is running a scheme that appears to compete with the long-running NRS. In fact, the two are complementary. Nest Box Challenge serves as a way of getting a large number of garden ornithologists involved in collecting very basic productivity data. Participants are asked to record whether or not their box is occupied, but do not necessarily look inside. Those that do can record counts of eggs and chicks, but for simplicity's sake do not use the status code system. The productivity information collected under Nest Box Challenge is therefore less detailed, so if you're already involved with the NRS, please do not register the same sites for Nest Box Challenge.

The new survey benefits the NRS in many ways, promoting the need to monitor active birds' nests, acting as a source of new NRS recruits and serving as a trial for the submission of productivity data on-line.

Nest record milestones passed in 2006

25,000 th	Tree Sparrow - Mike Netherwood & Mick Cook
10,000 th	Barn Owl - John Middleton
7,000 th	Redstart - Peter Wilson
4,000 th	Stonechat - John Callion
4,000 th	Wheatear - Dave Fulton
800 th	Long-eared Owl - Bob Swann & Son
300 th	Red Kite - Derek Holman
200 th	Gadwall - Jill Warwick

Hitting the deadline

Contrary to the laying dates of many of our nesting birds, the average arrival date of your nest records is getting later and later! For 2006, over 10% of the annual submission was received after February 2007. To put this into context, even though the overall totals for the past three years have been very similar, the 2004 total surpassed the 30,000 mark on the 28th February, the 2005 total only surpassed the 30,000 mark by mid-March, and the 2006 total didn't reach 30,000 until the 13th April, a month-and-a-half later than in 2004. Next year, we would very much like to produce Nest Record News in time for the beginning of the nest recording season, around the 1st April. Naturally we would like to print full species totals for the season, but to do so we'd need to receive everyone's records at least a month beforehand. In addition, we can't begin producing the annual trends until we have received most of the records. So, please help us to help the Scheme by sending in your records before the end of February!

New NRS leaflets

Last summer the Nest Record Scheme took delivery of our first ever stack of full-colour NRS leaflets. The leaflet briefly explains what the Scheme is about and how to get involved and it is ideal for use at promotional events and bird club meetings. If you'd like a batch of leaflets to distribute at events going on near you, please do get in touch.

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Please send any articles or letters to the Nest Records Officer, address on the back page. Thanks to Mandy T Andrews for helping to DTP the newsletter.

Concerns and submissions – the latest NRS results

With the new *Breeding Birds in the Wider Countryside Report* now available on-line, Dave Leech looks at the latest analyses of the NRS data and at the submissions for 2006.

Latest breeding trends

Spring is a very confusing time of year for Nest Record Unit staff. While we're searching for nests in 2007, we're busy sorting out the inputting of data from 2006 and reporting on breeding trends for the thirty years leading up to 2005! The latter have just been published on-line in the form of the *Breeding Birds in the Wider Countryside Report* (WCR), which brings together information about population trends and breeding success from the NRS, the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and Constant Effort Scheme (CES) ringing. The NRS trends really are one of the most important and valuable fruits of your labours, so it's definitely worth having a look at what your efforts are enabling us to say about the UK's birds at www.bto.org/birdtrends2006.

We receive enough data to allow us to calculate annual trends in productivity for around 90 species each year. The latest results show that of this group, 17 species, including Spotted Flycatcher and Moorhen, have displayed significant decreases in clutch size since the mid-1960s while the brood sizes of 19 species, including House Sparrow, Starling and Whitethroat, have also decreased significantly. We also calculate trends in failure rates at both the egg and the nestling stages, and these are increasing for 13 and nine species respectively. The trends can be found on the individual species pages of the WCR and are summarised in the 'Results Overview'.



Now the norm? Kestrel brood sizes have declined and more nests are now only fledging three young instead of four or five. Photo by Richard Castell.

Additions to the NRS Concern List

Each year, the NRS Concern List highlights those species that are both displaying a decrease in some aspect of productivity and declining in abundance. This doesn't necessarily mean that a reduction in breeding success is responsible for the drop in numbers, but it is an indication that more research could usefully be focussed on these species. There are currently 21 species on

the list, of which five were added after the most recent analyses. Kestrel brood sizes have declined over the last 15 years, suggesting that more pairs are producing broods of three fledglings rather than four or even five, a worrying trend as numbers appear to be falling across the UK, particularly in Scotland. Bullfinch, which dropped off the list last year, has appeared back on it due to an increase in the incidence of clutch failures, and Tree Pipit, Whinchat and Corn Bunting have also been added, although the trends for these three species are based on small sample sizes and should be interpreted with care. You can read more about the species on the Concern List on-line at www.bto.org/survey/nest_records/results.htm.

The 2005 season

Laying was delayed for both Blue Tit and Oystercatcher, although Grey Wagtail managed to make an unusually early start. Nightjar, Wren and Yellowhammer clutches were noticeably small, as were the brood sizes of both Common Buzzard and Tree Sparrows. In contrast, Barn Owl, Jackdaw and Blackbird all had larger broods than the breeding trends over the previous 30 years might have predicted. Failure rates were higher than expected for several wader species, resident hole-nesting passerines such as tits and sparrows, and Dunnock, while Great Spotted Woodpecker, Kestrel, Reed Warbler and many corvid species experienced above average nesting success.

Submissions in 2006

A quick glance at the record totals in the centre pages of this edition of Nest Record News reveals some interesting submission trends. The totals for waders were lower than in previous years for almost all species, particularly for Oystercatcher, Redshank and Common Snipe, and submissions for Tawny Owl and Barn Owl reflected the low vole numbers and resulting reduction in occupancy rates that were reported across the country in 2006. Submissions for hole-nesting passerines such as tits, Pied Flycatcher and House Sparrow were also lower than they had been in 2005 and the decline in records for common, open-nesting passerines continued, with a drop in the number received for Blackbird, Song Thrush, Wren, Dunnock, Chaffinch and Greenfinch. Declines were also apparent for some of the more specialist open-nesters, with the number of records submitted for Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler also lower than in 2005.

Conversely, totals for a range of open nesters, including Mistle Thrush, Long-tailed Tit, Whitethroat and Reed Bunting, increased and the same trend was apparent for some of our scarcer cavity-nesters, such as Marsh Tit, Willow Tit and Tree Sparrow. Submissions were up for project species such as Swallow and Dipper, and also for Little Owls, the latter perhaps benefiting from the absence of competition from the larger Strigiforms.

Thank you

We can never say it enough – thank you so much to everybody who has invested their time and effort to support the NRS and we hope you're all having an enjoyable and productive season in 2007.

Recorders' eye view - 2006 roundup

Here's a selection of your comments about the 2006 season, taken from the letters and e-mails we receive. Your nest records are what we use to find out about our breeding birds, of course, but your own thoughts provide us with a much needed 'grass-roots' feel for how the season is unfolding. So, if you have any views or opinions on your nest recording, please do let us know!

Nestbox species

In 2006, both Kevin Briggs (Lancs) and the EA Devon Nestbox Group noted the effect of persistent rain on titmice in May. The Blue Tits monitored by the EA Devon Group, who have three nestbox sites at Yarner Wood, Bovey Valley and Neadon Cleave, felt the effects of a May that was 72% wetter than average, with occupancy rates below average and the lowest number of young fledged since 1998. This was also attributed to a higher number of nests predated by Great-spotted Woodpeckers. Kevin Briggs, too, felt the season had been relatively poor; his Blue Tits laid later than average, clutch sizes were smaller, and many broods were found deserted or dead, possibly due to the weather.

Despite this, many others reported a good year for Blue Tits. DW Oliver (Fife), came across average sized broods and felt his birds had an 'OK' year overall. Steve Thompson (Herts) had higher than average Blue Tit box occupancy at his excellent new nestbox site on John O' Gaunt Golf Course and Major Counsell from the Birch Wood Association (Kent) similarly reported high occupancy and a high rate of nesting success.

There were more mixed fortunes in 2006 for Great Tit. John O' Gaunt Golf Course had a similar occupancy rate to 2005, whilst EA Devon Group noted above average occupancy rates but very low fledging success, the lowest since 1987 at Yarner Wood. On the other hand, the Birch Wood Association reported the lowest occupancy rates on their patch for three years, but relatively high nesting success.

Pied Flycatchers returned to the three EA Devon Group sites in abundance in 2006, with the highest nestbox occupancy since 1996. However, both average clutch size and nest success rates were below average. As with their Blue Tits, the drop in nesting success was partly due to frequent visits by Great-spotted Woodpeckers. On all three of their sites, the Group noticed later nesting than usual by Pied Flycatchers but, although late nests at their sites have often been seen to fail, these were all successful. Overall, however, the total number of young fledged from the three sites was around the average.

Open nesters

The May rain took its toll on open nesting passerines too. DW Oliver saw broods of Goldcrest and Dunnock abandoned very close to fledging because of "incessant rain." Paul Virgin, from the Parc Taf Bargoed Nest Record Scheme also saw several Goldcrest and Chaffinch failures due to storm damage.

Many common open-nesting species found good fortune in 2006. Kevin Briggs noted that Wren, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush and Linnet all had high rates of nesting success on his patch; his Robins fledged 4.2 young per nest on average. DW Oliver saw 10 young fledge from 12 Dunnock nests. The most common observation was an apparent drop in predation pressure, even amongst the more exposed nesters. Alan Burgess (Cheshire) commented in 2005 about the extent of nest predation on his site, but in 2006 he found it to be nowhere near as prevalent or systematic. In his fascinating annual report, he remarked that he had seen "...much more casual plundering that took only a sample of the available fare." Overall on his site, he recorded a higher rate of nesting success, with fewer replacements. Even his Blackbirds enjoyed their most productive season since arriving

on his patch seven years ago.

Reports on the Swallow season were typically mixed. Just as Max Meadows noted that Swallows and House Martins had "another disastrous year" on his patch and Alan Burgess observed a "disturbingly poor" season, DW Oliver saw no problems with his nesting birds.



Top: An Oystercatcher on eggs. Bottom: A traditional Oystercatcher nest in shingle. But is it now just as worthwhile checking the nearby maize field? Photos by Derek Belsey and Chris & Elspeth Rowe.

Moorhens and Oystercatchers

Just as rain was seen to catch out many titmice in May, so the hot weather in June and July prompted a return to drought conditions for many waterfowl. William Kennedy (Northern Ireland) noted that the Moorhens nesting on his local pond were "high and dry" by June and Max Meadows (Essex) reported that the drying up of many local water bodies caused the river and village pond on his patch to become "grossly overcrowded" with "too many fights for any successful nesting attempts."

We don't receive many letters about Oystercatchers, but Kevin Briggs had some interesting observations to make about his study site in the Lune Valley (Lancs). The birds nesting on shingle by the river had the worst breeding season Kevin had seen in 30 years. Of 40 nests, 10 were flooded, 21 predated, seven trampled by livestock, with only three young fledged from the remainder. However, he also noted that the birds in his study site were spreading out into new habitat, notably maize fields. Of the seven nests he found in maize fields, six hatched young, with 19 eggs overall and 12 young fledged. Kevin remarked that this change was in evidence "...all over the North-West now." Something to watch out for, perhaps?

Breeding birds and weather in 2006

BTO Research Biologist, David Glue, chronicles the weather patterns affecting the UK in 2006 and comments on the timing, scale and severity of key meteorological events that impacted on the nesting success of breeding birds, as reported to the NRS by nest recorders, ringers and birdwatchers.

Cold dry winter checks early breeding attempts

New Year nesting activity in 2006 got off to a slow start, possibly hindered by the poor condition of adult birds following the coldest mid-winter since 1995/96. By Saint Valentine's Day a meagre nine species had been reported to the NRS as being with active nests, fewer than one-half that reported in the previous two years. Blackbird, Mistle Thrush, Wren and Raven were the highlights.

Brief, milder 'spring-like' spells in third week of January and mid-February, the product of westerly Atlantic airflows, prompted short-term displaying and nest refurbishment by Golden Eagle, Goshawk, Mandarin, corvids, woodpeckers, Ring-necked Parakeet and Crossbill, among other species, but overall the coldest March since 1996 saw nesting operations for many species retarded by 2-3 weeks, recalling a more 'traditional' old-fashioned calendar.

Lack of rain retards vegetation growth

Cool westerly winds sweeping the UK in early April, with regular night frosts, prolonged the wintery 'feel'. However, growing warmth in late April, with temperatures topping 19.7°C (Sussex) on the 21st, finally triggered vigorous displaying and nesting operations by resident birds.

Small rodent numbers were very low in many areas in 2006, possibly not helped by the fact that vegetation growth had been further stunted by the lack of rain, and the impacts of reduced prey availability were evident further up the food chain. Buzzard, Red Kite and Kestrel were slow to egg-lay in parts and pairs of Barn Owl, Tawny Owl and Long-eared Owl locally failed to breed at all.

Tinder dry habitats in spring 2006 sparked off destructive fires on coastal grassland, heath and moor habitat in many counties, affecting key sites for chat, pipit and Dartford Warbler. Regular head winds over much of Northern Europe contributed to a 'late' spring for many summer visitors, with some slow to return to traditional haunts, including the short-haul Chiffchaff, and some trans-Saharan migrants, notably Cuckoo, Lesser Whitethroat, Sedge Warbler and Redstart.

Late spring rains swamp Sand Martin and Common Sandpiper

Genuine 'summer-like' heat nosed up from Iberia in the first week of May, contributing to the warmest first-half of the month since 1945. Hot south-easterly winds swept waves of 'over-shooting' Continental vagrants, notably Bee-eater, Great Reed Warbler, Woodchat Shrike, Spoonbill and southern herons, into the UK and attention was drawn to potential colonists. Scop's Owl summered in the Oxford village of Thrupp, the first 'stayer' since

1980. Black-winged Stilt eventually settled at Martin Mere WWT Reserve (Lancs) and laid eggs, though the clutch failed to hatch.

Parched habitats and low water levels, combined with few soil invertebrate foods, posed ongoing problems for nesting corvids, thrushes, Robin and Starling, with locally heavy brood failures; Badger, Fox, Weasel and Pine Martin suffered similarly. On the other hand, spring 2006 did lack the sharp late spring frosts and severe gale force winds that troubled breeding titmice, warblers and corvids in 2005.

Thundery showers from mid-May, the wettest since 1979, were initially welcomed but rapidly rising water tables sadly led to heavy clutch and brood losses amongst some study populations, including riverside nesters such as Kingfisher, Sand Martin and Common Sandpiper, and heath and moor nesters such as Lapwing, Red Grouse and Skylark, though many of the latter were able to repeat lay.



A uncompleted clutch of Blackbird eggs. Reports of early Blackbird nests were far fewer in the 2006 season than in 2005. Photo by Kate Risely.

Mid-summer scorcher curtails waders, wagtails and warblers

Dominant high pressure centred over, or west of, the UK throughout much of June and into July gave rise to heat waves, with daily temperatures 2.1°C above average, the sunniest and driest mid-summer since 1995. The surreal 'Mediterranean-like' heat baked already-parched habitats, adversely affecting nesting attempts in wetlands, gardens, farmland and heath. A lack of food and exposed vulnerable nests were major factors, while broods inside farm buildings and nest boxes were all exposed to searing heat. Avocet, Curlew and Lapwing struggled, having re-laid following the late spring wash-out, and in some areas vacated their breeding haunts prematurely. Similarly,

by mid-July, feather-worn thrushes, Robin, Dunnock and certain warblers halted nesting operations and were quick to commence moult. On the positive side, the warmth generated hitherto limited supplies of aerial insect foods, helping Swift, hirundines and Hobby to rear successful families.

Red Grouse and Grey Partridge suffered during the cool rains of late spring, the Glorious Twelfth in August proving a damp squib. However, relieving monsoon-like downpours in mid-July and August, combined with welcome Indian summer warmth in September, helped a scattering of Stock Dove, Woodpigeon, Barn Owl, Reed Warbler and Yellowhammer to fledge late broods.

For many UK breeding birds in 2006, then, the season appeared slow to ignite and swift to close. Data collected by nest recorders last year are currently being computerised in preparation for the upcoming annual analyses of breeding trends, the results of which will be available in the next Breeding Birds in the Wider Countryside Report (www.bto.org/birdtrends).

Absent Owls

For many, the 2006 season appeared to be a particularly bleak one for Tawny Owls. John Massie of Grampian Ringing Group, who have been studying Tawnies for almost 30 years, made some very keen observations in their 'Tawny Owl Report 2006', excerpts from which are printed here.

I see from Nest Record News 22 that I had forecast a bumper season in 2005 and this had come to pass as far as the owl situation prevailed. I had no crystal ball but in 2004 had noted the kind autumnal fall of berries, fruits and nuts, grains and grasses seeding and the countryside settling into a mild winter of plenty. Food chains were complete. Wood Mice and voles were plentiful, the former reaching almost plague proportions. 2005 reaped the harvest and the benefits in a bumper season and spring but nature is cruel and sandwiched in a day and a night in early June came a frost. I even noted the date - 6th June. I had been overnighing at the Sands of Forvie NNR, where I have a hut, when I was awakened by the bitter cold. When I rose with the sun at 4:30am, I looked out on a white world of hoar frost and a temperature of minus 8°C. The sun did its best but the low-lying hoar persisted till midday. When it lifted, the grass was black, the tree leaf frizzled, and the flower bud nipped. Blossoms were dead.

I noted the phenomena but did not realise the true extent of the damage that had occurred. Though animals and birds had passed the event off as one of those things, plants, trees, grasses and insects had not coped well. This did not immediately manifest itself, but as the year progressed through a fairly fine summer it became evident that the fruits of autumn were gone. The nut crop was absent, berries wizened and even ground and grain crops gave low yields. Insects had also suffered for they did not proliferate for late breeding birds. Swallows had but two broods and the countryside, once cropped, lay languid.

As my season begins in late October, I noted the changes with some disquiet. Cleaning, preparing, planning, resiting and repairing nest boxes revealed no returns or signs of occupancy. Owls, when seen, were in poor condition but vociferously claimed the shorter days. Snow fell in November and again in December but the snows of January, February and March were heavy, deep and bitterly cold. It was prolonged and the countryside even in April held deep drifts. Birds were still calling but without the persistence that marks an early season. In 2005, I had recorded 30 nests with eggs before March had ended. In 2006, the figure was eight and seven of these were in the last days of the month.

Early April showed improvements and by mid-month, 30 nest boxes with eggs were listed in my study area, a poor return from 80 territories. It was only too evident that some birds had not bred. An average clutch size of 2.4 eggs was poor.

My owl programme is normally completed by the end of May



Unlike these healthy Tawny Owls chicks, many of the young John Massie encountered in May 2006 were very thin and emaciated. Photo by Simon Thurgood.

but 2006 was different. Nine nests hatched and reared young, and from an initial 59 chicks, 31 survived to the ringing stage. Chicks, when examined in situ, were in poor condition and I remarked that I had rarely seen owl chicks so thin and emaciated. Early morning checks, which normally show food in the nest for the chicks during daylight hours, often showed nil or a single prey item. Chicks, which are normally ready to leave the nest in under four weeks, were taking a week longer or more before quitting the box. It was significant that 29 chicks in these successful nests died, probably of starvation, and were ingested by both siblings and adults.

It had been a poor breeding year with a return of 0.9 chicks per nest located in the study area. It had been expected, but it was none-the-less giving cause for concerns. Tawny Owls are monitors of the wild and sensors of the food chain. But as always, time will tell.

Top nest recorders in 2006

National Trust, Farne Islands (NTF) 2227 • John Brook (BRC) 1186 • Merseyside Ringing Group (MRG) 619 • Bob Danson (RD) 555 • David Warden (DWA) 546 • Kevin Briggs (KBR) 528 • Birklands Ringing Group (BRG) 416 • David & Diane Bowes (DJB) 400 • Lancaster & District Birdwatching Society (LDBW) 391 • Ian Spence (IMS) 361 • Sorby-Breck Ringing Group (SOBG) 343 • Peter Roe (PER) 337 • East Dales Ringing Group (EDRG) 326 • Ivan Proctor (IPR) 322 • West Wiltshire Ringing Group (WWRG) 318 • Robert Stevens (RS) 296 • John Lloyd (JVL) 293 • Souder Ringing Group (SDRG) 283 • Ron Louch & Dave Thompson (L/T) 282 • North-west Norfolk Ringing Group (NWNR) 277 • Neil Croton & Mike Tyler (CRTY) 274 • Mick Cook & Mike Netherwood (MCMN) 266 • Stanford Ringing Group (STAR) 262 • Peter Robinson (PIR) 261 • Dave Hazard (DAVH) 250 • David Oliver (DWO) 245 • Paul Holness (PRH) 245 • Rye Meads Ringing Group (RMRG) 245 • Northumbria Ringing Group (NRG) 243 • John Lawton-Roberts (JALR) 232 • Bob Swann & Son (RLS) 220 • Max Meadows (MOM) 218 • Jerry Lewis (JMSL) 210 • Suffolk Barn Owl Group (COCA) 210 • Neville Powell (NBP) 202 • Farlington Ringing Group (FRG) 201 • David Francis (DMF) 197 • Kane Brides (KABR) 196 • Paul Slater (PSL) 190 • David Myers (DAM) 182 • J & M Hodson (JMH) 175 • Arden Ringing Group (ARG) 175 • Dartford Ringing Group (DRG) 174 • Bristol Naturalists Society (BNS) 174 • Derek Holman (DHOL) 174 • Neil Winter (NEW) 170 • Michael Russell (MDR) 170 • Treswell Wood IPM Group (TWIG) 170 • Edward Cowley (EXC) 169 • Reginald Lanaway (RL) 168 • Alan Ball (AGBA) 165 • Frank Mawby (FJM) 164 • Spurn Point Bird Observatory (SPBO) 162 • Nicholas Watts (PNW) 161 • Garth Lowe (GAL) 156 • Ronald Clevley (RPC) 155 • Keith Seaton (KJS) 148 • John & Chas Holt (J&CH) 148 • S P Binney (SPB) 147 • Alan Old (ABO) 145 • Ronald Turkington (RHT) 143 • Roger Peart (RHP) 142 • Newbury Ringing Group (NERG) 142 • WWT Martin Mere (WWTM) 140 • Peter Johnson (PEJJ) 138 • Anne Goodall (AEG) 138 • Paul Robinson (PARO) 132 • Nunnery Ringing Group (BTO) 131 • Mervyn Greening (MERG) 128 • Geoff Myers (GWM) 122 • Philip Bone (PHBO) 117 • Colin Davison (CD) 116 • Jan Pritchard (JAP) 115 • George Candelin (GWC) 114 • Robin Husbands (ROXH) 113 • Julian Driver (JDR) 112 • Alan Lowe (ALA) 111 • Lothian Ringing Group (LORG) 110 • Tees Ringing Group (TERG) 109 • Tom Dewdney (TGD) 108 • Euan Cameron (EDC) 107 • Peter Wilson (PEWI) 105 • Rye Bay Ringing Group (RBRG) 103 • Grampian Ringing Group (GRG) 103 • Mike Rogers (MHR) 101

Nest finding tips

This newsletter's tips come courtesy of Andrew Davies, a long-time nest finder who has mainly operated in the Cambridgeshire area. If you have any nest finding advice or observations that you would like to see published in *Nest Record News*, please let us know.

Grey Partridges

Partridges that I monitored daily, nesting under hedgerows in Surrey, would scrape out a saucer-shaped indentation before the end of March. These were usually under such parts of the hedge as afforded the birds visibility from, and access to, the nest from either side of it. The birds would keep these scrapes bare of vegetation before and during the period of spring growth by visiting them regularly. Several weeks later, they would begin laying their eggs in the scrape, though by this time the nest would be impossible to see unless you knew it was there and deliberately parted the vegetation with a stick. Therefore, it is best to search for partridge nests in March when they are making their scrapes, rather than in May when they are actually on nests. Bear in mind also that partridges are faithful to nest sites or their immediate proximities.



Grey Partridges may begin making scrapes in March, a month or more before laying. Photo by Jill Pakenham.

Dunlin

Dunlin nests are situated fairly close to water and in my experience a hot-spot can be quickly located by looking for streams or runnels flowing into this water. The feature to look for is a sharp bend or kink in the stream, almost at a right-angle, especially about 20 or 30 metres in from the shore of the main water body. I would walk upstream, getting out where the right-angled bend occurred, and continue along the same line until I flushed one of the pair and established a hot-spot, usually within 10 to 15 metres of the stream. I found that Dunlin were faithful to nest sites, frequently breeding again in sites used the previous year. The nest site itself was usually in a very low, flat, grass tussock, no more than 5-6cm above the ground, with a deep nest cup hollowed out in the flat top and covered over with a few wispy strands of grass to camouflage the incubating bird.

More Skylark tips

A good number of Skylark nests can be found, where they are plentiful in moorland, simply by putting in enough legwork to stumble across them by chance. Deliberately finding them in less densely populated meadows, however, is quite a different proposition and involves two stages, usually on different days or in different parts of the same day.

The first nest-finding stage, that of locating a hot-spot, can take an entire morning or afternoon and has to be reasonably precise

so that when the second stage is undertaken, it can be successfully accomplished in about half-an-hour. It involves eliminating large parts of the meadow that are unlikely to contain the nest, leaving us with a small area to focus on. An hour of studying the entire meadow from a place of concealment at the edge will tell you a lot about the singing male and the extent of his territory. This can be checked by subsequently walking through the territory and watching the male, who will eventually turn back on his course and thus identify the boundary. Watch also for the appearance of the second bird, as only a small part of the meadow will have both birds in the air while you are walking through it, an indication that you are closer to the nest. Keeping both birds in view can be difficult if they separate, but if this happens, watch the female and not the male, as he will distract you while his mate goes back to the eggs. If you lose sight of the female, give her half an hour or so to reappear, then search the area in which she was last seen, but do this only to locate the female and your hot-spot, not to actually find the nest.

Having found the hot-spot, you have to go right away from the area and revisit later to undertake the second nest-finding stage. Return one evening, as the light is falling, and search your hot-spot, walking into the wind so that the bird does not hear you approach, allowing you to get a little closer before it flushes. Walk at quite a brisk pace, tapping the grass all round you with a long, thin switch of hazel. With luck, the bird will come straight up off the eggs at your feet, maybe after you've gone past. Listen out for the sound of a twig snapping behind you just after you've passed it - this will be the snap of the wings as the bird flushes from its nest.



Dunlin nests can often be found near a sharp bend in a stream, just off the main water body. Photo by Derek Belsey.

Nest Record Scheme totals 1939-2006 (as of 01/05/06)

Species	Code	2005	2006	TOTAL	Species	Code	2005	2006	TOTAL
Red-throated Diver*	RETDI	15	11	2401	Hobby*	HOBBY	54	58	1009
<i>Black-throated Diver</i>	BLTDI	3	4	232	Peregrine*	PEREG	87	86	3266
Little Grebe	LITGR	28	35	2625	Red Grouse	REDGR	2	1	850
Great Crested Grebe	GRCGR	68	49	4000	Ptarmigan	PTARM			131
Red-necked Grebe	RENGR			1	Black Grouse	BLAGR	1		80
<i>Slavonian Grebe</i>	SLAGR			196	Capercaillie	CAPER			91
<i>Black-necked Grebe</i>	BLNGR			30	Red-legged Partridge	RELPA	7	8	485
Fulmar	FULMA	139	197	7143	Chukar	CHUKA			1
Manx Shearwater	MANSH	73		629	Grey Partridge	GREPA	3		866
Storm Petrel	STOPE			92	<i>Quail</i>	QUAIL			16
<i>Leach's Petrel</i>	LEAPE			7	Pheasant	PHEAS	18	29	2272
Gannet	GANNE			33	Golden Pheasant	GOLPH			6
Cormorant	CORMO	29	46	2258	Lady Amherst's Pheasant	LAAPH			1
Shag	SHAG.	442	345	14688	Water Rail	WATRA	1		102
<i>Bittern</i>	BITTE			39	<i>Corncrake</i>	CORNC			32
Night Heron	NIGHE			3	Moorhen	MOORH	301	298	23920
Little Egret	LITEG	3		37	Coot	COOT.	512	486	19675
Grey Heron	GREHE	217	116	8094	Oystercatcher	OYSTE	400	294	17565
<i>Spoonbill</i>	SPOON			2	<i>Black-winged Stilt</i>	BLWST		1	3
Mute Swan	MUTSW	143	157	6576	<i>Avocet</i>	AVOCE	10	23	837
<i>Whooper Swan</i>	WHOSW	1	1	22	<i>Stone Curlew</i>	STOCU			425
<i>Greylag Goose</i>	GREGO	53	41	874	<i>Little Ringed Plover</i>	LIRPL	73	75	2574
Snow Goose	SNOGO			8	Ringed Plover	RINPL	229	181	10599
Bar-headed Goose	BAHGO		4	9	<i>Kentish Plover</i>	KENPL			19
Canada Goose	CANGO	164	108	4558	<i>Dotterel</i>	DOTTE			260
Barnacle Goose	BARGO	2	1	71	Golden Plover	GOLPL	7	2	914
Egyptian Goose	EGYGO	8	3	116	Lapwing	LAPWI	337	240	27066
Shelduck	SHELD	4	10	347	<i>Temminck's Stint</i>	TEMST			1
Ruddy Shelduck	RUDSH			2	<i>Purple Sandpiper</i>	PURSA			4
Mandarin	MANDA	27	41	649	Dunlin	DUNLI	3		566
Wigeon	WIGEO		1	187	<i>Ruff</i>	RUFF.			4
Gadwall	GADWA	3	18	200	Snipe*	SNIPE	13	2	1831
Teal	TEAL.	1	1	237	Woodcock	WOODC		6	665
Mallard	MALLA	118	119	9342	<i>Black-tailed Godwit</i>	BLTGO	1		39
<i>Pintail</i>	PINTA			23	<i>Whimbrel</i>	WHIMB			60
<i>Garganey</i>	GARGA			10	Curlew*	CURLE	22	13	3057
Shoveler	SHOVE	5	10	212	Redshank*	REDSH	104	10	3350
Red-crested Pochard	RECPO			1	<i>Greenshank</i>	GRESH	8		191
Pochard	POCHA	5	11	214	<i>Wood Sandpiper</i>	WOOSA			2
Tufted Duck	TUFDU	17	10	1328	Common Sandpiper*	COMSA	22	18	1605
<i>Scaup</i>	SCAUP			1	<i>Red-necked Phalarope</i>	RENPH			163
Eider	EIDER	430	302	9640	Arctic Skua	ARCSK			372
<i>Common Scoter</i>	COMSC			43	Great Skua	GRESK	1	2	426
<i>Goldeneye</i>	GOLDE	13	4	246	<i>Little Gull</i>	LITGU			3
Red-breasted Merganser	REBME	2	1	288	<i>Mediterranean Gull</i>	MEDGU	1	1	20
Goosander	GOOSA	14	13	386	Black-headed Gull	BLHGU	65	48	9993
Ruddy Duck	RUDDU		4	174	Common Gull	COMGU	41	54	5558
<i>Honey Buzzard</i>	HONBU	12	15	122	Lesser Black-backed Gull	LBBGU	8	15	4673
<i>Red Kite</i>	REDKI	56	86	311	Herring Gull	HERGU	94	78	7469
<i>Marsh Harrier</i>	MARHA	10	2	101	Great Black-backed Gull	GBBGU	2	4	3481
Hen Harrier	HENHA	60	39	1898	Lesser Crested Tern	LECTE			5
<i>Pallid Harrier</i>	PALHA			1	Kittiwake	KITTI	605	625	17120
<i>Montagu's Harrier</i>	MONHA			44	Sandwich Tern	SANTE			1814
<i>Goshawk</i>	GOSHA	85	84	1153	<i>Roseate Tern</i>	ROSTE	4	100	1193
Sparrowhawk*	SPARR	69	67	5605	Common Tern	COMTE	308	271	8014
Buzzard	BUZZA	223	205	6749	Arctic Tern	ARCTE	434	472	11850
<i>Golden Eagle</i>	GOLEA	16	20	628	<i>Little Tern</i>	LITTE	86	190	6664
<i>Osprey</i>	OSPRES	2	7	89	Guillemot	GUILL		167	1279
Kestrel	KESTR	316	278	8537	Razorbill	RAZOR	48	56	1482
Merlin*	MERLI	96	83	3836	Black Guillemot	BLAGU	36	37	1698

Species	Code	2005	2006	TOTAL	Species	Code	2005	2006	TOTAL
Puffin	PUFFI	75	100	979	<i>Dartford Warbler</i>	DARWA	6	12	520
Rock Dove	RODO	49	42	668	Lesser Whitethroat*	LESWH	11	17	955
Feral Pigeon	FERPI	30	24	2409	Whitethroat*	WHITE	67	79	6542
Stock Dove	STODO	554	478	11106	Garden Warbler*	GARWA	35	35	2271
Wood Pigeon	WOODP	511	483	29969	Blackcap*	BLACA	94	97	3980
Collared Dove*	COLDO	199	170	5630	Wood Warbler*	WOOWA	65	49	2698
Turtle Dove*	TURDO	8	6	2059	Chiffchaff*	CHIFF	112	94	3753
Ring-necked Parakeet	RINPA			49	Willow Warbler*	WILWA	151	124	13571
Cuckoo	CUCKO	15	4	2200	Goldcrest*	GOLDC	15	14	904
<i>Snowy Owl</i>	<i>SNOOW</i>			2	<i>Firecrest</i>	<i>FIREC</i>			9
Barn Owl	BAROW	1380	989	10713	Spotted Flycatcher	SPOFL	175	188	11899
Little Owl*	LITOW	76	109	2459	<i>Pied Flycatcher</i>	PIEFL	896	807	44401
Tawny Owl	TAWOW	390	254	11478	<i>Bearded Tit</i>	BEATI	18	9	352
Long-eared Owl*	LOEOW	29	12	810	Long-tailed Tit*	LOTTI	116	156	6495
Short-eared Owl*	SHEOW	4	2	408	Marsh Tit*	MARTI	40	53	1657
Nightjar	NIJAR	64	60	1909	Willow Tit*	WILTI	10	22	524
Swift	SWIFT	210	188	2773	<i>Crested Tit</i>	CRETI	6	2	456
Kingfisher	KINGF	20	17	740	<i>Coal Tit</i>	COATI	67	64	5801
<i>Hoopoe</i>	<i>HOOP</i>			1	Blue Tit	BLUTI	4761	4311	116203
<i>Wryneck</i>	<i>WRYNE</i>			23	Great Tit	GRETI	4327	3929	78887
Green Woodpecker*	GREWO	13	13	493	Nuthatch	NUTHA	168	109	4326
Gt Spotted Woodpecker*	GRSWO	117	126	2359	Treecreeper*	TREEC	28	33	2683
Lr Spotted Woodpecker*	LESWO	9	7	244	<i>Short-toed Treecreeper</i>	<i>SHTTR</i>			1
Woodlark	WOODL	61	82	1736	<i>Golden Oriole</i>	<i>GOLOR</i>			41
Skylark*	SKYLA	83	48	8552	<i>Red-backed Shrike</i>	<i>REBSH</i>	1	1	256
Sand Martin*	SANMA	392	183	3346	Jay*	JAY..	14	16	1630
Swallow	SWALL	2061	2612	66797	Magpie*	MAGPI	70	81	8297
House Martin	HOUMA	189	184	10446	<i>Chough</i>	<i>CHOUG</i>	28	2	926
Tree Pipit*	TREPI	27	44	1988	Jackdaw	JACKD	265	257	8687
Meadow Pipit	MEAPI	56	47	9929	Rook*	ROOK.	109	98	14988
Rock Pipit*	ROCIPI	8	10	871	Carrion Crow*	CROW.	123	126	8170
Yellow Wagtail*	YELWA	6	5	1063	<i>Hooded Crow</i>	HOOCR	4	1	1149
Grey Wagtail*	GREWA	101	91	6406	Raven	RAVEN	183	139	4687
Pied Wagtail	PIEWA	189	169	10693	Starling	STARL	292	311	17549
Dipper	DIPPE	191	221	10741	House Sparrow	HOUSP	498	404	15017
Wren	WREN.	304	203	16824	Tree Sparrow	TRESP	1764	1930	26411
Dunnoek	DUNNO	319	266	31647	Chaffinch	CHAFF	340	307	24284
Robin	ROBIN	401	320	22638	<i>Brambling</i>	<i>BRAMB</i>			2
Nightingale	NIGAL	2	1	487	<i>Serin</i>	<i>SERIN</i>			1
<i>Bluethroat</i>	<i>BLUTH</i>			1	Greenfinch	GREFI	212	164	15231
<i>Black Redstart</i>	<i>BLARE</i>	1	2	180	Goldfinch*	GOLDF	80	76	3592
Redstart*	REDST	112	105	7032	<i>Siskin</i>	SISKI	2	2	91
Whinchat*	WHINC	10	16	2477	Linnet	LINNE	198	189	29013
Stonechat*	STOCH	164	97	4086	Twite*	TWITE	21	9	1187
Wheatear*	WHEAT	41	39	4032	Redpoll*	LESRE	5	2	1367
Ring Ouzel*	RINO	9	37	1830	<i>Parrot Crossbill</i>	<i>PARCR</i>			4
Blackbird	BLABI	1231	1069	136255	<i>Crossbill</i>	CROSS	4	8	167
<i>Fieldfare</i>	<i>FIELD</i>			7	<i>Common Rosefinch</i>	<i>SCARO</i>			1
Song Thrush	SONTH	526	402	76473	Bullfinch*	BULLF	51	43	6035
<i>Redwing</i>	<i>REDWI</i>	1		125	<i>Hawfinch</i>	HAWFI	1	5	211
Mistle Thrush*	MISTH	44	65	8307	<i>Snow Bunting</i>	<i>SNOBU</i>			202
<i>Cetti's Warbler</i>	<i>CETWA</i>	1	1	32	Yellowhammer*	YELHA	109	108	8145
Grasshopper Warbler*	GRAWA	4	9	418	<i>Cirl Bunting</i>	<i>CIRBU</i>			254
<i>Savi's Warbler</i>	<i>SAVWA</i>			4	Reed Bunting*	REEBU	57	76	8251
Sedge Warbler*	SEDWA	34	36	5032	Corn Bunting*	CORBU	31	5	1021
<i>Marsh Warbler</i>	<i>MARWA</i>			168					
Reed Warbler	REEWA	475	482	17519					
					NUMBER OF RECORDS		33,346	30,996	1,388,493

Species in bold are used within the BTO's Integrated Population Monitoring Programme. We would be particularly pleased to receive more records for those species marked with + (less than 150 records per year on average over the last 10 years). Schedule 1 species are in italics (please note that this list relates to GB classification and may vary for Eire, Northern Ireland and Isle of Man).

IPMR v2.2 update

IPMR 2.2 is released!

Since the last edition of Nest Record News, version 2.2 of Mark Cubitt's Integrated Population Monitoring Reporter has been released, following an intense period of development and testing. Our thanks, of course, go to Mark Cubitt and all the developers and testers involved with the production of IPMR version 2.2.

Now that the v2.2 is available to all nest recorders, we would like to ask all current IPMR users to upgrade to this version of the program if at all possible. Anyone who is already using IPMR v2.1 will be able to upgrade to v2.2, as will most people running v1 on a reasonably up-to-date computer. If you are not sure whether you can upgrade, or have reservations about doing it safely, please do get in touch with the Nest Records Unit for advice.

We would also encourage anyone who is still submitting records on card to consider making the switch to electronic recording. It's easy to do, it reduces the time you have to spend filling in your records and it is of tremendous benefit to us here at the BTO!

How to upgrade or install IPMR

To upgrade or install IPMR v2.2, you need only two items- a copy of the Installation Guide for IPMR and a copy of the new program or program upgrade.

They are available to download on the IPMR web-page at www.bto.org/software/ipmr/index.htm, and also on CD from the Nest Records Unit. Once you have your copies, simply follow the instructions in the Installation Guide for IPMR. Please note that it is essential that these instructions are followed when you attempt to upgrade or install IPMR.

A new manual

In the Nest Records Unit, we deal with queries and questions about IPMR on a daily basis. Many of these relate to features of IPMR that are explained in Ian Spence's IPMR User Manual for Nest Recording. Whilst we are always happy to deal with questions of any sort, IPMR users are perhaps not taking full advantage of the advice offered in this manual and may be unaware that it is available. Therefore, we would like to renew our appeal for all users to obtain a copy of both the IPMR User Manual for Nest Recording, which is available on the IPMR web-page and on CD from the Nest Records Unit. The manual is ideal for those of you just getting started with IPMR and also explains the program's more advanced features, making it essential reading for all users.

To reflect the changes made to IPMR with v2.2, the manual has been updated and also reformatted to make it easier to consult the various sections. So even if you have a copy of the manual for v2.1, it is well worth obtaining the new one when you upgrade.

New Features

Many of the updates in IPMR v2.2 are hidden, in that they make the program run more smoothly and increase its stability without altering the way it is used. This is good for the user, of course, because it means that there is absolutely no need to 're-learn' the program. However, there are some notable features that you will come into contact with. One of these is the 'Nest Effort' table, which allows you to enter your monthly recording effort, just as is done on the paper Summary Forms. Another feature, which is important for those of you with Schedule 1 Licences, is the ability to have IPMR generate your annual Schedule 1 Report for you.

Validation

The most important new feature of IPMR v2.2 for nest recorders is the improved validation system, which has been implemented to help guard against simple mistakes made when entering your visit data, such as using the wrong code or entering the wrong date. Now, when you enter your visits into the nest records form, IPMR examines what you are entering against the visits you have already entered, to check whether the entries make biological sense. If you enter information that is not what we would normally expect for the species, such as an incubation period of 2 months

for a clutch of Blue Tit eggs, IPMR will present you with a warning message informing you that a mistake might have been made (see Fig. 1). The system is only there to advise and does nothing more than bring up the warning message. Therefore, once you have closed this message, it is up

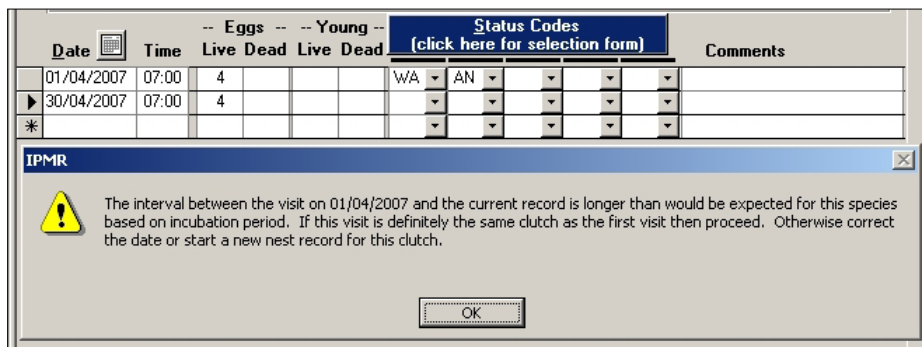


Figure 1. In this screenshot, the user has been entering visits for a Blackbird nest and has recorded that the eggs are being incubated for much longer than is expected, prompting a warning message from IPMR.

to you to check and amend your data if necessary. If you are confident that what you have entered is correct, you need not change anything. However, if you encounter warning messages frequently, it could be an indication that you may be using one or more nest visit codes incorrectly and we would ask you to please contact us for advice.

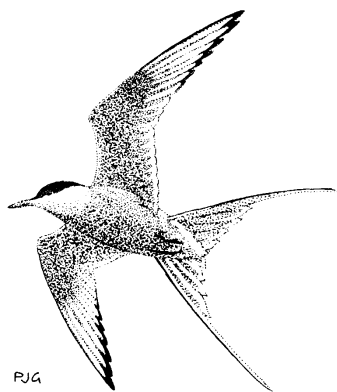
Help

If you have any questions or queries about IPMR, need advice about installing or upgrading the program, or if you would like help entering or submitting your data, there are plenty of places to turn to. First and foremost, as discussed, we would ask all users to consult the IPMR User Manual for Nest Recording. Secondly, there is an excellent 'Help' feature built into IPMR itself. This can be accessed from the main menu or by clicking the 'Help' button that appears at the top right-hand corner of most of the forms. Thirdly, it is well worthwhile subscribing to the IPMR forum, where you can ask questions and be given advice by expert users. To sign-up, simply send an e-mail to ipmrforum@yahoo.com. Finally, please do not hesitate to telephone, write to, or e-mail us at the Nest Records Unit if you need any help at all.

Gordon Vaughan 1933-2006

Very sadly, in November 2006, the BTO learned of Gordon Vaughan's death after a long illness. With his passing, the Devon ornithological community lost a leading, loyal member whose involvement spanned 50 years, and the BTO a veteran nest recorder of 35 years. Gordon's bird watching hobby was one of discovery, careful observing and meticulous note-taking; a model to follow. Early on, as a schoolboy in northeast London, he found and detailed Black Redstart breeding sites in the city. Ever keen-eyed, a move to Devon in 1955 produced many outstanding records, including the County's first Mediterranean Gull at Dawlish Warren in 1964 and a small, auk-type bird during a trip to Lundy in 1990, subsequently identified as the UK's first Ancient Murrelet.

It was the discovery of a Pied Flycatcher pair, though, nesting close to his new home at Belstone, near Okehampton, in 1970, that was to transform Gordon's birding life-style. By 1988 he was maintaining and carefully monitoring a woodland nest box study plot with 300 boxes, at which point 53 boxes supported Pied Flycatchers - the largest population in southern England. Gordon maintained a somewhat tongue-in-cheek, love-hate relationship with the native Common Dormice (those 'varmints'- see BTO News) that usurped his precious Pied Flycatcher nest boxes, but this afforded a unique opportunity for detailed study on behalf of the Mammal Society. The BTO will sorely miss Gordon's carefully crafted annual stack of Nest Record Cards as well as his annual newsletter, relayed religiously as feedback to agencies and landowners. For us at the BTO, his life's work lives on in a treasure trove of nest histories, housed and analysed at The Nunnery. The Trust relays condolences to his wife Joy, sons Nigel and Roger.



Thanks to Peter Hawkey's early endeavours, the Farne Islands now submits over 300 Arctic Tern records per year. Drawing by PJG.

Peter Hawkey 1925-2006

With the death of Peter Hawkey in October 2006, an important chapter in the history of the Farne Islands came to a close. As a manager of this site from 1970-1990 he brought about changes that benefited all visitors – both avian and human.

The Farnes, in the ownership of the National Trust since 1925, had been ably managed by a Committee up until 1970. With increasing visitor numbers and consequent pressures on the islands, the time was right for a full-time manager and increased numbers of seasonal wardens. So it was that Peter was duly appointed 'Warden Naturalist' – how quaint that title appears almost forty years on! He set about the difficult task of limiting the numbers of boats able to land at any one time and put in place measures which allowed the breeding birds the 'space' they required, while still retaining the unique visitor experience.

With Grace Hickling from the Natural History Society of Northumberland and his seasonal team, he continued the tradition of bird-ringing and must have ringed many thousands of seabirds during his twenty years in post. He initiated BTO recording for most of the seabird and wader breeding species and it is almost impossible, not to mention somewhat daunting, to estimate how many Nest Record Cards and Colony Sheets will have passed across his desk. His legacy is the continuation of this work – the Farnes team now provide over 80% of nest records for Fulmar, Eider, Kittiwake, Arctic Tern, Puffin, and Razorbill.

Whilst writing this, I thought how delighted Peter would have been to see that records could now be submitted by computer. In my time as a seasonal in the late-70s/early-80s I had the distinct impression that he loved the recording – but hated the paperwork that went with it. Obviously, in wardening, some things never change!!

John Walton, National Trust Property Manager, Farne islands & Northumberland Coast

Harold F. Mayfield 1911-2007

In January this year, we learned of the passing of eminent ornithologist Harold F. Mayfield at the age of 95. As an amateur who helped reverse the decline of an endangered local species, authored over 200 scholarly papers, and developed the famous 'Mayfield Method' for calculating nest failure rates, Harold Mayfield will remain an inspiration to professional researchers and lay-ornithologists alike.

Harold was born in Minneapolis, USA, attended senior school at Alton, Illinois and received a master's degree in mathematics from the University of Illinois. In 1935, he began his career in personnel management for a local packaging firm and, as a personnel executive, authored over 90 papers in the field of business and employment. This expertise crossed over to his ornithological studies, when Harold used his work on workplace safety records to develop a means of estimating nest failure rates, his 'Mayfield Method'.

Harold was a keen sportsman until the age of 28, when he suffered a temporarily debilitating stroke. Whilst recovering, he developed an interest in bird watching and began studying the endangered Kirtland's warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*), a species found only in lower Michigan. His studies led to a dramatic turnaround in the fortunes of the species, as he identified the major causes of its decline and worked with authorities to develop a conservation strategy to aid its recovery. This work led to the publication of his famous 1960 monograph on the Kirtland's Warbler, for which he won the American Ornithologists' Union's, highest honour, the Brewster Memorial Award.

Harold was most famous for his development of a sophisticated method, now known as the 'Mayfield Method', for estimating the daily mortality rate of nests, a very important but hitherto difficult to ascertain breeding parameter. His method has been used by the Nest Record Scheme to calculate nest failure rates for UK breeding birds for many years.

Later in life, he held positions as president of the American Ornithologists' Union, the Wilson Ornithological Society and the Cooper Ornithological Society, all three of the major ornithological organizations in the USA. He also received many awards, including a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Toledo Naturalists' Association in 2003 and was awarded honorary doctorates from two US universities.

Busy in the river

While passerines and raptors regularly feature in *Nest Record News*, less is mentioned about waterbirds. Keith Seaton's account of his experiences monitoring wildfowl on the River Welland serves as a reminder that, even in a well-established field such as nest recording, innovation breeds success.

Early in 1996, I was approached by the South Lincolnshire WeBS Counts organiser and asked to take over the count area of the Coronation Channel, Spalding. This channel was created after extensive flooding early in 1947, when the River Welland overflowed its narrow confines where it passes through the town. The channel branches off the tidal River Welland, bypasses the town and re-enters through sluice gates around three miles downstream. There is another lock gate nearby that allows navigation into the now fresh-water river that runs through the town.

The first year I monitored the breeding waterfowl, I was taken by the success of the resident Great-crested Grebes, which by August had fledged 11 young from six pairs. These nests were easy to find, mostly being sited in the branches of weeping willow that touched the water. However, the following year the fortunes of these birds turned, as work by the Environment Agency on the upstream banks of the Welland inadvertently made these nesting sites unsafe. Each week, the water level was dropped to allow maintenance work, being raised again at the weekend for the benefit of the local sailing club and angling. Unfortunately, this meant that nests would either tilt or be flooded, resulting in loss of the eggs.

Over the next two winters, some of the willows were removed and others heavily pruned back, forcing the grebes to find new nest sites on the edge of beds of *Phragmites*. These new nests were also somewhat vulnerable to flooding after heavy rain, and while their inaccessibility made them safe from destruction by local fishermen, it was also unfortunately difficult for me to inspect from the bank. By this time, I had added two more *Phragmites* nesters, Coot and Moorhen, to my recording list and again their nests were too inaccessible to monitor from the bank - so I decided to try a different approach.

I had owned kayaks of various types since 1957 and had paddled on many rivers, so the obvious solution to monitoring these waterfowl nests was to visit them from on the water itself. By leaving the Coronation Channel at the sluice and portaging to

re-enter the River Welland above the lock gates, I had a circular route of around six miles by which I could visit all the waterbird nests, though this could take up to four hours. The only problem I had with this method was keeping my note books dry, so I began to use pieces of card that would fit into a breast pocket sown onto my buoyancy jacket.

I have now been nest recording by kayak for several years and find that I can approach and monitor nests with a minimum of disturbance. The grebes usually cover the eggs and leave the nest as I approach, returning fairly soon after I have moved on. Visiting the nests by kayak affords a very close inspection of the contents. Many times I have had the pleasure of hearing chicks calling from inside eggs and even seen them in the process of hatching.

Great-crested Grebe clutches usually number from three to six, and after hatching the parents will carry the young on their backs for the first few days. At this time, I will only be able to watch a family from the bank, though I might still catch good views of the parents feeding the young feathers, small fish and eels. After a week, there will usually be only two to three young remaining, though in most cases these birds will then survive to fledging.

Unlike grebes, Coots will sit tight on the nest for as long as possible before finally making a dash, sometimes aggressively flying at me when I approach, making only a quick count of the eggs possible whilst I paddle by. Despite this, I have managed to come upon Coot chicks just hatched and still wet and I am always amazed just how quickly they leave the nest and follow the parents. I have found up to 13 eggs in one nest, although the usual clutch size is eight or nine. Most of the eggs will hatch, though the brood size is then very quickly reduced to only two or three. Some youngsters are taken by Grey Heron, some perhaps by pike, whilst others die of cold if the weather is very wet. If inclined by necessity, the male will even drown some of them.

Coots will often have second nesting attempts, with a new nest being built close to the first, or else the original nest being rebuilt. By the time the second clutch hatches, the original young are almost independent and will often help the parents feed the new brood.

The number of breeding pairs of Coot has increased during the time I have been recording and in 2006, I had 92 nest records of Coot on the Coronation and non-tidal River Welland. This increase has slowed of late and, as the pairs are territorial and the males aggressively defend their own stretch of water, I doubt there will be room for many more.

Moorhen nests can be much more difficult to find than those of Coot, being often hidden deep in the reeds. Some nests are built in overhanging bushes or bramble, under landing stages or on the top of posts under bridges, and can be one or more metres above the water. As with Coot, I have seen large clutches of up to 12 eggs. Once the entire clutch is hatched, the whole family will leave the nest each morning to follow the parents in and out of the reeds, feeding, and only going back to the nest site to roost.

Most winters I find some pairs of Little Grebes on the channel, and although I suspected breeding early last season, I was unable to locate the nest. However, I did eventually see a female with a tiny young one on the non-tidal stretch of the river. I hope they will return to breed again, along with all the other waterfowl, in 2007.



Last two floating- a brood of Coot chicks is very quickly whittled down from about eight young down to only two or three. Photo by Josie Latus.

How to monitor Ure plovers

The East Dales Ringing Group have been sending Nest Records of Little Ringed Plover to the NRS for many years. But as Steve Worwood and Jill Warwick now reveal, the Group has been doing a lot more than just visiting nests...

In North Yorkshire, the River Ure, running through the territory of the East Dales Ringing Group, has formed large meanders with associated shingle banks that have long been utilised by various mineral companies, resulting in an abundance of gravel workings along the Ure valley. Since colonising the UK in the 1930s, Little Ringed Plovers (LRPs) have readily taken to both the natural banks and the quarries as they have spread along the Ure, resulting in a discernable increase in the local population.

In 1994, after ringing several broods of LRPs, we decided to undertake a more structured study of the breeding habits of these charismatic little plovers, in particular their breeding success, site fidelity and general behaviour. It was to be an excellent opportunity to compare the breeding success of plovers on the shingle banks of the Ure with that of the birds found on the man-made quarries in the same river system.

Initially, studies concentrated on ringing just the pulli, but this did not reveal anything about site fidelity by breeding adults, or whether young birds returned to natal areas to breed. Trapping and colour-ringing was clearly the next step and was initiated in 1996 using walk-in traps. Adult birds were fitted with four colour rings, allowing individual identification. Youngsters were fitted only with BTO rings, the intention being that those which returned to breed in later seasons would then be trapped and fitted with the appropriate combination of colour rings.

As most people are aware, LRPs start returning to the UK in mid to late March. The adult birds start displaying shortly afterwards, but it is usually late April before nest site selection begins. The often frenetic courtship display, usually initiated by the male bird, eventually results in pair bonding, leading on to an intriguing nest site selection process. The male chooses a site and entices the female over with a soft "purring" call, whereupon she inspects the chosen site underneath his fanned tail. This ritual can be repeated several times until an acceptable nest site is chosen.

With the nest site established, the male then generally begins his mating display, a characteristic "high-strutting" walk, in order to initiate copulation. At this point we begin identifying nest sites by looking for the displaying males. Spotting this behaviour is time-consuming but rewarding work, as it is essential to finding the location of the nest sites early enough to obtain first egg laying dates. This, in turn, allows approximate hatching dates to be calculated.

Compared with Ringed Plovers, LRPs have narrower requirements when it comes to site selection, preferring bare, more open areas of shingle-type habitat. The nest itself is a shallow scrape, lined with tiny pebbles and/or small bits of twig, depending on available materials. Into this scrape, a clutch of about four eggs is laid, with a 36 hour interval between the laying of each egg. Incubation lasts for approximately 25-26 days after laying the final egg and is shared by both adults. When the eggs are within 48 hours of hatching, the chicks can be heard 'pipping' from within. Interestingly, the eggs normally all hatch on the same day and within 24 hours of hatching, the young will leave the nest scrape. They instinctively forage for their own food, as do all members of the plover family, the adult birds acting as sentinels and brooding the young. The young can wander quite a distance from the adults whilst foraging but they instinctively



Not an easy find - a Little Ringed Plover scrape with a full clutch of eggs. Photo by Derek Belsey

freeze when the adults' alarm call is given and they have cryptic plumage to hide from predators.

In addition to the usual suite of predators, LRPs are at the bottom of the wading-bird pecking order and so are often harassed by Ringed Plovers and Lapwing. The latter will even keep incubating LRPs off their eggs, which can lead to desertion of the clutch. Also, in rare instances, Lapwing will actually kill the young. In our opinion, this is because the young LRPs are seen as competitors for food resources needed by the young of the more dominant plover species.

The East Dales Ringing Group has now been studying LRPs in the Ure valley for over 10 years and our findings so far have proved interesting. Our colour ringing activities have shown that successful breeding pairs are more likely to return to the same site the following year, whereas failed pairs very rarely do. Juveniles almost never return to their natal area.

As far as natural riverine sites versus man-made quarries is concerned, many factors, such as predation pressure, appear to be similar, but the two habitat types also have their own peculiar hazards. Nests in quarry sites can be susceptible to disturbance or destruction through quarrying activities, though fortunately this is now an uncommon event thanks to increased awareness by quarry operators. Riverine nest sites, on the other hand, are susceptible to flooding; the River Ure is a "wild" river and can experience dramatic summer floods. Overall, there are fewer riverine nest sites each year, but probably no significant difference in the percentage failure rates of the two different habitats.

Our study has taught us a lot about this quirky species of plover. We have learned much about their breeding activities just by watching them closely year after year and yet it seems that every season has something new to reveal. Let's see what 2007 brings!

Please note that Little Ringed Plover are listed as Schedule 1 breeding birds and therefore a licence is required to monitor them at the nest. Please see the back page for details.

A nested interest

As nest recorders, we tend to focus on the contents of a nest rather than the nest itself - Professor Mike Hansell takes a closer look at some current studies investigating nest structure

It is another breeding season. Birds large and small are suddenly showing that special behaviour they generally exhibit for only a few days each year - nest building! These nests are a record of bird behaviour and as such should be collected for study just like any other breeding record. That's why the two major collections of bird nests in the UK are now working together to promote the collection of nests in the field.

The largest collection of nests in the UK is at the Natural History Museum at Tring. It contains nearly 4000 nests gradually acquired over the last 200 years from all over the world. This collection, curated by Douglas Russell, contains specimens of great interest, including nests of extinct species. Its aim is to provide a broad selection of nests representing as many of the world's bird families as logistically possible.

Douglas is currently undertaking a major update of the storage and cataloguing of this nest collection, allowing him to accurately assess its current historical and biological importance. Among the contributors of ornithological material to the Natural History Museum was the great 19th century ornithologist John Gould, a pivotal figure in the history of Australian ornithology and author of the monumental illustrated volumes of 'The Birds of Australia' (1840-48). The Natural History Museum acquired from Gould around 11,000 ornithological specimens, overwhelmingly bird skins, but including about 1,500 eggs and 100 nests. Figures 1 & 2 show two of these important nest specimens.

The other major collection of birds' nests in the UK is the National Nest Reference Collection of the Hunterian Museum of the University of Glasgow. Its focus is on British breeding species and it currently houses over 1000 nests and nest images, representing nearly half of the known 246 breeding species. It may well be the only museum in Europe to have taken on the task of forming a comprehensive national collection. It is curated by Maggie Reilly of the Hunterian Museum, with me working on nest acquisition. Our aim is to build up nest series that represent within-species variation as well as between-species differences in nest building. We therefore continue to seek nests, not just of the rarer species but also of commoner species, especially groups of nests that are linked to a particular



© Natural History Museum, London.

Figure 1. The hanging, purse-like nest of the Mistletoebird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*), a species that is widely distributed in Australia, makes considerable use of spider silk.

survey or piece of research. A number of readers of Nest Record News have kindly contributed to this collection in the nine years since its foundation.

As you can see, the aims of the Natural History Museum and the Hunterian are complementary and so we have now agreed to coordinate work on the development of our collections. This cooperation should provide a unique collective resource within the UK, which will facilitate the study of this very special feature of bird biology.

Studies of nests

The National Nest Reference Collection has assisted both education and research projects. In the last year, photographs of nests in the collection were used by the Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour in the preparation of teaching resources for schools.

More recently, nests from the collection were supplied to Dr Charles Deeming and Miss Rosetta Blackman at the University of Lincoln. Rosetta was funded by a Nuffield Undergraduate Scholarship to develop a method for recording thermal conductance of songbird nests and then to correlate these values with attentiveness of the adults at the nest during incubation.

It was hypothesised that nests with low insulation would be built by birds that sat on their eggs for a high percentage of the day. Surprisingly, no correlation was found between the two, confirming that research generally raises as many questions as it answers. However, another very interesting trend emerged. The structure and thermal characteristics of Blackbird nests roughly correlated with latitude, with Scottish nests being thicker and having better insulation. Charles hopes to extend this



Figure 2. The cup nest of the Eastern Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus dubius*), a species found down the eastern side of Australia and in Tasmania. This specimen was collected in 1838 from Brown's River, Van Diemen's Land, Tasmania.

© Natural History Museum, London.

study by examining characteristics of Blackbird and Robin nests constructed in 2007 for which records have been kept about location and nesting success.

Dr Sue Healy and I are currently conducting a study of cognition in bird nest building, funded by the Leverhulme Trust. It is often assumed that bird nest building is instinctive. However, it has been known for over 40 years that some African weaverbirds show substantial improvement in their nest building with experience, yet this has never been studied further. We wish to compare weaverbird nest building techniques with those of two species with a much simpler nest design - Blackcap and Garden Warbler.



Figure 3. A Robin nest with an identification tag being bagged-up, ready to send to the National Nest Reference Collection with its accompanying collection form.

How you can help

As well as sending in your nest records to the BTO, you can get even more value for conservation out of your hard-won nest finds by collecting them at the end of the season and sending them off to us. The National Nest Reference Collection will accept nests of all UK birds, although certain species will always be particularly in demand due to the requirements of the projects that we are involved with. As discussed earlier, Sue Healy and I are currently in need of Garden Warbler and Blackcap nests, whilst Charles Deeming is after nests of Blackbird and Robin. If you monitor any of these species this season, please help us by sending in your empty nests.

To do this, at the end of the season carefully remove each empty nest from its location, seal each one in a separate plastic bag (see Fig. 3), and fill out a nest collection form (available from me) for each. Then, simply send the nests to us at the National Nest Reference Collection - the more the better!

If you're interested, please do get in touch with me at the University of Glasgow for details and copies of the relevant collection forms. Helping to build the National Nest Reference Collection is a rewarding and simple addition to your nest recording activities, so please do contact us to get involved.

Prof. Mike Hansell, IBLS, Graham Kerr Building, University of Glasgow, Glasgow. G12 8QQ. E-mail: m.hansell@bio.gla.ac.uk

Certain *Certhia*

Following on from Allan Batnick's tale of attracting Crested Tits to nest boxes in the last issue, here is another success story - this time from Chris and Elspeth Rowe on the Isle of Wight.

Having tried unsuccessfully for some years to entice nesting Treecreepers with wedge-shaped boxes, we decided to try bark attached to trees and found these were an instant hit. We erected our bark creations in a number of woodland sites, mostly deciduous. When siting the bark fixtures, we chose the sheltered side of large oaks with no live ivy growth and fixed them with screws at a height of about 1.7m. The bark fixtures were about 400mm by 400mm and usually had a large gap at the top and bottom due to the barrel shape of the bark pieces. The fixtures were placed under natural projections to minimise the gaps at the top, but the bottom gaps were left open. This did not seem to matter to the Treecreepers and in fact may have deterred titmice from claiming the fixtures. Two D-shaped entrance holes were cut out near the top of each side, immediately adjacent to the trunk.

Overall we had a high level of occupancy at almost every site. Many nests were started and seven progressed to at least the egg stage. Three of these nests were successful, fledging at least four young each. The successful nest sites were always the ones that fitted well at the sides, leaving a very narrow, deep chamber. At the end of the season we sent our seven cards off to the BTO and were pleased to be told that we had submitted the largest number of Treecreeper records for 2006. Not bad for a few bits of bark!



One of the Treecreeper bark fixtures sited directly below a branch, with a nest poking out below the bottom space and an entrance hole cut at the top. Photo by E. Rowe

Species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

The species listed in italics in the tables on pages 8 and 9 are specially protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended by the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

You will require a licence to visit the nests of these species.

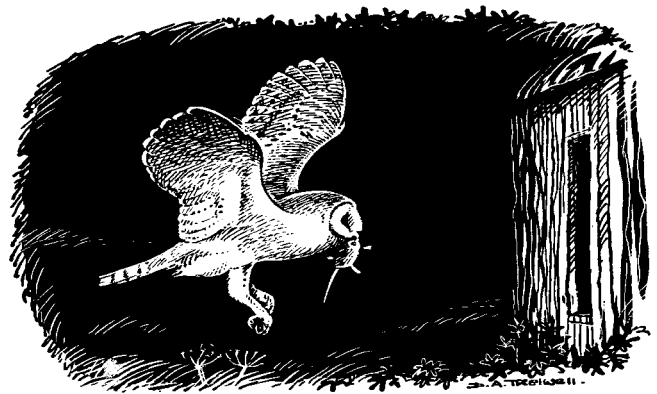
All applications for Schedule 1 licences (for nest recording and/or ringing) are dealt with by the BTO Licensing Officer, Jez Blackburn jez.blackburn@bto.org who can send you an application form.

The majority of licences issued during the breeding season are renewals for the same workers who held the appropriate approval during the previous season. Recorders who have not held such a licence before can apply for the relevant approval through the BTO. However, it is necessary to provide two references from 'respected' ornithologists (eg County Recorder, BTO Regional Representative, Bird Club Chairman, BTO Ringer etc). Please note that applications must be received before the end of February to be given priority and no renewal can be granted until a form has been submitted (including nil returns) for the previous season. Schedule 1 nests that are found by 'accident' should not be visited a second time without a licence. **NO SCHEDULE 1 NEST MAY BE VISITED WITHOUT PRIOR APPROVAL.** For very rare breeding species (ie any species not currently in the NRS table), please

contact the BTO Licensing Officer for further advice.

All other requests (to handle eggs, nest photography* of Schedule 1 species) should be directed to the Licensing Teams at the appropriate Country Agency.

*By nest photography we refer to 'hide-based' work. We understand that 'snap-shots' taken at nests are permitted under your ringing or nest recording Schedule 1 licence, provided that this does not significantly extend the length of your visit.



Useful email addresses:

General NRS enquiries: nest.records@bto.org
Submission of IPMR data files: nrs.data@bto.org
Subscribe to NRS Email Forum: nrsforum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Subscribe to IPMR Email Forum: IPMRForum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Post message on IPMR Forum: IPMRForum@yahoogroups.com
Post message on NRS Forum: nrsforum@yahoogroups.com

Useful web addresses:

BTO website: <http://www.bto.org/>
NRS web pages: <http://www.bto.org/goto/nrs.htm>
IPMR program and help guide downloads: <http://www.bto.org/software/ipmr/index.htm>
Wider Countryside Report: <http://www.bto.org/birdtrends/>
NRS Email Forum pages (need to sign up to Yahoo! Groups first): <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nrsforum/>

Nest Record Scheme contacts

Carl Barimore (Nest Records Officer) - The main point of contact for nest recorders, provides IPMR support, edits Nest Record News, and is the person to whom your nest records should be sent.

Dr Dave Leech (Head of Nest Record Scheme) - Oversees the running of the NRS and Barn Owl Monitoring Programme and undertakes research using the data collected.

Dr Humphrey Crick (Senior Ecologist/Head of Demography Unit) - Leads work on schemes such as the NRS, CES and RAS that seek to understand what makes bird populations rise or fall.

David Glue (BTO Research Biologist) - Writes articles and provides advice based on a long involvement with the Scheme.

Mandy T Andrews (Secretary) - Provides secretarial support to the Scheme. She is responsible for sending out acknowledgements, replacement recording materials and also the NRS 'Starter Packs'.



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