

*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).*

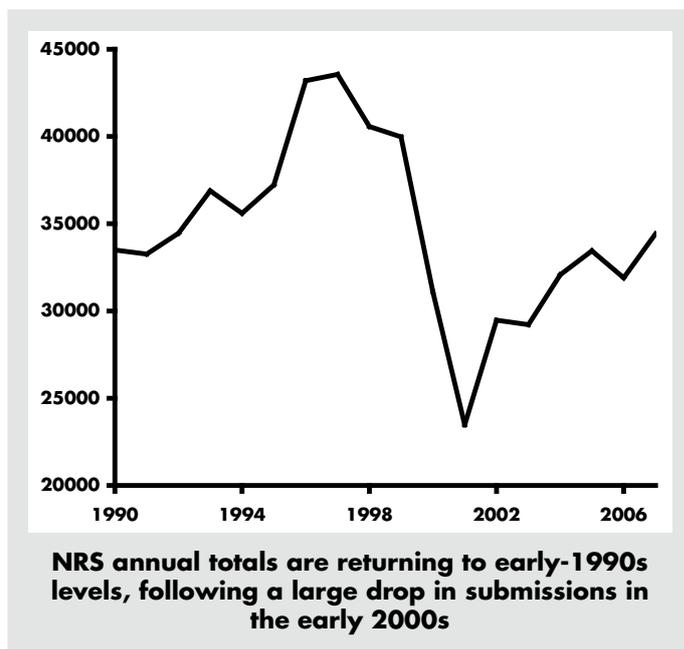
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## Helpers at the nest

Welcome to the 24<sup>th</sup> edition of Nest Record News. For the first time since 1999, our annual total has topped the 34,000 mark and the Nest Record Scheme (NRS) is seeing once again the level of participation that it enjoyed before the large drop in submissions at the end of the 1990s. The 2007 total of 34,202 includes 1,200 records from 65 new participants—so a warm welcome to the NRS if you are reading Nest Record News for the first time. As ever, our sincere thanks go to all supporters of the survey, whether you have been busy monitoring nests, sent us photos, told a friend about nest recording, spoken at a local bird club meeting or have simply written and told us about the breeding birds near you.

For Dave Leech, the head of the NRS, and I, the last year has been about the many ways volunteers can help grow and develop this essential bird monitoring tool. Traditionally, and perhaps not surprisingly, participants have always been told to focus on nest recording and sending us data. 'If you're interested in nest recording, please find us some nests!' But over the past 12 months we have approached you for help in many other ways, and the response has been no less enthusiastic.



A female Pied Flycatcher on eggs. Thanks to the efforts of volunteer Michael Palles-Clark, over 5000 historic Pied Flycatcher records have been loaded onto the Nest Record Scheme database, contributing to a run of records for this species that dates back to 1944. Photo by Richard Castell.

In January 2008, the Nest Record Scheme received funding to revise and update many of its materials, including the NRS Handbook. The first step in finding out how we could improve our materials was to ask you what you thought of them. After sending out a letter inviting comments on the current handbook and ideas for the new one, we were delighted to receive over 50 letters and e-mails, giving extensive and detailed suggestions. If you were one of those who wrote back to us, even with just a few words—thank you!

More recently, the Nest Records Unit has turned its attention to some of our historic nest record cards and developed a home-inputting database so that volunteers can easily enter them onto computer. An appeal for help in the BTO's Bird Table magazine brought an overwhelming response, and we found ourselves having to turn keen inputters away! Thanks to several dedicated volunteers, we have since loaded over 5000 historic records onto our database, fleshing out our long-term recordsets for species like Pied Flycatcher and Woodpigeon.

The enthusiasm we see whenever we turn to you for help never ceases to amaze us and I believe that this year more than ever has testified to the fact that there is more than one way to get involved in the Nest Record Scheme!

*Carl Barimore, Nest Records Unit*

# News from the Nest Records Unit

## IPMR 2.3

In February 2008, version 2.3 of Mark Cubitt's Integrated Population Monitoring Reporter was released. If you using version 2.2 or older, please do upgrade to the latest version as soon as you are able. Version 2.3 is compatible with Windows Vista, so if you have recently upgraded to Vista or bought a new Vista machine, you will now be able to use IPMR. The upgrade also contains enhancements to existing functions and fixes a number of small bugs. As ever, our sincere thanks go to the program's developer, Mark Cubitt, as well as all the testers who have helped to make such an excellent tool for ringing and nest recording. Over 50% of nest recorders now use IPMR to submit their data, so if you haven't yet made the switch, why not give it a go?

## New Handbook

Thanks to a recent grant from the BTO's Birds in Trust appeal, the Nest Records Unit is currently redeveloping the majority of its literature, including the NRS Handbook and the NRS web-pages. The handbook is undergoing its first significant revision since 1999 and to ensure that it is as useful as possible for beginners and experienced recorders alike, we have written to a cross-section of NRS participants and asked what they would like to see in the new manual. Our sincere thanks go to everybody who wrote and gave us their ideas—and there were many! Also in development is a brand new concise version of the NRS Handbook; a 'quick start guide' to nest recording. Both these guides will be out in time for the next breeding season, so watch this space!

## Mentoring scheme

Part of the Birds in Trust funding has been allocated to the development of a 'mentoring scheme' to aid new NRS participants. Similar in some ways to the Ringing Scheme's system of Trainers, we hope to develop a national network of volunteer mentors who would be willing to accompany beginners into the field and teach them some of the basic field skills necessary for finding and recording nests safely and confidently. We believe that just one or two hours in the field with an experienced nest finder can make all the difference for those who are new to nest finding and recording. If you are interested in this new development, please do get in touch.

## Nest recording workshops

On the weekend of the 31st May the BTO held its very first Nest Recording Workshop at The Wetland Trust's Pannel Valley Nature Reserve in East Sussex. Seven participants attended a weekend spent in the field finding and recording nests with experienced nest finder Tony Davis, who located a remarkable five Sedge Warbler nests, and BTO staff, who found half a Wren's nest. The workshop was generously hosted by the Rye Bay Ringing Group, who provided accommodation and facilities as well as lots of tea and breakfast. Our thanks go to Tony, all the hosts and all the attendees for a fantastic workshop that was enjoyed by all. We have more NRS Workshops planned for 2009, so please keep an eye out. A full report on this workshop will appear in the next edition of Nest Record News.



The Nest Record Scheme's Carl Barimore shows workshop participants how to aimlessly prod at nettles in-between finding nests.

## Contents

News from the Nest Records Unit .....	2
Latest NRS results and the Wider Countryside Report .....	3
Recorders' eye view - 2007 roundup .....	4
Breeding birds and weather in 2007 .....	5
Dormouse survey .....	6
Reed Warbler nest monitoring .....	7
NRS totals 1939-2007 .....	8 - 9
Dipper nest boxes .....	10
Bill Grainger obituary .....	11
Pullus ringing and nest recording .....	12
Spotted Flycatchers abroad .....	13
Monitoring a swallow colony .....	14 - 15
Useful addresses .....	16

Please send any articles or letters to the Nest Records Officer, address on the back page.

# From the undergrowth to the Internet

The culmination of all your hard work finding and recording nests is the production of the annual productivity trends. Dave Leech explains why it's so important to have a look at them.

Ever found yourself waist deep in a bramble patch, unable to move without something scratching or stinging some part of your person? My last such experience was about forty-eight hours ago and I will admit to having a very fleeting 'why am I doing this again?' moment as the thorns connected fully with the most intimate parts of my anatomy. I, however, have the



The Nest Record Scheme's Dave Leech feels the pain whilst descending on a Blackcap nest.

privilege of being the first person to see the productivity trends that we produce each year as part of the Breeding Birds in the Wider Countryside (WCR) report ([www.bto.org/birdtrends](http://www.bto.org/birdtrends)) and the answer is therefore always clear as crystal in my mind—it's because I want to know what's going on. I want to know

whether it's a good year for Chiffchaffs or a bad year for Blackbirds on my patch, and I want to know how the data that I'm collecting compare to those that you're gathering at your sites. This curiosity plays as big a part in my desire to record nests as the challenge of actually finding them.

If you haven't had a look at the WCR then you really should. It may have one of the duller titles of any BTO report, which in itself is a challenge, but it's what's inside that's important. Select any of the 115 species from the drop-down menu, scroll to the bottom of the page and, assuming we receive enough records to generate them, you'll be able to look at the mean figures for laying dates, clutch sizes, brood sizes and failure rates for each year since 1966, displayed as a series of graphs. What's more, the accompanying table above tells you whether there's been a statistically significant change in any of these aspects of breeding success over that time. It's also well worth looking at the NRS Concern List (below), which highlights those productivity declines that may be affecting species' abundance, helping to direct future research.

So, please browse, if nothing else to convince yourself that your records are being put to good use and not just stockpiled! I hope that you enjoy the fruits of your labours and that they continue to spark that all-important curiosity that's so vital to the UK conservation effort.

## NRS Concern List

Species	Years on list	Significant decline in...	Breeding Population trend	Conservation Concern list
Kestrel	2	Brood size	>25% decline	Amber
Moorhen	15	Clutch size & Nest Survival (E)	Fluctuating	
Ringed Plover	11	Nest survival (E)	Uncertain	Amber
Lapwing	New	Nest survival (E)	>25% decline	Amber
Nightjar	New	Brood size*	Uncertain	Red
Tree Pipit	2	Nest survival (C)*	>50% decline	Amber
Yellow Wagtail	8	Brood size*	>50% decline	Amber
Grey Wagtail	5	Clutch size & Brood Size	Probably decline	Amber
Pied Wagtail	4	Clutch size & Brood size	Uncertain	
Dunnock	5	Nest Survival (C)	>25% decline	Amber
Whinchat	2	Nest survival (E)*	Probable decline	
Willow Warbler	9	Nest Survival (E)	>50% decline	Amber
Spotted Flycatcher	3	Clutch size, Brood size & Nest survival (E & C)	>50% decline	Red
Starling	3	Brood size	>50% decline	Red
House Sparrow	4	Brood size	>50% decline	Red
Linnet	16	Brood size and Nest survival (C)	>50% decline	Red
Bullfinch	2	Nest survival (E & C)	>50% decline	Red
Yellowhammer	5	Brood size, Nest survival (E & C)	>50% decline	Red
Reed Bunting	16	Nest survival (E)	>50% decline	Red
Corn Bunting	2	Brood size*	>50% decline	Red

\* indicates that the average annual sample size is small (between 10 and 30 records per year). (E) indicates nest survival at the egg stage and (C) indicates nest survival at the chick stage. Breeding population trends are taken from [www.bto.org/birdtrends](http://www.bto.org/birdtrends). The Red and Amber Lists of Conservation Concern are available at <http://www.bto.org/psob>

# Recorders' eye view—2007 roundup

Each year, the Nest Records Unit receives a host of letters and reports from our recorders, relating their thoughts and observations on the nesting season. As it takes 12 months from the season's end to collate all your nest records and calculate annual trends, we very much welcome these early glimpses of the season from the perspective of those in the field, and are pleased to give a brief summary of your comments in NRN. Please keep your letters coming!

The 2007 season was one of contrast, both in the weather between the early and latter half of the season, and in the fortunes of our breeding birds. March and April were sunny and dry in most of the country, but this early promise of a good season was not borne out as rain set in for much of May and June, breaking precipitation records in some counties. Many of you complained about not having the opportunity to find and visit nests at all. Some passerines appeared to struggle in the wet conditions, whereas raptors and owls seemingly had little difficulty fledging young.

## Owls and raptors

John Massie's article in NRN 23 detailed the disastrous breeding year for Tawny Owls in 2006 and Barn Owls fared little better that season. Recorders breathed a sigh of relief, then, when the high small rodent population in 2007 resulted in a bumper year for owls and raptors.

Jan Pritchard from Kent, and Kevin Southwell from Buckinghamshire, both celebrated their best year since 2000 for Barn Owl fledging at their respective monitoring sites. Reported failure rates were also low. Alan Ball from Lincolnshire, saw only eight failures from 168 first broods.

After fledging so many young, as many as 50% of Barn Owl pairs moved on to second broods in some of the southern counties monitored by Colin Shawyer, although the majority of these failed at the egg stage. Alan Ball also reported up to 50% of pairs second-brooding.

Many other recorders were kept busy by prolific raptor nests. John Lawton Roberts, in Clwyd, found that his Buzzards, Barn Owls and Ravens all did very well '...despite the awful weather from May until July.' Alan Ball and Bob Sheppard, from Lincolnshire, witnessed their most productive season ever for their Kestrel and Little Owls and Peter Wilkinson, who has been monitoring raptor boxes in Cambridgeshire for many years, ringed more Kestrel chicks than ever before, most broods containing five or six young.

Tawny Owls started early in some areas. Philip Hanmer, from Northumberland, found an eight-day-old chick on the 22nd April. In contrast, the Grampian Ringing Group's John Massie found the peak laying period on their patch to be two weeks later than usual, following very poor weather from February to mid-March. As in other areas, John reported very high productivity coupled with an abundance of small rodents, although he did note that Tawny Owl site occupancy was lower than expected.

## Waterbirds

The incessant rain from May apparently created favourable conditions for a few waterfowl. David Warden, from Bristol, reported '...a record number of Great-crested Grebe nests due to the high water level.' Rex Knight, from West Sussex, was only just able to glimpse the double- and triple-brooding of Moorhen, Coot and Little Grebe pairs on his site, owing to prolific reed growth. He did note, however, that many early attempts were flooded out as water levels first rose. Rye Meads Ringing Group saw the spring rain replenish a water meadow on their patch in Essex, leading to their highest ever breeding totals for Shoveler, Lapwing and Redshank. However, they also noted that nesting success was still very low owing to predation.



A return to form—Tawny Owls had a more successful breeding season in 2007. Photo by Herbet & Howells.

## Passerines

The hot weather in March seemingly encouraged resident passerines to make an early start and many people on the NRS online forum noted Blackbird and Robin activity. Not all of these were successful, however, as Vince Lea from Cambridge pointed out: 'Early breeders were thwarted by hard-baked ground, so all Blackbird and most Song Thrush chicks died in April, but later Blackbirds were successful.'

Reports in 2006 of rain halting the breeding attempts of titmice were repeated by many in 2007, with letters and reports making reference to a 'washout' season from May onwards. Vince Lea found well-grown juvenile titmice dead in his boxes, which he attributed to heavy rain during the crucial two months of feeding. Woodwalton Fen, also in Cambridge, saw the highest failure rates for Great Tit since 1992. According to site manager Bryan Nelson, predation was observed to be the main cause, but, as elsewhere, the reserve had exceptionally high levels of rainfall in May (96.6 mm) and June (74.4 mm). The maximum clutch size for both Blue Tit and Great Tit on his site was also the lowest since monitoring began. DL Robinson, from Ilkley in West Yorkshire, echoed the overall sentiment that '...things seemed to fizzle out after a promising start.' However, he noted that his Blue Tits fledged on average 11 days earlier than in 2006.

A few other observers felt that the breeding season was somewhat better than in 2006 and even had favourable weather. Stephen Lemon, in particular, noted that he hadn't observed the titmice failures reported elsewhere at his oak woodland site in London. The majority of his Blue Tit nests fledged large broods of up to 15, and only one late nest suffered the loss of all young. His Great Tits were slightly less successful, with 30% of attempts failing at the young stage and 12% deserting at the egg stage, which Stephen thought was probably owing to predation of the adults. Bob Harris found mostly positive signs of breeding in North Wales and his Pied Flycatcher boxes gave up almost 80 pulli for ringing.

Finally, the Rye Meads Ringing Group made an interesting discovery in their reedbed in Essex, according to Toby Spall: 'The early Cuckoo in a Sedge Warbler nest is particularly intriguing. The egg was laid at an early date—too early for the birds to accept it—and it strongly resembled the illustration of a Great Reed Warbler egg in Colin Harrison's guide. Possibly the bird was an overshoot; we will never know.'

# Breeding birds and weather in 2007

BTO Research Biologist David Glue charts a roller coaster ride of extreme weather events in 2007: from unprecedented winter warmth and record-breaking April heat, to the wettest early summer (May-July) on record. These conditions had a substantial impact on the timing and productivity of the UK's breeding birds, as described to the BTO's Nest Record Scheme by nest recorders, ringers, reserve wardens and BBS Surveyors.

## Mild winter triggers early nesting

Rarely, in recent times, have successive winters been so different in character. Winter 2005/06 was the coldest in a decade and saw little mid-winter nesting activity, but New Year 2007 was a return to the recent warming theme, with daily temperatures 2.8°C above the norm and the mildest January since 1921.

As temperatures topped a 'spring-like' 12–14°C mid-month, with scarce night frosts, active nests of species such as Blackbird, Robin and Woodpigeon were noted in some warm coastal and suburban settings. In the final week of January, noteworthy nesting activity included Great Crested Grebe incubating clutches in parkland (Glos) and in a tidal stretch of the River Thames (Surrey), Grey Heron feeding 'branching' young (north Solent, Hants) and Tawny Owl tending fledged broods beside the Grand Union Canal (Northants) and in an overgrown quarry (Grampian Region).

By St. Valentine's Day, 16 species had been reported to the NRS as having nests holding eggs or young, double that during the previous spring and maintaining the recent trend towards earlier egg-laying and 'unseasonal' mid-winter nesting.

## Winter fruit bounty boosts nesting tits

Bright and breezy conditions heralded a mixed bag 'Manyweather' March. High pressure conditions from the 10<sup>th</sup> brought generous warmth and a surge in reports of nest refurbishment, building and egg-laying by a broad array of species including Little Egret, Woodcock, Red Kite, Raven, Dipper and Ring-necked Parakeet. A few pathfinder Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Swallow returned to prime territories by the month's end, but many migrants were checked by a bottleneck of unsettled cyclonic weather in the Mediterranean Basin, mirroring events during the two previous springs.

The record-breaking heat in April, with temperatures 3.1°C above average and bountiful sunshine (eclipsed only by 1893), triggered a spate of egg-laying by dabbling duck, rails, Grey Heron, Lapwing and thrushes over Easter. However, progressively parched conditions on farm and wetland sites checked some of this activity.

Great Tit overwintered in strength, bolstered by the rich wild winter larder, and many modest-sized broods ultimately fledged. With vegetation growth and emergence of free-flying insects two to three weeks advanced, nestbox scheme operators as far afield as Devon, Oxford, Nottingham and Scottish Borders noted a mismatch between the peak in defoliating small caterpillar prey and developing young tits. Many young losses were charted at the IP/FS stage as parent birds struggled in the late May rains. Great Tit and Nuthatch alike had enough time to re-lay, the second-broods fledging in early July, recalling 'Pre-Global Warming' days for old lags.

## May downpours check nesting raptors

The rich legacy of lush grasses from mild, damp winter weather, combined with a wealth of hedgerow berries, forest mast and conifer seeds, filtered up through the energy food chains. Boosted by peak populations of small rodents (in sharp contrast to 2006), many owls and diurnal raptors laid large clutches and often tended sizeable families. However, persistent cool, cloudy and often windy weather in a lacklustre June, the wettest since 1914, made brooding and hunting increasingly difficult and deserted clutches and infanticide featured widely. Over one-third of Barn Owls had enough energy reserves to relay and raise second broods in some areas.

In the final week of May, monsoon-like deluges from slow-moving rain-belts trundling up from France tore the heart out of the breeding season at a crucial phase for certain birds.

Coastal colonies of Black-headed Gull, terns and Oystercatcher were swamped, streamside nests of Sand Martin, Common Sandpiper and Kingfisher were chilled and open-nesting farmland Skylark, pipits, chats and warblers were trapped by rapidly rising water levels.

## Midsummer showers depress migrants

July finally defied the recent warming trend, with monthly daily temperatures 1.1°C below average. Fortunately for vulnerable nesting passerines, temperatures remained fractionally above average by night under cloudy skies, though down by a chilly 2-3°C by day.

Intense deluges from electrical storms contributed to the wettest May-July on record and a second destructive episode hit nesting birds

during 19–20<sup>th</sup>, the heaviest rains being recorded at Brize Norton, Oxon (127 mm) and Pershore, Worcs (145 mm). Flooded homes and human misery extended from Gloucester and Oxford to East Yorkshire while riparian, farmland and coastal breeding birds were hard-hit in many areas. Intense rains flattened the nests of scrub and *Acrocephalus* warblers, leaving many with limited time to lay again.

Certain soil-invertebrate and insect eating birds prospered, though—Robin, Wren and Starling often rearing twin broods and Blackbird and Song Thrush raising three families in places. Swifts searching for aerial plankton high above humid active weather fronts managed to raise broods of two to three young.

A brief taste of 'high summer' was had in early August, as anticyclonic conditions pushed temperatures to a hot, humid 30.3°C at Heathrow Airport on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Conditions favoured late nesting thrushes, hirundines and doves. The damp and windy theme quickly returned mid-month, as a premature autumnal low pressure swept further torrential rains. For many UK birds, an early spring that promised so much stuttered and closed like a damp squib.



A Whitethroat nest in undergrowth. In some parts of the country, many ground-nesting birds' nests were flooded out during the May deluge.

# Rodent records required

The Peoples' Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) was established in 1977 to fund national and international research and ensure a future for many threatened species throughout the World. The Charity is a lead partner on both the Stag Beetle and Noble Chafer Biodiversity Action Plans. We are currently undertaking a national Traditional Orchard Survey and we have been involved in dormouse conservation for many years.

There are native populations of dormice in the Lake District and Northumberland but otherwise they have generally been lost from England's northern and midland counties. They are now mostly confined to the southern counties of England and south Wales and along the Welsh border. PTES have, along with Natural England, been instrumental in reintroducing dormice to counties where they have been lost and efforts to re-establish populations are ongoing.

PTES manages and co-ordinates the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP) which was initiated about 15 years ago and remains the only long-term national small mammal monitoring programme. To participate within the NDMP, a minimum of 50 dormouse nest boxes are sited within a wood known to contain dormice. These are checked each month between April and November by a licensed dormouse worker and the sex, weight and condition of any animals found is recorded. The data collected is used to construct a population trend for the Hazel Dormouse.



A Hazel Dormouse being inspected during a survey of nesting boxes. Photo by Nida Al-Fulaji.

PTES has recently taken responsibility for the National Dormouse Inventory, which comprises a list of sites where dormouse presence has been recorded. These records have come from two national 'nut hunts' that were undertaken in 1993 and 2001 along with data from the NDMP, observations from local mammal recorders and casual sitings from members of the public. The data that make up the National Dormouse Inventory is used to produce the current dormouse distribution map, which can be viewed at <http://www.searchnbn.net/> (type 'dormouse' into the search box). As custodians of the National Dormouse Inventory, the PTES is

eager to collect more records of dormouse sitings in the UK, which means we need your help! If you see a dormouse, please send a record of your siting, including a grid reference, a date and ideally a photograph, to:

Ian White  
People's Trust for Endangered Species  
15 Cloisters House  
8 Battersea Park Road  
London SW8 4BG  
Tel. 020 7498 4533  
Fax. 020 7498 4459  
E-mail: [Ian@ptes.org](mailto:Ian@ptes.org)

## Top nest recorders in 2007

National Trust, Farne Islands (NTF) 2420 • Bob Danson (RD) 878 • John Brook and Reg Cooke (BRC) 867 • Merseyside Ringing Group (MRG) 836 • Birklands Ringing Group (BRG) 612 • Sorby Breck Ringing Group (SOBG) 454 • David Warden (DWA) 453 • Ian Spence (IMS) 410 • East Dales Ringing Group (EDRG) 408 • Ron Louch & Dave Thompson (L/T) 390 • Robert Batty & Nick Bateman (REB) 389 • Newbury Ringing Group (NERG) 386 • John Lawton-Roberts (JALR) 378 • Lancaster & District Birdwatching Society (LDBW) 374 • Matt Prior (MGPR) 348 • Neville Powell (NBP) 324 • Andy Ball (AGBA) 317 • Robert Stevens (RS) 316 • Kevin Briggs (KBR) 314 • Souder Ringing Group (SDRG) 301 • Reginald Lanaway (RLL) 294 • John Lloyd (JVL) 293 • Annelie Mattisson (AMA) 292 • Peter Roe (PER) 286 • Neil Croton & Mike Tyler (CRTY) 284 • Mike Netherwood & Mick Cook (MCMN) 282 • Rye Meads Ringing Group (RMRG) 268 • Colin Davison (CD) 260 • Geoff Myers (GWM) 258 • Arden Ringing Group (ARG) 254 • Foulney Island Reserve (FI) 244 • Manx Ringing Group (MANX) 243 • Dave Francis (DMF) 242 • Bob Swann & Rob Swann (RLS) 233 • Stanford Ringing Group (STAR) 226 • Peter Robinson (PJR) 222 • Dave Hazard (DAVH) 218 • Darford Ringing Group (DRG) 215 • North-west Norfolk Ringing Group (NWNR) 213 • Kane Brides (KABR) 213 • Edward Cowley (EXC) 210 • Northumbria Ringing Group (NRG) 210 • Roy Rhodes (RORH) 206 • Mike Russell (MDR) 205 • David Myers (DAM) 203 • Tom Dewdney (TGD) 189 • Frank Mawby (FJM) 178 • Alan Old (ABO) 176 • Julian Driver (JDR) 173 • Paul Robinson (PARO) 171 • Anne Goodall (AEG) 171 • Paul Holness (PRH) 163 • Tees Ringing Group (TERG) 163 • Jerry Lewis (JMSL) 162 • Ronald Turkington (RHT) 161 • Alan Lowe (ALA) 161 • Keith Seaton (KJS) 159 • Nigel Cleere (NICL) 154 • Philip & Sara Bone (PHBO) 152 • Bristol Naturalists' Society (BNS) 152 • Peter Johnson (PEJJ) 148 • Farlington Ringing Group (FRG) 145 • Cwm Clydach RSPB Reserve (CWMC) 145 • Max Meadows (MOM) 144 • Derek Holman & Karl Ivens (DHKI) 143 • Jonathan Lingard (JOLI) 139 • Garth Lowe (GAL) 133 • Jan Pritchard (JAP) 128 • South Devon Nestbox Group (SDNG) 128 • South Nottinghamshire Ringing Group (SNRG) 127 • John Holt (J&CH) 124 • Treswell Wood IPM Group (TWIG) 121 • Alan Burgess (ACB) 120 • Doug Wright & Rebecca Gladwin (JDWR) 120 • Scott Jarvis (SAJ) 119 • Jeremy Gates (JEG) 118 • Jim Hodson (JMH) 116 • Spurn Point Bird Observatory (SPBO) 114 • Isabel Hildred (IPDH) 114 • Ken Arthur (KSA) 114 • Mike Rogers (MHR) 112 • Sean Morris (SEJM) 111 • Robin Husbands (ROXH) 109 • Swale Wader Group (ROS) 108 • Rye Bay Ringing Group (RBRG) 106 • Peter Goodlad (PG) 105 • Peter Wilson (PEWI) 104 • Simon Cox (SICO) 102 • Grampian Ringing Group (GRG) 102 • Stephen Lemon (STLE) 102 • Robert Smith (SMI) 102 • Nigel Goodgame (NIGO) 101 • British Trust for Ornithology/Nunnery RG (BTO) 101 • Duncan Hood (DAH) 101 • Felicity Burge (FB) 100 • Nicholas Watts (PNW) 100 • Nigel Lewis (NJL) 100 • Ali Cooper (ACO) 99

# Reed all about it

Monitoring Reed Warblers tends to be quite a different process to finding and recording the nests of other warblers. Suitable reed beds need to be found and waders are essential. Once a site is successfully in operation, however, it is often possible to monitor large numbers of nests. The two largest REEWA nest recorders each send in more than 100 records per year! David Warden, who has been studying the species for over 30 years, gives a few tips.



The BTO received 241 Reed Warbler records in 2007, of which 60% were sent in by our top four REEWA recorders. Photo by John Cranfield.

My study area is at a public drinking water supply reservoir which is also used for trout fishing and for sailing. It is some 1200 acres in area with mainly naturally vegetated banks. Most of the reed beds are in the southern half of both east and west banks and are partly within a designated nature reserve. The whole lake is a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

In April of each year I look for two things: the level of the water and how well the dead reeds of the previous year have survived. Water levels fluctuate widely and when they have been kept high over winter, wind and wave action can lead to loss of the previous years' dead reed cover. Reed management by the water company is dependent on water levels in autumn and cannot take place if the level is high. At most, it involves cutting blocks of reed to create maximum "edge effect".

Depending upon what I find at this preliminary visit, I decide whether tracks used in previous years can be used again or whether it will be necessary to choose new ones. I try to make tracks through what look like the most attractive areas for Reed Warblers. The preferred nesting areas have a mixture of new and old reeds, are not too dense and are not in the centre of large reed beds. Whether or not the reed is growing in water appears to be unimportant. Because of the fluctuations in water level, early nests are usually over water while later ones are often over relatively dry ground. The earliest nests are frequently in entirely dead reed tangles and sited quite low.

It is not necessary to actually cut reeds to create tracks; all that is needed is to walk the same path consistently over the season. This has the advantage of keeping the tracks narrow, which in turn helps to prevent 'reed fall' later in the season, when a combination of heavy rain and wind can cause areas of strongly growing reed to collapse. Reed fall can destroy nests and also make follow-up visits impossible.

Having decided on the best areas, I eagerly await the arrival of the Reed Warblers! Males arrive first and the reed beds can soon fill with song. At this stage I walk quietly along my tracks looking for signs of nest building to the right and left but not pausing to mark nests yet. Some of these first attempts may be dismantled but others progress to completed nests. The fully-built nests I then mark and number. The cheapest and easiest method I have found is to use masking tape—the sort used by painters when painting windows to protect glass from paint – and an indelible marking pen. I fold a short length of tape torn from the roll around a stem close to the nest and number it. This is durable enough for a whole season and, if the reed survives winter and the tape is still legible the following year, can occasionally be used again if a nest is built near enough the following season!

Once the nests are marked I try to revisit during incubation and at roughly five to seven day intervals, carrying rings with me so that the young can be marked at the optimum stage. After ringing the young, I try to make one more visit to determine the final nest outcome and see if any chicks have died in the nest. Since any one track will usually run alongside a number of nests at varying stages, final visits can usually be made during the 'round' and it is not usually necessary, except at the very end of the season, to make special visits to particular nests.

Depending on what is found, it may be necessary to extend tracks or create new ones during the season. However, it is very important to keep to the tracks once established in order to re-locate nests already found. One bit of reed bed looks much like another, especially when the reeds are high, and it can be as easy to get lost as it can be to lose a nest!

It is not possible to find all nests using this method but I have found it to be the best compromise between locating significant numbers of nests and causing minimum disturbance to the birds and the habitat.

## From 241 REEWA records to only 26 SEDWA. The 2007 totals by observer...

Rye Meads R.G.	7
Jeremy Gates	4
Richard Castell	3
Brian Standley	2
Colin Davison	2
John Callion	2
John Brook	2
John Walshe	1
Fylde R.G.	1
A.R. Scott	1
Melvyn Preston	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>



Photo by Glenn Bishton

## Nest Record Scheme totals 1939–2007 (as of 01/05/07)

Species	Code	2006	2007	TOTAL	Species	Code	2006	2007	TOTAL
<b>Red-throated Diver*</b>	<b>RETDI</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>2424</b>	<b>Merlin*</b>	<b>MERLI</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3878</b>
<i>Black-throated Diver</i>	BLTDI	4	1	233	<b>Hobby*</b>	<b>HOBBY</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>1071</b>
Little Grebe	LITGR	35	51	2677	<b>Peregrine*</b>	<b>PEREG</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>3357</b>
Great Crested Grebe	GRCGR	49	129	4129	Red Grouse	REDGR	1	1	851
Red-necked Grebe	RENGR			1	Ptarmigan	PTARM			131
<i>Slavonian Grebe</i>	SLAGR		2	198	Black Grouse	BLAGR		1	81
<i>Black-necked Grebe</i>	BLNGR		1	31	Capercaillie	CAPER			91
Fulmar	FULMA	197	335	7478	Red-legged Partridge	RELPA	8	3	489
Manx Shearwater	MANSH			629	Chukar	CHUKA			1
Storm Petrel	STOPE			92	Grey Partridge	GREPA		2	868
<i>Leach's Petrel</i>	LEAPE		17	24	Quail	QUAIL			16
Gannet	GANNE			33	Pheasant	PHEAS	29	27	2300
Cormorant	CORMO	46	72	2330	Golden Pheasant	GOLPH			6
Shag	SHAG.	345	382	15070	Lady Amherst's Pheasant	LAAPH			1
<i>Bittern</i>	BITTE			39	Water Rail	WATRA		3	105
Night Heron	NIGHE			3	Corncrake	CORNC			32
Little Egret	LITEG		19	56	<b>Moorhen</b>	<b>MOORH</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>24209</b>
<b>Grey Heron</b>	<b>GREHE</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>8278</b>	Coot	COOT.	485	498	20173
<i>Spoonbill</i>	SPOON			2	<b>Oystercatcher</b>	<b>OYSTE</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>17925</b>
<b>Mute Swan</b>	<b>MUTSW</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>6736</b>	<i>Black-winged Stilt</i>	BLWST	1		3
<i>Whooper Swan</i>	WHOSW	1	1	23	<i>Avocet</i>	AVOCE	23	36	874
<i>Greylag Goose</i>	GREGO	41	44	918	<i>Stone Curlew</i>	STOCU			425
Snow Goose	SNOGO			8	<i>Little Ringed Plover</i>	LIRPL	76	80	2660
Bar-headed Goose	BAHGO	4		9	<b>Ringed Plover</b>	<b>RINPL</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>10773</b>
Canada Goose	CANGO	108	82	4641	<i>Kentish Plover</i>				19
Barnacle Goose	BARGO	1		71	<i>Dotterel</i>	DOTTE			260
Egyptian Goose	EGYGO	3	8	124	<b>Golden Plover</b>	<b>GOLPL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>922</b>
Shelduck	SHELD	10	6	353	<b>Lapwing</b>	<b>LAPWI</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>27394</b>
Ruddy Shelduck	RUDSH				<i>Temminck's Stint</i>	TEMST			1
Mandarin	MANDA	41	30	679	<i>Purple Sandpiper</i>	PURSA			4
Wigeon	WIGEO	1		187	Dunlin	DUNLI		2	568
Gadwall	GADWA	18	11	211	<i>Ruff</i>	RUFF.			4
Teal	TEAL.	1		237	<b>Snipe*</b>	<b>SNIPE</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1839</b>
Mallard	MALLA	121	132	9482	Woodcock	WOODC	6	7	672
<i>Pintail</i>	PINTA			23	<i>Black-tailed Godwit</i>	BLTGO		2	41
<i>Garganey</i>	GARGA		1	11	<i>Whimbrel</i>	WHIMB			60
Shoveler	SHOVE	10	7	219	<b>Curlew*</b>	<b>CURLE</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3077</b>
Red-crested Pochard	RECPO			1	<b>Redshank*</b>	<b>REDSH</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>3395</b>
Pochard	POCHA	11	11	225	<i>Greenshank</i>	GRESH		1	192
Tufted Duck	TUFDU	10	9	1337	<i>Wood Sandpiper</i>	WOOSA			2
<i>Scaup</i>	SCAUP			1	<b>Common Sandpiper*</b>	<b>COMSA</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1634</b>
Eider	EIDER	302	412	10052	<i>Red-necked Phalarope</i>	RENPH			163
<i>Common Scoter</i>	COMSC			43	Arctic Skua	ARCSK		2	373
<i>Goldeneye</i>	GOLDE	4	4	250	Great Skua	GRESK	2	3	429
Red-breasted Merganser	REBME	1		288	<i>Little Gull</i>	LITGU			3
Goosander	GOOSA	13	9	395	<i>Mediterranean Gull</i>	MEDGU	1	9	29
Ruddy Duck	RUDDU	4	5	179	Black-headed Gull	BLHGU	48	43	10036
<i>Honey Buzzard</i>	HONBU	15	12	134	Common Gull	COMGU	54	67	5625
<i>Red Kite</i>	REDKI	86	122	433	Lesser Black-backed Gull	LBBGU	15	6	4679
<i>White-tailed Eagle</i>	WHTEA		2	2	Herring Gull	HERGU	78	128	7597
<i>Marsh Harrier</i>	MARHA	2	7	108	Great Black-backed Gull	GBBGU	4	6	3487
<b>Hen Harrier</b>	<b>HENHA</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>1952</b>	Lesser Crested Tern	LECTE			5
<i>Pallid Harrier</i>	PALHA			1	Kittiwake	KITTI	625	756	17876
<i>Montagu's Harrier</i>	MONHA		1	45	Sandwich Tern	SANTE			1814
<i>Goshawk</i>	GOSHA	84	102	1255	<i>Roseate Tern</i>	ROSTE	100	76	1269
<b>Sparrowhawk*</b>	<b>SPARR</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>5659</b>	Common Tern	COMTE	271	242	8256
<b>Buzzard</b>	<b>BUZZA</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>7009</b>	Arctic Tern	ARCTE	472	556	12406
<i>Golden Eagle</i>	GOLEA	20	13	641	<i>Little Tern</i>	LITTE	190	204	6868
<i>Osprey</i>	OSPPE	7	3	92	Guillemot	GUILL	167	206	1485
<b>Kestrel</b>	<b>KESTR</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>8907</b>	Razorbill	RAZOR	56	81	1563

Species	Code	2006	2007	TOTAL	Species	Code	2006	2007	TOTAL
Black Guillemot	BLAGU	37	34	1732	<i>Dartford Warbler</i>	DARWA	12	13	533
Puffin	PUFFI	100	105	1084	<b>Lesser Whitethroat*</b>	LESWH	18	12	968
Feral Pigeon	FERPI	24	6	2415	<b>Whitethroat*</b>	WHITE	90	62	6625
Rock Dove	ROCOO	42	44	712	<b>Garden Warbler*</b>	GARWA	36	36	2308
<b>Stock Dove</b>	<b>STODO</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>643</b>	<b>11766</b>	<b>Blackcap*</b>	BLACA	97	103	4085
<b>Woodpigeon</b>	<b>WOODP</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>30518</b>	<b>Wood Warbler*</b>	WOOWA	48	58	2756
<b>Collared Dove*</b>	<b>COLDO</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>5795</b>	<b>Chiffchaff*</b>	CHIFF	95	127	3892
<b>Turtle Dove*</b>	<b>TURDO</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2067</b>	<b>Willow Warbler*</b>	WILWA	125	138	13714
Ring-necked Parakeet	RINPA			49	<b>Goldcrest*</b>	GOLDC	14	19	923
Cuckoo	CUCKO	4	3	2203	<i>Firecrest</i>	FIREC			9
<i>Snowy Owl</i>	<i>SNOOW</i>			2	<b>Spotted Flycatcher</b>	SPOFL	200	117	12030
<b>Barn Owl</b>	<b>BAROW</b>	<b>1019</b>	<b>1656</b>	<b>12398</b>	<b>Pied Flycatcher</b>	PIEFL	835	825	45265
<b>Little Owl*</b>	<b>LITOW</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>2573</b>	<i>Bearded Tit</i>	BEATI	9		352
<b>Tawny Owl</b>	<b>TAWOW</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>11928</b>	<b>Long-tailed Tit*</b>	LOTTI	159	164	6669
<b>Long-eared Owl*</b>	<b>LOEOW</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>829</b>	<b>Marsh Tit*</b>	MARTI	54	59	1719
<b>Short-eared Owl*</b>	<b>SHEOW</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>Willow Tit*</b>	WILTI	23	24	549
<b>Nightjar</b>	<b>NIJAR</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>1988</b>	<i>Crested Tit</i>	CRETI	2	2	458
Swift	SWIFT	189	112	3009	Coal Tit	COATI	64	74	5881
<b>Kingfisher</b>	<b>KINGF</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>764</b>	<b>Blue Tit</b>	BLUTI	4419	4551	121612
<i>Hoopoe</i>	<i>HOOP</i>			1	<b>Great Tit</b>	GRETI	4069	4209	82594
<i>Wryneck</i>	<i>WRYNE</i>			23	<b>Nuthatch</b>	NUTHA	116	172	4506
<b>Green Woodpecker*</b>	<b>GREWO</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>Treecreeper*</b>	TREEC	33	52	2736
<b>Gt Spotted Woodpecker*</b>	<b>GRSWO</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>2494</b>	<i>Short-toed Treecreeper</i>	SHITR			
<b>Lr Spotted Woodpecker*</b>	<b>LESWO</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>263</b>	<i>Golden Oriole</i>	GOLOR		1	42
<b>Woodlark</b>	<b>WOODL</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>1849</b>	<i>Red-backed Shrike</i>	REBSH	1	2	258
<b>Skylark*</b>	<b>SKYLA</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>8622</b>	<b>Jay*</b>	JAY..	16	9	1639
<b>Sand Martin*</b>	<b>SANMA</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>3661</b>	<b>Magpie*</b>	MAGPI	87	61	8365
<b>Swallow</b>	<b>SWALL</b>	<b>2675</b>	<b>2386</b>	<b>69252</b>	<i>Chough</i>	CHOUG	29	28	981
House Martin	HOUMA	184	169	10615	<b>Jackdaw</b>	JACKD	283	342	9056
<b>Tree Pipit*</b>	<b>TREPI</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>2028</b>	<b>Rook*</b>	ROOK.	99	266	15255
<b>Meadow Pipit</b>	<b>MEAPI</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>10034</b>	<b>Carrion Crow*</b>	CROW.	130	102	8290
<b>Rock Pipit*</b>	<b>ROCPI</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>885</b>	<i>Hooded Crow</i>	HOOCR	2	2	1153
<b>Yellow Wagtail*</b>	<b>YELWA</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1074</b>	<b>Raven</b>	RAVEN	140	217	4913
<b>Grey Wagtail*</b>	<b>GREWA</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>6552</b>	<b>Starling</b>	STARL	319	225	17785
<b>Pied Wagtail</b>	<b>PIEWA</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>10927</b>	<b>House Sparrow</b>	HOUSP	419	377	15419
<b>Dipper</b>	<b>DIPPE</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>10995</b>	<b>Tree Sparrow</b>	TRESP	1967	2109	28557
<b>Wren</b>	<b>WREN.</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>17115</b>	<b>Chaffinch</b>	CHAFF	316	271	24571
<b>Dunnock</b>	<b>DUNNO</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>31903</b>	<i>Brambling</i>	BRAMB			2
<b>Robin</b>	<b>ROBIN</b>	<b>337</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>23140</b>	<i>Serin</i>	SERIN			1
<b>Nightingale</b>	<b>NIGAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>Greenfinch</b>	GREFI	173	135	15333
<i>Bluethroat</i>	<i>BLUTH</i>		1	2	<b>Goldfinch*</b>	GOLDF	83	79	3682
<i>Black Redstart</i>	<i>BLARE</i>	2		180	<i>Siskin</i>	SISKI	2	1	92
<b>Redstart*</b>	<b>REDST</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>7140</b>	<b>Linnet</b>	LINNE	198	155	29188
<b>Whinchat*</b>	<b>WHINC</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2497</b>	<b>Twite*</b>	TWITE	9	2	1189
<b>Stonechat*</b>	<b>STOCH</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>4331</b>	<b>Redpoll*</b>	LESRE	2	2	1369
<b>Wheatear*</b>	<b>WHEAT</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>4108</b>	<i>Parrot Crossbill</i>	PARCR			4
<b>Ring Ouzel*</b>	<b>RINO</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1837</b>	<i>Crossbill</i>	CROSS	8		166
<b>Blackbird</b>	<b>BLABI</b>	<b>1113</b>	<b>1223</b>	<b>137548</b>	<i>Common Rosefinch</i>	SCARO			1
<i>Fieldfare</i>	<i>FIELD</i>			7	<b>Bullfinch*</b>	BULLF	44	61	6097
<b>Song Thrush</b>	<b>SONTH</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>76898</b>	<i>Hawfinch</i>	HAWFI	5	2	213
<i>Redwing</i>	<i>REDWI</i>			125	<i>Snow Bunting</i>	SNOBU			202
<b>Mistle Thrush*</b>	<b>MISTH</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>8382</b>	<b>Yellowhammer*</b>	YELHA	111	121	8273
<i>Cetti's Warbler</i>	<i>CETWA</i>	1		32	<i>Cirl Bunting</i>	CIRBU	40	66	360
<b>Grasshopper Warbler*</b>	<b>GRAWA</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>Reed Bunting*</b>	REEBU	83	66	8324
<i>Savi's Warbler</i>	<i>SAVWA</i>			4	<b>Corn Bunting*</b>	CORBU	5	8	1031
<b>Sedge Warbler*</b>	<b>SEDWA</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>5060</b>					
<i>Marsh Warbler</i>	<i>MARWA</i>			168					
<b>Reed Warbler</b>	<b>REEWA</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>17776</b>					
					NUMBER OF RECORDS		31,900	34,282	1,424,227

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 + (fewer 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).

# Bridging the gap

One of the great things about nest monitoring is that a casual or passing interest can soon develop into a full-blown hobby and the most modest endeavour can quickly grow into an extremely valuable monitoring and conservation programme. Felicity Burge, a nest recorder from Herefordshire, tells us a Dipper success story grown from humble beginnings.

It all started by chance, as I suppose many unexpected events tend to do. I happened to attend the University of Birmingham's evening classes on birds in the 1970s and ended up going on a field trip to the Black Mountains to see Dippers, Kingfishers and Grey Wagtails in the hand as our then tutor, Dr Stephanie Tyler, treated us to a mist-netting demonstration.

Fascinated by these birds, I found myself searching stretches of the streams and tributaries of the river Monnow and the Olchon Brook in the Black Mountains for Dipper and Grey Wagtail nests and then calling in a qualified bird ringer when the young were old enough to ring. After a while, it occurred to me that I could cover this aspect of nest monitoring myself, so I trained to become a bird ringer and in 1989 was sufficiently qualified to 'do my own thing'.

Moving on to 2004, happenstance once again saw me receive an e-mail from the local County Recorder for Herefordshire, asking if I would like to contact a 'William' of the Herefordshire Ornithological Club, who had moved to the north of the county and was very interested in Dippers. I did this, and William and I went on to spend many days surveying the Rivers Teme, Arrow and Lugg for Dipper and Grey Wagtail nesting sites. These birds almost always nest over water and so we searched under every road and foot bridge that crossed these rivers and very quickly discovered that many were extremely unfriendly for Dippers in particular, having no ledges, holes or platforms where a prospecting bird might want to build a nest. A few bridges could easily be made suitable by positioning a plank of wood near or on the girders, but in most cases the structures were completely smooth underneath and lacking any adaptable ledge or crevice.



A typical Dipper nest box mounted under a bridge, complete with occupants. Photo by Felicity Burge.

We set to work and by spring 2005 had successfully erected five of the boxes. One was used by a Grey Wagtail at Upper Lye and three young were later ringed, whilst of the four boxes in the Limebrook and Letchmoor areas, one housed a nest of four young and another produced two broods of four and three young, all of which were ringed.

Of course, providing suitable nesting sites is not just about erecting boxes. Dipper are specialist gravel-bed feeders and their food source can be affected by soil entering the streams during heavy rainfall, causing high turbidity and sedimentation. Although in some areas steps are being taken to prevent cattle and sheep entering the streams, such as on the Monnow, where Water Voles have recently been re-introduced, there is much still to be done on that front.

We have many more nest boxes still to put up, but the project has so far been a very exciting and rewarding exercise and we anticipate having many active nests to monitor in the future. If you're interested in the project or would like to help with the survey work, please do contact me on 01432 830482 or by e-mail ([felicity@hurdlehall.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:felicity@hurdlehall.freeserve.co.uk)). I would like to thank the Environment Agency in South Wales for their co-operation and assistance in the funding of these boxes.



Conservation in action—a phonecall to the Highways and Transportation Department saved an active Dipper nest from being disturbed by roadworks. Photo by Felicity Burge.

Soon after, an unrelated meeting with the County Ecologist happened to reveal that we could perhaps apply for funding from the Environment Agency in South Wales for Dipper boxes to be made and erected under some of the more unsuitable bridges. William and I lost no time in pursuing this opportunity and after some fairly lengthy discussions with the Highways and Transportation Department of Herefordshire Council, and with more help from our County Ecologist, we managed to obtain 120 Dipper boxes, which we stored in William's garage.

## Nest record milestones passed in 2007

- 120,000<sup>th</sup> Blue Tit – Dartford Ringing Group
- 10,000<sup>th</sup> Meadow Pipit – Colin Davison
- 7,000<sup>th</sup> Buzzard – Merseyside Ringing Group
- 4,000<sup>th</sup> Blackcap – Birklands Ringing Group
- 1,000<sup>th</sup> Puffin – National Trust Farne Islands
- 500<sup>th</sup> Green Woodpecker – Isabel Hildred
- 50<sup>th</sup> Little Egret – Jez Blackburn

# R W Grainger (Bill) 1930–2007

*BTO Research ecologist David Glue and long-time nest recorder Noel Fenwick provide an overview of the ornithological career of one of the NRS's most significant and long-standing contributors.*

The BTO received the very sad news in Autumn 2007 that Bill Grainger had died on the 24<sup>th</sup> August. With his passing, the Trust lost a loyal long-standing member and the Nest Record Scheme one of its foremost supporters and finest nest recorders.

It was in spring 1952 that Bill, along with his life-long field companion Noel Fenwick, set about finding, describing and charting the nesting fortunes of as wide an array of British breeding birds as circumstances would allow. In one of their early 1957 excursions, not having a car, Bill and Noel took the train from Durham to Berwick-on-Tweed and walked down the Northumberland coast, recording the first seabird nests for their field diary.

Bill joined the BTO in 1958, having attended a stimulating lecture delivered in nearby Newcastle by the late, great nest-finder Bruce Campbell, who was at one point organiser of the Nest Record Scheme. The NRS gave an extra dimension to Bill and Noel's hobby, and they were stimulated to nest-find and complete nest histories from sites the length of Britain. In 1959, Bruce Campbell advised Bill and Noel to make Aviemore the centre for their first trip to Scotland. This trip produced their first Common Gull nests and also a Dotterel, but no Crested Tits—they had all already fledged.



Common Gull is one of our most under-recorded breeding gulls, but was a staple of Bill Grainger's nest recording. Photo by Balsey & Reddick.

Having established their main sites for excursions away, Bill and Noel made regular trips the Northumberland coast over the years, but as cars became numerous, good breeding areas suffered. Not so in Scotland, where one trip in 1973 added four new species to the nest-finding list: Redwing, Twite, Greenshank and Black Guillemot. An added bonus the Saturday of that week was a Little Ringed Plover with four eggs back at their home in Weardale.

Bill travelled widely in his pursuit of 'new ones.' Doncaster gave him his first Nightjar nest record and Brampton Cliffs in Yorkshire were regularly visited for seabird records: Guillemot, Razorbill, Kittiwake, Puffin and Gannet. Over the years, Bill journeyed from his home in Durham to the North coast of Scotland and the Islands, to Kent, the New Forest and Cumberland. Except for three years at Newcastle University from 1960–63, few things would divert Bill from his nest-finding passion during March–June each season.

His diary entry from the beginning of the 1956 season reads, 'this coming season may prove difficult as writers are now married.' It didn't, of course!

Although Bill never lost his enthusiasm in the pursuit of new nest-finding ticks and the highest nest record total each year, he did become frustrated at the ever-increasing restriction placed upon his hobby. In the Durham dales, his favourite hunting grounds, Bill was well-known by farmers and game keepers, so there were few problems. One Saturday afternoon in 1967, in a wooded valley on the moor edge, with two friends, Bill found and recorded 51 nests of 19 species, all with eggs or young.



A Dotterel nest with eggs. Bill Grainger and Noel Fenwick are among the few nest recorders to contribute to the 260 records we have for this species. Photo by Tom Addie.

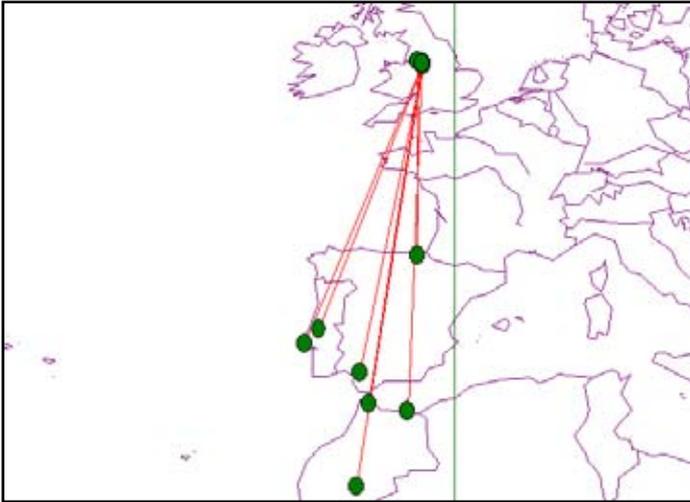
Over the years, Bill, with his close friends, Noel, Paul, John and Maurice, monitored a remarkable 21,000 nests, spanning more than 160 species. As their annual totals show, the group developed their nest finding abilities into a finesse that few could match. In 1952, their first year of recording, Bill and Noel recorded 74 nests. Thirty seven years later, in 1989, the group found an astonishing 828 nests (excluding colonies) in a season.

While Bill remained the lynchpin of the group, fresh faces were brought into the team. When John Richardson and the late Maurice Longsdale joined the fold, batches of cards were submitted to the BTO under the letters 'JR' – a familiar code to nest records staff, indicative of quality nest histories. After the passing of Maurice Longsdale in 2003, and as Bill Grainger and John Richardson became less mobile, the role of team co-ordinators fell to Noel and his son Paul Fenwick, submitting under the equally familiar code 'PAFE'.

Fortunately, Bill and Noel have passed their hard-won field skills and knowledge on to friends and family, helping to ensure their efforts are followed-up in years to come. Bill's endeavours live on in the enormous body of records he has given to the BTO. His contribution is especially evident in the recordsets of rarer passerines—species that only nest finders of Bill's calibre have been able to monitor in significant numbers.

# Keeping an eye on the kids

Nest recording and pullus ringing have always made good bedfellows, yet in recent years the Ringing Unit has seen a downturn in the number of pulli being ringed, a trend the BTO is eager to reverse. Traditionally, many ringing groups have done an excellent job of combining the two disciplines, including the long-running South Manchester Ringing Group. Group member Tony Wilkinson here celebrates the last 40 years of the group's activities.



A map of long-distance Meadow Pipit recaptures, ringed as pulli by South Manchester Ringing Group

The above map illustrates some of the more interesting movements of Meadow Pipits ringed as pulli during the 40 years of South Manchester Ringing Group's (SMRG) existence and is just an idea being knocked around for a handout or 'Power Point' presentation at this year's North West Ringers' Conference. Back in 1968, the group's three founder members, Malcolm Calvert, Geoff McPherson and Rhys Green, could have had no idea what powerful images it would be possible to construct four decades later, in a matter of minutes, to show the fruits of their labour. At the advent of the group, Silicon technology, now taken for granted, had only just allowed computers to be placed on desks rather than occupy whole rooms.

Another new feature of those early days was motor car ownership, which had not long ceased to be the prerogative of the rich. Anyone could now drive up into the hills and use their car as a mobile hide from which to observe a moorland bird carrying food, locate its nest, ring the pulli and move on to another territory. A dozen nests per day could be recorded using this method and over the years SMRG members have used their vehicles to watch parents back to the nests of Meadow Pipit, Skylark, Ring Ouzel, Wheatear, Whinchat, Dipper and even Golden Plover on one occasion.

Ringing Swallow pulli was another early group activity and in the summer of 1977 one member, Dennis Elphick, personally ringed 1,350 pulli. In those days it seemed that every field in NE Cheshire was home to a herd of Friesians. They are now mostly gone and the Swallows with them, replaced by BMWs, Range Rovers, Mini Coopers and a few horses. In all, 27,000 Swallows have been ringed by the group over the years, the vast majority pulli. I well recall my ringing trainer and dedicated nest recording mentor, Nev Powell, telling a local countryside warden that he had never had a 'good' ringing recovery. Before the conversation was over, his mobile phone had rung and he had been told that one of his Swallow pulli, ringed a month or so earlier on the Tatton estate near Knutsford, had hit a Land Rover in Kruger National Park in the Transvaal.

It would be silly, despite its frequent airing, not to mention Malcolm Calvert's Reed Warbler marathon at Rostherne Mere, which alone has yielded 1,800 nest record cards and is second only to David Warden's gigantic effort at Chew Valley. Beat that, but remember to back up IPMR!

Over the years the Group has been involved in many nest box monitoring schemes, beginning with Pied Flycatcher and Redstart boxes and latterly Tree Sparrow and bigger 'box species' such as Barn Owl and Kestrel. As a result of a meeting at a ringing demonstration, our latest 'apprentice', 12 year-old Jake Gregory, has his own monitoring scheme comprising 50 boxes in a variety of sizes and shapes, from Blue Tit boxes to Tawny Owl chimney boxes. A budding ringer, Jake's first nine ringed birds were of course Meadow Pipits—though not pulli—and the first ringing tick on his new trainee permit last month was an adult Barn Owl.

Looking again at the map, 10 foreign recoveries of Meadow Pipits from 600 ringed broods might not seem very many and locations such as Estremadura in Portugal or Sevilla in Spain may sound more like the destinations of touring English football fans than our ringed fledglings. But then, do you know where your birds go?

Results of this calibre are within easy reach of any nest recorder who, being already accustomed to the task of finding and visiting nests, is prepared to take that small extra step of acquiring a permit to ring selected chicks. And when you consider the fascinating extra dimension that ringing pulli has brought to SMRG's own study of Meadow Pipit nests, it only emphasises how much more useful and indeed vital is such data to the BTO's Integrated Population Monitoring Programme. Ultimately, information on breeding success (nest recording) is of little value without accompanying data on survival (ringing) and vice-versa, which is why it is so important that both surveys are healthy. Combining nest recording and pullus ringing is the most efficient way of providing data for both and thereby maximising the conservation value of your efforts in the field. Pullus ringing also adds that extra challenge and enjoyment to the nest recorder's hobby.

If you are interested in ringing young at the nest, do get in touch with the Nest Records Unit. But be warned: if any nest recorder should want to emulate the feats of Malcolm Calvert, he ought to note that young Jake will be 50 years old before he exceeds the number of years that Malcolm has so far notched up, and as for the time he has spent monitoring Dippers, Neville will be 88 and I 108.



Who's holding this ladder? Neville Powell checks a Dipper nest. Photo by Steve Suthill.

# Plentiful Papamoscas

Having run a comprehensive annual survey of nesting Spotted Flycatchers in Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire since 2001, submitted over 300 nest records to the BTO and even written a book – ‘The Spotted What?’ – on the success of his community volunteer survey, John Clarke could be forgiven for wanting to get away from it all and enjoy a holiday in Majorca. Unfortunately, his chosen study species had other ideas...

Majorca was not somewhere that I had considered as Spotted Flycatcher country. We were there for two weeks of rest and recuperation but having read a little about the local wildlife we decided to pack binoculars and cameras. This being the seventh year of my Spotted Flycatcher study in England, it was a little difficult to leave in mid-May just as the birds were arriving. However, I considered it would be good to switch off for a while and forget what is sometimes referred to in our house as the ‘F’ word!

But how wrong I was. It was only the second morning when I noticed a Spotted Flycatcher feeding in the garden of our villa. From my knowledge of the birds back home, its behaviour suggested that it was on territory. Another portent came that evening during a walk after supper, when we found another territory not 200 metres away! Then, within a few days, we discovered that wherever we went, we would see a Spotted Flycatcher within minutes of parking the car. From Albufeira Marshes, famous for wildfowl and waders, to boulder-strewn mountain passes with scrub barely two metres high, the flycatchers were there. In one mountain valley we walked, we kept careful note and were convinced that Spotted Flycatcher was one of the most common birds present, along with Serin, Goldfinch and Sardinian Warbler.

Tracking down nests, especially when they were at the egg stage, was extremely difficult in Majorca. It was often impossible to leave the road or track, either because the terrain was too difficult for me or because everywhere was fenced off and sometimes guarded by fierce dogs! But with the help of local people who invited us onto their land, we did locate two nests and also found a further six along roadsides. At one site the owner invited us in past his guard dog so that—we thought—we could show him a nest in an Olive tree. Instead, he showed us a second nest on a disused lamp fitting on his veranda!

Having studied around 250 nests in England—all of fairly uniform construction and location—it was a surprise to find them so different in Majorca. Here, a typical nest was built with dried grasses, string (in four nests), wool, feathers, dried leaves and Oak



A very scruffy and mis-shapen Spotted Flycatcher nest in Majorca. Both the nest site and construction were very different to the average nest in the UK. Photo by John Clarke.

catkins—all bound together in a loose and scruffy fashion and at least double the size of an English nest. Unlike our neat and compact nests, each nest cup I found in Spain had an uneven rim, behind which a bird’s head and tail was much better camouflaged.

The nest sites too were different. In my study area, flycatchers build nests in the crevices of walls and trees or else flat against them in climbing shrubs. In Majorca, the nests were almost always built towards the lower, outer ends of branches – where they become pendulous and the foliage thickens. I have been able to think of only one possible reason for this. In England the threat of predation is varied but (aside from Grey Squirrel) is most likely to come from avian predators such as Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw and Tawny Owl—hence the need to hide the nests. But these birds do not occur in Majorca and so the main predators are probably mammals and reptiles, species that are more likely to be foiled by building a nest as far away from trunks and walls as possible.

The nests were mostly impossible to reach without a step-ladder, so we only able to examine one, a clutch of three with a bird incubating. Our friend with the guard dog told us that his nest had four eggs, that the site had been used for a number of years, and that the birds usually bred throughout July and August. If correct, this would indicate that Spotted Flycatchers in Majorca are often double-brooded and perhaps occasionally have third attempts.

I estimate that we saw around 250 Spotted Flycatchers during our holiday. It seemed to me that the species was so common that it could not have suffered a decline similar to the UK population. Would a comparison of the two populations be in order?

That we managed to locate and photograph so many nests is in part due to the patience and friendliness of the local Majorcans, who watched in amazement as—being unable to speak a word of their language—I garbled odd words from several tongues, gesticulated a lot and drew childish diagrams to help communicate. I still cringe with embarrassment at what became my opening gambit—“Ola! I am English.” Then, pointing to camera, bird book and binoculars—“I am a biologgggist!”



Spotted Flycatcher nests were even to be found amongst sparse scrub in rocky valleys. Photo by Pamela Clarke.

# Stablemates

Many nest recorders monitor colonies or small patches and endeavour to record the nests of all breeding pairs present. This level of monitoring, combined with the assistance of IPMR to compare data between years, can reveal a fascinating breeding history of the birds at a site, as they battle each year against multiple threats. Tom Kittle describes how the Swallows in his stable at Codicote, Hertfordshire, responded to the torrential May rains in 2007.

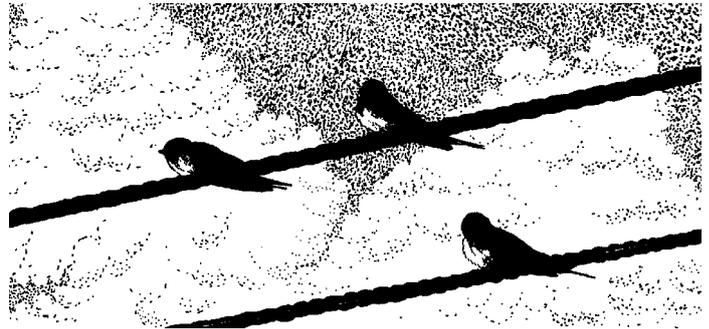
Last year appeared to be a poor season for many breeding birds Land, having monitored a small colony in a group of stables at Codicote in Hertfordshire since 2003, it was interesting to see how the Swallows at my site coped with rains from May onwards.

The colony is located in the beams of five stables that are still used to keep horses and are surrounded on three sides by a covered area used for stores. Very conveniently, the beams in four of the stables just allow the extension of a single section of a 10' 6" ladder. The remaining areas of the stable are lower and require only a pair of steps to check nests. The store area has nests at various heights and situations but none that are difficult to access.

I have been monitoring the colony since 2003 but birds have been nesting in the stable block for many years. The nests on the beams always survive the winter intact and most are reused each year after minor repairs, though new nests do appear from time to time. During the season, I make visits at weekly intervals with a few additional visits as necessary.

The first three years of monitoring revealed a similar number of nesting attempts and similar productivity: eight pairs nested and most had two successful broods. A very high proportion of eggs hatched, most young fledged and there were very few nest failures. In 2006, three of the eight pairs had a third brood, increasing the overall number of nesting attempts to 19, with an accompanying increase in total eggs laid and young fledged.

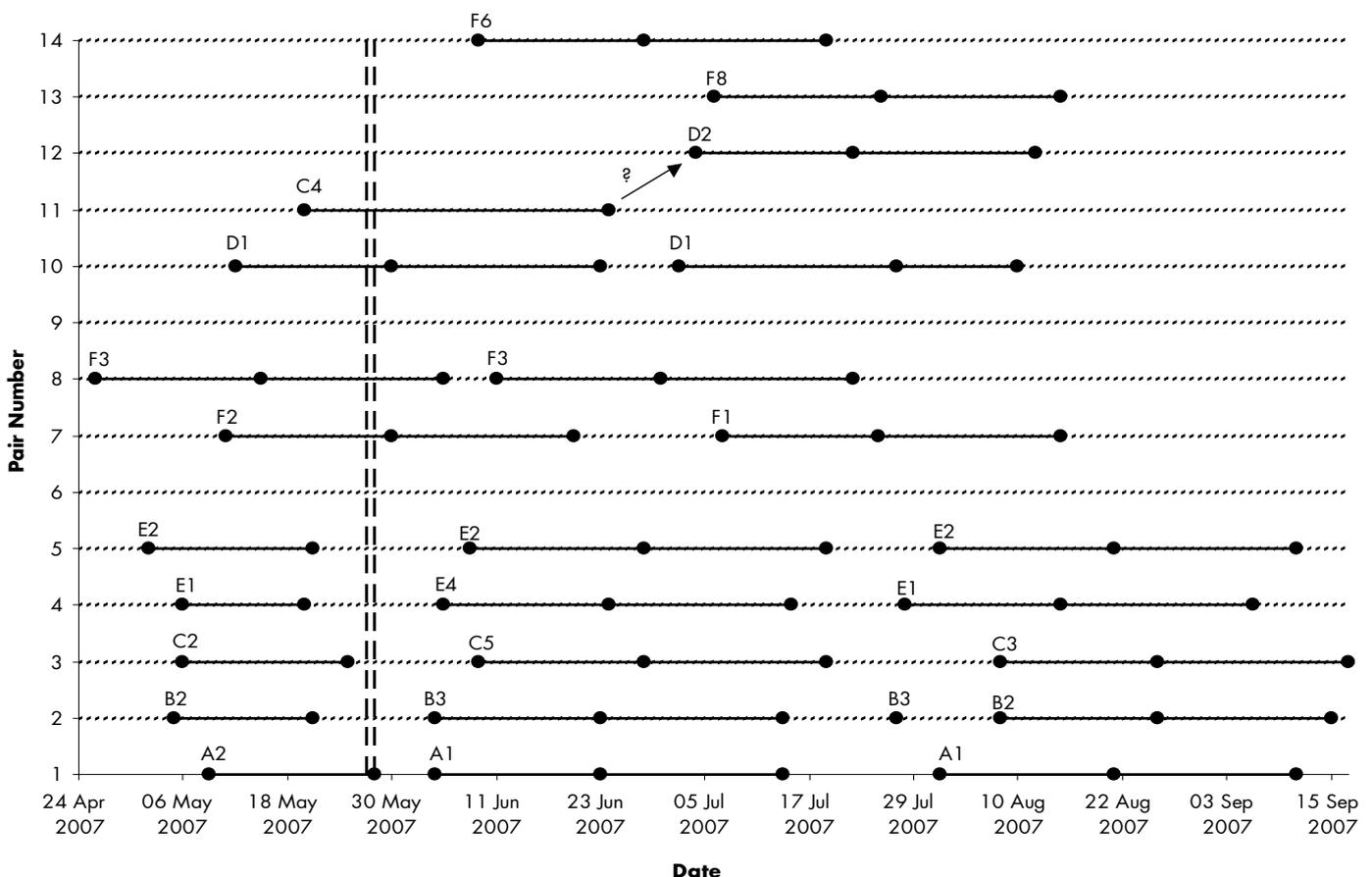
IPMR includes the facility to estimate first egg, hatching and



Paul Roper

fledging dates per nesting attempt. When these dates are compared in a 'time-line of activity' for the stables, it appears that the same Swallow pairs are using either the same nest or one very close by for subsequent nesting attempts. Fig 1 shows a time-line of activity for each breeding Swallow pair in the stable block in 2007. Each pair of birds is represented by a horizontal line and the nesting attempts attributed to a given pair are shown on the same line. Each nesting attempt is labelled with the nest location code.

In 2007, 11 pairs arrived in the stables and by the end of May nine of them had nests, but the inclement weather resulted in quite a different outcome compared to previous nesting seasons. On the 27<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> May, Royston, Hertfordshire, experienced 40 hours of almost continuous rain along with temperatures consistently below 10°C. The timing of this event in relation to nesting activity



**Fig. 1.** Timeline of Swallow pair activity in the stable block over the 2007 breeding season. Thick lines represent nesting attempts; markers are first-egg dates, hatching dates and fledging dates; codes (e.g. D1) are nest sites. The dotted line marks the period of continuous rainfall.

# Warblers wanted

As part of my PhD, I have spent the past few months working with Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data in order to explore changes in the UK's Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) population over the past 13 years. While much of this work is still in progress, early indications are in close agreement with the BTO's original analysis of these data and show marked differences in population changes on a national scale.

The next stage of the project will therefore be to start exploring the drivers of these population changes. In migrant species, such as the Willow Warbler, population change can, of course, be influenced by a suite of factors acting on the population throughout its range. By analysing Nest Record Scheme data, I will examine demographic factors such as laying date, brood size and overall productivity. I will then go on to investigate their relationship with a range of environmental correlates, such as local habitat and weather but also potential large-scale climatic influences.

The data collected by nest recorders provide an ideal opportunity to explore some of the possible consequences of climate change for a migrant species. For example, advances in the timing of food peaks have been found to cause a mismatch between timing of breeding and peak availability of prey in some species<sup>1</sup>. This has led to decreases in abundance of up to 90% in Pied Flycatcher populations in some areas of Europe and also a reduction in the number of second broods in Great Tit populations. I hope to explore similar patterns in Willow Warblers and to consider population-level responses in the face of climate change.

As you can see, Nest Record Scheme data will therefore be extremely valuable to this project, so if you've never tried finding the nests of *Phylloscopus* warblers and Willow Warblers in particular, why not have a go this year? Your efforts will be greatly appreciated and the data will help us to learn more about this vulnerable species.

Catriona Morrison

1. Both C., Bouwhuis S., Lessells C.M. and Visser M.E. (2006). Climate change and population declines in a long-distance migratory bird. *Nature* 441 (4): 81-83.

## Where do our WILWA records come from? The total for 2007 by county...

Nottinghamshire	23
Fife	19
Oxfordshire	14
Suffolk	8
Cumbria	6
Lothian	6
Cheshire	5
Shropshire	5
Powys	5
West Yorkshire	5
Highland Region	4
Somerset	4
Avon	3
Elsewhere	31

**Total 138**



Photo by Richard Vaughan



Having survived the downpours of 2007, a brood of Swallows prepare to leave the nest. Photo by Tom Kittle.

is indicated by the dashed vertical line in Fig 1. As can be seen in the diagram, of the nine nests active during the showers, the nests at sites A2, B2, C2, E1 and E2 contained very recently hatched young and the nest at site F3 had slightly older chicks. All the nests with very small young failed during the deluge, suggesting perhaps that the rain made it too difficult for the adults to find sufficient food for the family at the same time as brooding the small chicks during the low temperatures. The nest at site F3 did survive the showers, perhaps because the older chicks were less susceptible to the cold, and so too did nests at sites D1 and F2, which both contained live eggs.

After finding the failed nests, I was intrigued as to what the parents would do next. With the triple-brooding pairs of 2006 in mind, I wondered whether there was enough time to get off two more broods before the season's end, or whether each pair would have only a single replacement clutch. As can be seen in Figure 1, most of the pairs who failed early on did in fact raise two more broods successfully. This effort took the overall nest count for 2007 to 26 attempts – a much higher total than in previous years, although the early failures accordingly lowered the overall nesting success rate for the season. Unlike 2006, no pairs reared three successful broods – not even the pair that nested at site F3, which had fledged their first brood by early June.

One nesting attempt worth noting was that at site C4, which failed in mid-June. Four eggs were present in this nest on the 23rd May and the clutch size was the same on the 1st June, after the rainy period. Ten days later there were seven eggs in the nest, five of which later hatched on the 25th June. Unfortunately, all the nestlings subsequently died between the 2nd and the 6th July for unknown reasons. The very late increase in clutch size is interesting and there are a number of possible explanations. If the four eggs seen on the 23rd May were amongst the clutch of seven seen later, then at least some of the original four hatched. However, this would require a nine-day delay between the fourth and fifth egg, which is very unusual. Alternatively, it could have been that the four eggs I saw on the 1st June were the first four of an entirely new clutch, or that a new clutch was started after the 1st June.

All in all, it was an interesting breeding season and testament to the level of detail that can be obtained by monitoring a site intensively. Let's hope at least some of the fledged birds will make it back next year.

# 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.

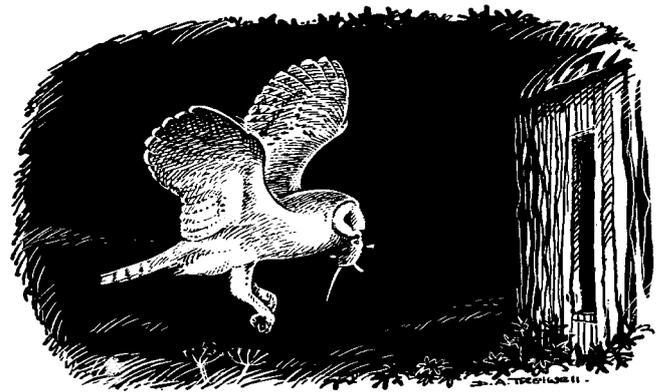
All applications for Schedule 1 licences (for nest recording and/or ringing) are dealt with by the BTO Licensing Officer, Jez Blackburn [jez.blackburn@bto.org](mailto:jez.blackburn@bto.org) who can send you an application form.

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](mailto:nest.records@bto.org)  
Submission of IPMR data files: [nrs.data@bto.org](mailto:nrs.data@bto.org)  
Subscribe to NRS Email Forum: [nrsforum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:nrsforum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)  
Subscribe to IPMR Email Forum: [IPMRForum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:IPMRForum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)  
Post message on IPMR Forum: [IPMRForum@yahoogroups.com](mailto:IPMRForum@yahoogroups.com)  
Post message on NRS Forum: [nrsforum@yahoogroups.com](mailto: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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