

# NRSnews

The newsletter of the Nest Record Scheme



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**PLUS** TRIBUTE TO MARK FARMER, NEW PARTICIPANTS IN 2011, SPOTTED FLYCATCHERS AT THE DENTIST.



More Whitethroat nests are being monitored thanks to the targeted efforts of recorders. See pages 8–9 for 2011 NRS totals.



Thanks to Ben MacDonald for this excellent photo of a Hawfinch nest with chicks. For more on Hawfinch nest monitoring, see page 6.

## A New Nesting Generation

In the early 2000s, we were reporting worrying trends in NRS participation. Now, thanks to you, the Scheme is on the up again.

**A**nyone who has been involved with the Nest Record Scheme for more than a couple of years won't have been able to avoid our incessant appeals for more records and more recorders. In 2005, nest record totals were down 25% on the 1990s, and, even more worryingly, annual totals for common species such as Whitethroat were dwindling, as were recorders who could monitor them. Seven years on and totals are on their way back up, especially for those species we've highlighted. So far, 255 Whitethroat nest records have been sent in for 2011, up from 70 in 2005 (and helped by a bumper breeding season!). For Chiffchaff, 2011

submissions currently stand at 243, up from a low of 97 in 2006. As well as monitoring more nests, experienced recorders have helped tremendously by writing articles on nest finding, mentoring new recorders, helping to run courses and promoting the NRS in Bird Club reports and newsletters. Just as impressive have been the efforts of the 300 recorders who have joined us since 2008. Over 7,000 of the 37,252 records submitted for 2011 have been sent in by these new recorders, including 35 of the 255 Whitethroat records mentioned. It's great to start the 2012 season with such upbeat news. As ever, a huge thanks to all NRS supporters for their efforts!

## FROM THE EDITOR

# Welcome...

...to the 28th edition of Nest Record News. I hope you like the re-design! A question I often hear this time of year is, 'what species are you going for this season?' I usually think of those annoying nests that got away last year; the elusive pair of Bullfinches or the Lapwings in the field next to the hedgerow, but it's actually a very relevant question about focus. The BTO/JNCC partnership has identified a need for 'demographic targeting', focussing ringing and nest recording efforts on priority species to fill gaps in our knowledge. In this edition of *NRN*, there are some great examples of this happening. On page 11, we read about East Dales Ringing Group doing a wonderful job of combining ringing and nest recording. As a nest recorder who has joined a local ringing group at Wicken Fen, it's an example I find inspiring. On page 12, Tony Davis describes his exciting project monitoring a locally declining population of Wood Warblers, and on page 6, the Hawfinch Working Group's article will appeal to anyone wanting to get in at the deep (or is that high?) end when it comes to targeting species. I hope the various volunteer efforts covered in this issue will inspire both new and old recorders to ask the question, 'What will I go for this season?'

**Carl Barimore** Editor & NRS Organiser

### NEW NEST RECORDERS

## Eighty new participants join us in 2011

New participants are, of course, the future of the scheme, and last season 1,990 nest records were collected by 81 first-time recorders, so, a big thanks and a warm welcome to:

Tessa Anning • Maurice Aungier • Steve Baines • John Baker • Daniel Bardsley • Daniel Bennett • Marcus Betteridge • Amanda Biggins • Paul Blackburn • Keith Bowden • Mark Breaks • Christopher Charlton • Alister Clunas • Michael Colquhoun • Paul Cremins • Richard Curtis • Mark Dadds • Gillian Dinsmore • Richard du Feu • William Edmond • Jess Ellington-Goldfinch • Clive Elliott • Lee Folger • Stephen Freeman • Bee Choo Gallivan • Vivien Green • Adrian George • Andrew Glover • Elizabeth Gorsuch • James Grant • Peter Grice • Steven Harris • Suzanne Haselton • Colin

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### NRS NEWS

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## IN THE NEWS...

### EVENTS

## NRS-aplenty at BTO Conference

A major theme of the 2011 BTO Conference, held at Swanwick in December, was how important integrated monitoring is to studying population change. Nevertheless, we were secretly rather pleased to see our favourite survey stealing pole position in the conference title, 'Nests, Rings and Conservation'. In fact, nest recording dominated the whole first night of the conference. Richard Castell was first up with an inspiring talk entitled 'Putting the nest back into ornithology'. No doubt thanks to Richard's rousing appeal, the annual NRS meeting that immediately followed enjoyed its highest ever turnout—over 100 people! At the meeting, Tony Davis gave an excellent presentation on his Wood Warbler project, which you can read about on page 12. Overall, it was a fantastic start to a weekend of fascinating talks on studying bird populations, combined, of course, with as many conversations in the bar!



Attendees chatting by the NRS display at the 2011 BTO Annual Conference



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### TRAINING

## 2012 NRS training courses

Our first nest finding course was held in 2007 with the Wetland Trust at Pannel Valley Nature Reserve. Since then, we've run 11 courses for 109 budding nest finders.

As ever, huge thanks are due to our volunteer tutors, Richard Castell, Tony Davis and David Oliver, and to our venue hosts, Elmwood College, the Wetland Trust, and Chapel House Farm, for making the courses possible.

We are taking bookings for four more courses this May:

- 11 May–13 May Thetford, Norfolk.
- 18 May–20 May Pulford, Cheshire.
- 25 May–27 May Hindhead, Surrey.
- 01 June–03 June Cupar, Fife

Please go to [www.bto.org/nrs/training-courses](http://www.bto.org/nrs/training-courses) to download course programmes and booking forms, or phone us on **01842 750 050** to request information by post.

### RESOURCES

## Field guide selling well

As we've been only too pleased to mention at every opportunity, the new BTO publication *A Field Guide to Monitoring Nests* went on sale last April, the first comprehensive guide to nest recording for almost 40 years. The book has been an immediate hit with recorders and ringers and,

bolstered by positive reviews in *British Birds*, *Ibis* and *Limosa*, it has also sold well further afield. Overall 1,857 copies have shifted in only 10 months! If you haven't got yourself a copy yet, visit [www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/field-guide](http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/field-guide) for an overview of this essential field guide.

### APPEAL

## Skylark nest finders wanted

Imperial College London and the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust are running a project investigating the impacts of biomass crops on farmland birds. The main aim of the project is to determine the breeding success of ground-nesting birds in different farmland types. This season, the research team will be monitoring Skylark nests at selected sites across Lincolnshire

and Nottinghamshire and we are looking for local help with Skylark nest-finding. Hints and tips would be welcome, or perhaps you might even be able to spend a few hours with us in the field. If you think you can help or would like more information on the project, please contact me, Henrietta Pringle, at [henrietta.pringle09@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:henrietta.pringle09@imperial.ac.uk)

## NRS LATEST RESULTS

# Tits and targets

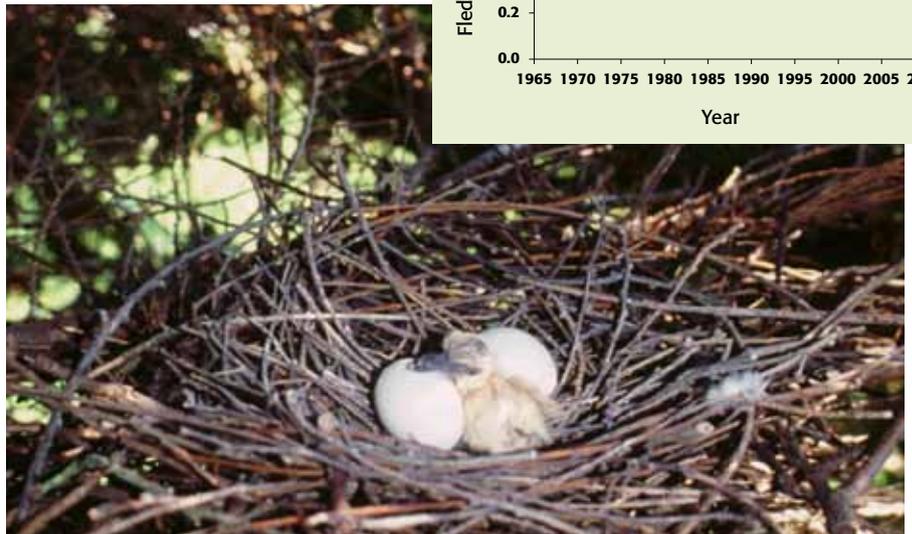
When it comes to nesting, some species may be sexier than others, but none is too common to be recorded, as Dave Leech explains.

**Dave Leech** Head of NRS, CES and RAS

**W**hile it would be difficult to argue that flushing a Collared Dove off a clutch is as exciting as following the croak of a Nightingale back to her chicks, no species is 'too common' to nest record. We need to know what's happening to our abundant birds in the same way that we need to know what's happening to those on the Amber and Red Lists. The large datasets collected when studying widespread species also allow more detailed analysis of environmental pressures such as climate change, competition and urbanisation, which may affect rarer taxa in the same way.

Conservation policy is increasingly reflecting this view, with the emphasis moving from a species-based approach to one that monitors habitat quality using suites of indicator species. Accordingly, the combined efforts of nest recorders and volunteer inputters have allowed us to further extend the coverage of the latest *BirdTrends Report* ([www.bto.org/birdtrends](http://www.bto.org/birdtrends)) to include two abundant species, Wood Pigeon and Coal Tit.

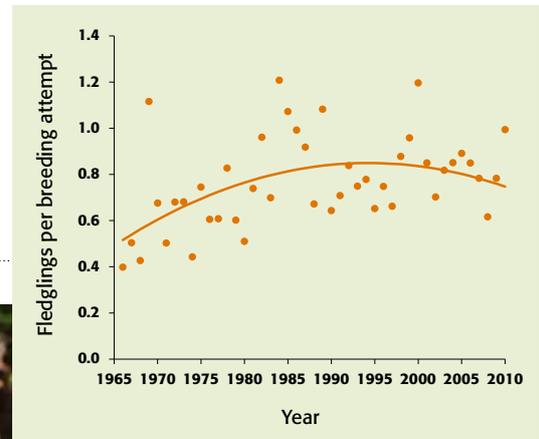
Some may find it hard to get enthused by Wood Pigeons (beyond them presenting a handy way to boost NRS totals at the end of the season), but as a potential agricultural pest that has also proven very adept at colonising urban areas, they pose some really interesting questions. The NRS data suggest that productivity has increased over time (Fig 1), largely due to a fall in failure rates at the egg stage. Interestingly, laying dates appear to be 20 days later than in the 1960s, the opposite trend to that displayed by the majority of birds (although similar to that identified for Collared Dove). Has this relationship been influenced



**A Wood Pigeon nest with an unusual clutch size of three. INSET: Figure 1. Fledglings per breeding attempt for Wood Pigeon 1966–2010**

by changes in observer effort or the shift towards urban area? There are lots of interesting studies of seasonal trends and habitat comparisons that could be undertaken and, for once, sample sizes shouldn't be too much of an issue!

Coal Tits are relatively poorly studied compared to their Blue and Great brethren, their reluctance to utilise nest boxes (or their exclusion from them by other species?) a major factor. I've recently spoken to several recorders who are trying out new designs aimed specifically at attracting this species and I look forward to hearing about box uptake during the 2012 season. While the impact of climate change on tits breeding in deciduous woods, where they may struggle to match advances in caterpillar peaks, is well documented, it will be interesting to see whether those in coniferous woods face the same challenges. The number of fledglings produced has remained constant over time but there is some



evidence that brood sizes are falling and nestling failure rates are rising, which could reflect reduced food availability.

So, while projects on declining species are obviously a vital part of the conservation effort, those of us who don't have the opportunity to monitor Whinchats or Wood Warblers need not despair; we just need to focus on a common species instead. The totals on pages 8–9 show that many could do with more attention; fewer than 150 Greenfinch nests are monitored each year, and a larger dataset would provide the perfect opportunity to investigate the impacts of the trichomonosis outbreak on productivity. When it comes to finding out how broader environmental pressures affect breeding success, and how this influences abundance, every nest counts.

See the latest NRS results at [www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/results](http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/results)

# Breeding birds and the weather in 2011

BTO Research Ecologist David Glue summarises the breeding season, drawing on comments and findings from nest recorders, ringers and reserve wardens.

**David Glue** BTO Research Ecologist

January kicked off with frozen water bodies, rock-hard soils and snow-topped hillsides as the UK was hit by the coldest December in 120 years. Night-time temperatures fell as low as  $-22^{\circ}\text{C}$  and Kestrel, Barn Owl and Wren territories, among others, were worryingly vacant. Atlantic westerlies brought about a slow thaw in January, with lashing rain and temperatures above  $1^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Collared Dove and Feral Pigeon were reported nesting in suburban areas and Grey Heron, Magpie and other species were seen nest-building. By February, with temperatures topping  $15^{\circ}\text{C}$  in Central London, egg-laying had been reported for 10 different species, including Tawny Owl in Yorkshire and Wiltshire, Blackbird in Devon, Moorhen in Birmingham and a Robin in a garden centre in Berkshire. Overall, although not as severe as 2009/10, it was another hard winter.

## Spring drought

A northerly wind chill in March delayed changeover of winter visitors and spring migrants; lingering Waxwing, Redwing and Fieldfare were all reported in full song. An ongoing rainfall deficit—March was the driest since 1990—seemed to leave foraging Rook, Blackbird and other species hard-pressed. Flimsy Long-tailed Tit, Dunnock, dove and thrush nests were all reported spilling contents, mirroring events in 2010.

April Fools' Day heralded spring proper and warm sub-tropical Atlantic air was followed by a spate of egg-laying by Grey Heron, Little Egret, dabbling duck, coastal gulls and waders. High pressure from 6 April gave rise to a sunny, dry April, with

temperatures  $3.9^{\circ}\text{C}$  above average. Early egg-laying was reported for thrushes, Robin and other passerines with modest-sized broods fledging.

The continuing drought conditions (driest April since 2007) sparked off widespread lowland heath and hillside moor fires from Dorset, Berkshire and Derby to Cumbria and Sutherland, destroying many nests and breeding territories.

## Glorious Spanish heat in May

The dry, sunny theme to spring continued in May. High pressure anchored long-term in the south of the UK and hot air from Iberia took temperatures up to  $25.4^{\circ}\text{C}$  in places, though 'lows' did reach damp northwestern parts.

Regular spring migrants were quickly back on station, but song periods were short and pairs swift to egg-lay, according to frustrated nest recorders. Short-haul species, notably Chiffchaff and Blackcap, were back in strength and performed well, as did Whitethroat. However, concern for depleted populations of Cuckoo, Nightingale and Turtle Dove—thought to winter in savannah woodland further south in Africa—seemed further justified in 2011, with some traditional haunts seemingly empty and only modest breeding success noted.

Repeated blasts of hot southeasterly winds helped to sweep extra Black Redstart, Grasshopper Warbler and Quail to the UK, the latter singing widely from grasslands and cereals.

## Summer rains replenish flora

June marked the return to classical British Atlantic maritime weather: cool, changeable, cyclonic, with

temperatures down across the UK. Repeat westerly-tracking rainbelts—June rainfall was above the norm in all regions—helped reinvigorate jaded gardens, farm, heath and moor, and at just the right time for second-brooding Robin, thrushes, and Starling.

Torrential downpours in the south on 12 June led to swollen water courses and wetlands. Recorders noted flooded nests of Mute Swan, grebes, Kingfisher and Sand Martin.

June closed with a brief taste of high summer, the mercury clipping  $33.3^{\circ}\text{C}$  in London, boosting numbers of airborne insects—good for foraging warblers, flycatchers and hirundines.

## More showers in July and August

A cool, showery regime returned in July, with see-sawing temperatures and fitful sunshine, uncomfortable for UK holidaymakers but good for many nesting birds. Premature 'autumnal' gales and lashing rain during 14–17 July dislodged 'branching' young and broods from nests of Grey Heron, Hobby and Long-eared Owl.

The fluctuating temperatures and showery pattern to summer spilled over into August, initially favourable for second broods. Nest box-using Robin, Stock Dove and Tree Sparrow churned out extra families. Large, mobile flocks of Crossbill, composed of mixed families, hinted at a productive season. Violent thundery cloudbursts on 18 August caused local flash-flooding, affecting wetland waterfowl, waders, *Acrocephalus* warblers and Reed Bunting. A cooler final week of August with frequent showers, though affecting some late broods, failed to take the gloss off a fairly productive breeding season for many UK species.

## NRS SPECIES SPOTLIGHT



# High-bough nesting

In 2011, the Hawfinch Working Group met to discuss what could be done to understand better the large-scale decline of this woodland specialist. Working group members and nest recorders Steve Roberts and Jerry Lewis report.

**Steve Roberts & Jerry Lewis**

Even nest recorders who like heights don't often come across Hawfinch nests. Fewer than 10 records are submitted to the Nest Record Scheme per year and only 226 Hawfinch nests have ever been recorded. These records, dating back to 1940, are nevertheless interesting to compare. Virtually all the nest records since 1980 are from nests in woodland, whereas earlier records are from a more diverse spread of habitats, including orchards, hedgerows and gardens. The most commonly recorded vegetation for nest sites post-1980 is Beech and oak, whereas for older records it is Hawthorn, Silver Birch and fruit trees. The cards hint at changes in productivity: average first egg dates are a week earlier (5 May) post-1980 and the failure rate is higher. The Hawfinch Working Group would like to see more Hawfinch nest records collected to give us an opportunity to study their productivity in more detail. So, we offer here some tips on finding Hawfinch nests.

Although when it is high up, seeing into a Hawfinch nest may be the preserve of a trained and equipped tree climber, nevertheless a recorder on the ground can observe adult activity, count larger chicks and record nest outcome. Remember to follow the Code of Conduct in the *NRS Handbook* at all times.

Hawfinches are considered to be very sensitive to disturbance at the nest but work in our study area and by others does not support this assessment. Although usually secretive, Hawfinches are quite confiding and return to eggs and chicks readily, even when observers are still in the vicinity and they tolerate hides without problems. However, many nests are



**A Hawfinch nest with tell-tale fine twigs protruding. Hawfinches usually have one brood in a season, laying 3–7 eggs.**

predated (Jays and squirrels likely, though unproven suspects), so perhaps the species' reputation has been built on early-stage predations being misinterpreted as desertions.

Hawfinch in our study area favour mixed broadleaved woodland with a well-defined canopy, understory and tall shrub layer. There is a marked preference for nesting in slender, ivy-covered trees, particularly young Ash, Beech and Silver Birch, though this is not exclusive. In these trees, nests are often positioned against the trunk, towards the top, where the ivy is beginning to thin. They may appear see-through from below and, if the female is sitting, the tail and shining bill are sometimes visible. Nests have also been found within hanging clumps of Honeysuckle, in leaders of trees, on epicormic growths, in small forks with no ivy cover at all and sometimes well out towards the tips of branches. Nests have also been found

in evergreens, *eg* Yew and Hemlock. The preferred tree species may vary between areas; Holly for instance is often favoured in the New Forest. Nest height is also extremely variable.

### Locating territories

Essential to finding Hawfinch nests is familiarity with their subtly different calls and timing of visits to coincide with peak activity. To begin with, potential breeding sites should be located. This can be done on fine mornings in late March and April, when birds may be detected by their weak song and 'typical' explosive ticking calls. These calls carry up to 100 m, so can be heard from forest paths, although picking them out from a background of general bird song takes practice. Pairs often form loose colonies that are made obvious in the leafless canopy by the noisy and aggressive interactions between males, but isolated pairs are more difficult to locate.

The timing of follow-up visits to find the actual nests is crucial. Nests should be located as early as possible, before leaf cover becomes too extensive, but also when the birds are likely to be incubating eggs. In the Wye Valley, Wales and Gloucestershire this is traditionally in the first week of May, but it may be earlier in other areas. Towards the end of incubation, and by the chick stage, leaf cover becomes so dense that nest locations are almost impossible to see. Some nests on our study sites have not been visible at all from the ground on follow-up visits. This is also a good reason for marking nest locations well once you have found them!

### Homing in on the nest

During incubation, males feed the females at or very near the nest at intervals of about 45 minutes. Feeding is accompanied by protracted bursts of calling, similar to the above-mentioned ticking call, but more rapid and excitable.

When a burst of calling is heard, immediately hasten towards it to get close to the nest site; reaching this 'hot spot' is more important than a stealthy approach. Calls will probably cease near the site but with luck birds may be seen. Once in the general vicinity of the nest, wait quietly for the next bout of feeding, when it will be easier to pinpoint the birds. Watch closely any birds that are not in the canopy and try to see where they go; birds lower down will invariably be going to or from a nest. Do not use binoculars at this point, as the restricted field of view will be a handicap. The nest itself will be difficult to see, but look out for tell-tale fine twigs protruding from ivy. If the nest isn't spotted immediately, wait for the next bout of calls and spend the time slowly looking over nearby trees with binoculars. Thoroughly check all parts of suspected nesting trees.

When a nest is found, do not discount further calling in the vicinity, as nests can be as little as 20 m apart.

Hawfinch is one of the species featured in the new BTO publication 'A Field Guide To Monitoring Nests'. See [www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/field-guide](http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/field-guide) for more information.

## A trip to the dentist

Steve Low, a postman in Suffolk, found himself going to the dentist a lot more often last year – an unusual side effect of getting involved in the Nest Record Scheme

**Jo Jones** Wicken Fen Ringing Group

Steve's introduction to nest recording was by chance. He happened to be in a hide at Wicken Fen Nature Reserve, Cambridgeshire, when I arrived to check on a Swallow's nest above the hide door. While inspecting the nest, I explained to him what nest recording is all about. This encounter was a piece of luck, as Steve is a friendly postman and people on his rounds know about his interest in nature.

Later that week, a villager mentioned to him that Spotted Flycatchers were nesting by the entrance to a dentist's surgery in Newmarket. Steve immediately got in touch with me and together we went to see the nest.

The surgery receptionists told us that a pair had been coming to nest in the trellis by their front entrance for years. When we checked, we found a Spotted Flycatcher nest with four chicks. The parents were feeding busily, taking no notice of the constant

comings and goings from the surgery.

Steve took on the job of recorder, visiting every few days at the end of his delivery rounds.

Ten days later the chicks were ready to fledge, flapping vigorously on the edge of the nest. Steve visited the next day and the nest was empty, but the adults were still nearby and acting agitated. Then Steve heard cheeping from low down. Following the noise, he found that a chick had fallen through a grating next to a cellar window. Steve and two receptionists dashed down to the cellar, forced open the window and managed to catch the chick, leaving it safely under bushes outside. Later, it was heard calling from the bushes and the parents were calling back.

Four chicks fledged, one chick rescued, one completed nest record card, one new nest recorder—my sort of trip to the dentist!



STEVE LOW

# Nest Record Scheme totals

A summary of the number of records per species submitted to the Nest Record Scheme in 2010, 2011 and from 1939–2011 (as of February 2012).

Species preceded with a bullet-point are incorporated in the BTO's Integrated Population Monitoring Programme. We would be particularly pleased to receive 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 varies for Eire, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man).

Species	Code	2010	2011	Total
• Mute Swan	MUTSW	142	117	7,343
<i>Whooper Swan</i>	WHOSW	0	2	28
Bar-headed Goose	BAHGO	0	0	9
<i>Greylag Goose</i>	GREGO	52	63	1,177
Snow Goose	SNOGO	0	0	8
Canada Goose	CANGO	163	143	5,217
Barnacle Goose	BARGO	1	1	75
Egyptian Goose	EGYGO	16	18	175
Ruddy Shelduck	RUDSH	1	1	5
Shelduck	SHELD	6	5	383
Wood Duck	WOODU	2	0	3
Mandarin	MANDA	43	28	840
Wigeon	WIGEO	0	0	187
Gadwall	GADWA	15	20	273
Teal	TEAL.	1	2	243
Mallard	MALLA	207	134	10,127
<i>Pintail</i>	PINTA	0	0	23
<i>Garganey</i>	GARGA	0	0	11
Shoveler	SHOVE	5	0	235
Red-crested Pochard	RECPO	8	6	32
Pochard	POCHA	17	3	286
Tufted Duck	TUFDU	33	36	1,479
Eider	EIDER	317	339	11,016
<i>Common Scoter</i>	COMSC	0	0	43
<i>Goldeneye</i>	GOLDE	12	15	290
Red-breasted Merganser	REBME	2	1	294
Goosander	GOOSA	11	12	433
Ruddy Duck	RUDDU	0	0	185
Red Grouse	REDGR	3	10	873
Ptarmigan	PTARM	0	1	133
Black Grouse	BLAGR	1	3	85
<i>Capercaillie</i>	CAPER	1	0	92
Red-legged Partridge	RELPA	7	6	509
Grey Partridge	GREPA	3	2	874
<i>Quail</i>	QUAIL	0	0	16
Pheasant	PHEAS	30	44	2,417
Golden Pheasant	GOLPH	0	0	6
• Red-throated Diver*	RETDI	20	18	2,505
<i>Black-throated Diver</i>	BLTDI	5	4	250
Little Grebe	LITGR	50	37	2,870
Great Crested Grebe	GRCGR	155	127	4,621
<i>Slavonian Grebe</i>	SLAGR	2	16	216
<i>Black-necked Grebe</i>	BLNGR	0	0	31
Fulmar	FULMA	16	7	7,638

Species	Code	2010	2011	Total
Manx Shearwater	MANSH	4	0	633
Storm Petrel	STOPE	0	0	92
<i>Leach's Petrel</i>	LEAPE	0	0	75
Gannet	GANNE	0	0	33
Cormorant	CORMO	79	7	2,540
Shag	SHAG.	400	283	16,170
<i>Bittern</i>	BITTE	0	0	39
Little Egret	LITEG	44	29	205
• Grey Heron	GREHE	220	78	8,889
<i>Honey Buzzard</i>	HONBU	20	17	198
<i>Red Kite</i>	REDKI	321	310	1,477
<i>White-tailed Eagle</i>	WHTEA	5	1	16
<i>Marsh Harrier</i>	MARHA	23	20	179
• Hen Harrier	HENHA	33	5	2,045
<i>Montagu's Harrier</i>	MONHA	2	0	47
<i>Goshawk</i>	GOSHA	104	86	1,626
• Sparrowhawk*	SPARR	77	83	5,937
• Buzzard	BUZZA	248	263	7,943
<i>Golden Eagle</i>	GOLEA	20	19	713
<i>Osprey</i>	OSPRE	14	13	143
• Kestrel	KESTR	417	398	10,690
• Merlin*	MERLI	54	56	4,143
• Hobby*	HOBBY	63	89	1,368
• Peregrine*	PEREG	128	127	3,789
Water Rail	WATRA	1	3	114
<i>Corncrake</i>	CORNC	0	0	32
• Moorhen	MOORH	387	233	25,519
Coot	COOT.	978	778	23,325
• Oystercatcher	OYSTE	309	350	19,143
<i>Black-winged Stilt</i>	BLWST	0	0	4
<i>Avocet</i>	AVOCE	12	32	1,013
<i>Stone Curlew</i>	STOCU	0	0	425
<i>Little Ringed Plover</i>	LIRPL	59	72	2,953
• Ringed Plover	RINPL	202	165	11,456
<i>Kentish Plover</i>	KENPL	0	0	19
<i>Dotterel</i>	DOTTE	1	0	264
• Golden Plover	GOLPL	6	6	947
• Lapwing	LAPWI	308	314	28,644
Dunlin	DUNLI	1	2	579
<i>Ruff</i>	RUFF.	0	0	4
• Snipe*	SNIFE	8	5	1,863
Woodcock	WOODC	0	4	692
<i>Black-tailed Godwit</i>	BLTGO	1	0	43
<i>Whimbrel</i>	WHIMB	36	32	128
• Curlew*	CURLE	35	22	3,188
• Common Sandpiper*	COMSA	42	32	1,749
<i>Greenshank</i>	GRESH	3	8	209
• Redshank*	REDSH	24	36	3,526
<i>Red-necked Phalarope</i>	RENPH	0	0	163
Arctic Skua	ARCSK	1	1	377
Great Skua	GRESK	1	11	451
Kittiwake	KITTI	535	665	19,676

Species	Code	2010	2011	Total
<b>Black-headed Gull</b>	BLHGU	47	194	10,352
<b>Mediterranean Gull</b>	MEDGU	1	0	50
<b>Common Gull</b>	COMGU	123	58	6,146
<b>Lesser Black-backed Gull</b>	LBBGU	24	10	4,776
<b>Herring Gull</b>	HERGU	56	63	7,850
<b>Great Black-backed Gull</b>	GBBGU	3	9	3,503
<b>Little Tern</b>	LITTE	54	92	7,219
<b>Sandwich Tern</b>	SANTE	0	0	1,814
<b>Common Tern</b>	COMTE	188	108	8,936
<b>Roseate Tern</b>	ROSTE	80	1	1,514
<b>Arctic Tern</b>	ARCTE	537	5	13,399
<b>Guillemot</b>	GUILLE	96	0	1,674
<b>Razorbill</b>	RAZOR	30	89	1,738
<b>Black Guillemot</b>	BLAGU	44	32	1,873
<b>Puffin</b>	PUFFI	20	0	1,205
<b>Rock Dove</b>	ROCDO	55	51	945
<b>Feral Pigeon</b>	FERPI	23	9	2,516
• <b>Stock Dove</b>	STODO	1,048	715	15,445
• <b>Wood Pigeon</b>	WOODP	821	855	33,291
• <b>Collared Dove*</b>	COLDO	192	136	6,454
• <b>Turtle Dove*</b>	TURDO	15	11	2,100
<b>Ring-necked Parakeet</b>	RINPA	56	4	112
<b>Cuckoo</b>	CUCKO	15	31	2,303
• <b>Barn Owl</b>	BAROW	1,705	1,823	20,065
• <b>Little Owl*</b>	LITOW	153	143	3,160
• <b>Tawny Owl</b>	TAWOW	472	476	14,126
<b>Long-eared Owl*</b>	LOEOW	16	17	884
<b>Short-eared Owl*</b>	SHEOW	5	6	434
• <b>Nightjar</b>	NIJAR	75	106	2,316
<b>Swift</b>	SWIFT	143	47	3,430
<b>Kingfisher</b>	KINGF	19	21	841
<b>Wryneck</b>	WRYNE	0	0	23
<b>Green Woodpecker*</b>	GREWO	21	9	563
• <b>Great Spotted Woodpecker*</b>	GRSWO	153	60	2,964
<b>Lesser Spotted Woodpecker*</b>	LESWO	6	3	283
• <b>Woodlark*</b>	WOODL	102	140	2,292
• <b>Skylark*</b>	SKYLA	47	50	8,862
• <b>Sand Martin*</b>	SANMA	330	378	4,954
• <b>Swallow</b>	SWALL	3,183	2,953	80,844
<b>House Martin</b>	HOUMA	283	149	11,551
• <b>Tree Pipit*</b>	TREPI	36	76	2,230
• <b>Meadow Pipit</b>	MEAPI	150	209	10,642
<b>Rock Pipit*</b>	ROCPI	14	5	921
• <b>Yellow Wagtail*</b>	YELWA	14	17	1,128
• <b>Grey Wagtail*</b>	GREWA	86	82	7,012
• <b>Pied Wagtail</b>	PIEWA	180	201	11,762
• <b>Dipper</b>	DIPPE	365	409	12,392
• <b>Wren</b>	WREN.	229	146	18,001
• <b>Duncock</b>	DUNNO	331	277	33,071
• <b>Robin</b>	ROBIN	445	365	24,775
<b>Nightingale</b>	NIGAL	12	14	519
<b>Black Redstart</b>	BLARE	1	1	184
• <b>Redstart*</b>	REDST	138	186	7,723
• <b>Whinchat*</b>	WHINC	45	55	2,657
• <b>Stonechat*</b>	STOCH	135	142	4,964
• <b>Wheatear*</b>	WHEAT	60	38	4,299
• <b>Ring Ouzel*</b>	RINOUE	28	36	1,953
• <b>Blackbird</b>	BLABI	1,464	1,188	142,889
<b>Fieldfare</b>	FIELD	0	0	7
• <b>Song Thrush</b>	SONTH	501	377	78,774

Species	Code	2010	2011	Total
<b>Redwing</b>	REDWI	0	0	127
• <b>Mistle Thrush*</b>	MISTH	82	75	8,688
<b>Cetti's Warbler</b>	CETWA	2	3	45
<b>Grasshopper Warbler*</b>	GRAWA	17	29	479
<b>Savi's Warbler</b>	SAVWA	0	0	4
• <b>Sedge Warbler*</b>	SEDWA	48	86	5,296
<b>Marsh Warbler</b>	MARWA	0	0	170
• <b>Reed Warbler</b>	REEWA	639	988	20,537
• <b>Blackcap*</b>	BLACA	142	212	4,627
• <b>Garden Warbler*</b>	GARWA	58	78	2,516
<b>Lesser Whitethroat*</b>	LESWH	15	12	1,028
• <b>Whitethroat*</b>	WHITE	163	255	7,245
<b>Dartford Warbler</b>	DARWA	12	25	600
• <b>Wood Warbler*</b>	WOOWA	76	171	3,101
• <b>Chiffchaff*</b>	CHIFF	197	243	4,638
• <b>Willow Warbler*</b>	WILWA	190	311	14,687
<b>Goldcrest*</b>	GOLDC	14	7	969
<b>Firecrest</b>	FIREC	0	0	9
• <b>Spotted Flycatcher</b>	SPOFL	130	159	12,602
• <b>Pied Flycatcher</b>	PIEFL	896	933	49,366
<b>Bearded Tit</b>	BEATI	13	4	386
• <b>Long-tailed Tit*</b>	LOTTI	323	206	7,653
• <b>Blue Tit</b>	BLUTI	5,641	5,947	142,622
• <b>Great Tit</b>	GRETI	4,759	4,144	101,252
<b>Crested Tit</b>	CRETI	3	2	468
• <b>Coal Tit*</b>	COATI	90	75	6,222
<b>Willow Tit*</b>	WILTI	29	26	644
• <b>Marsh Tit*</b>	MARTI	65	51	1,943
• <b>Nuthatch</b>	NUTHA	187	214	5,284
• <b>Treecreeper*</b>	TREEC	69	53	2,956
<b>Golden Oriole</b>	GOLOR	0	0	42
<b>Red-backed Shrike</b>	REBSH	0	0	258
• <b>Jay*</b>	JAY..	15	9	1,683
• <b>Magpie*</b>	MAGPI	65	75	8,633
<b>Chough</b>	CHOUG	26	25	1,086
• <b>Jackdaw</b>	JACKD	498	372	10,841
• <b>Rook*</b>	ROOK.	132	88	15,898
<b>Hooded Crow</b>	HOOCR	11	77	1,257
• <b>Carrion Crow*</b>	CROW.	164	100	8,811
• <b>Raven</b>	RAVEN	110	91	5,293
• <b>Starling</b>	STARL	315	233	18,825
• <b>House Sparrow</b>	HOUSP	345	391	17,021
• <b>Tree Sparrow</b>	TRESP	2,137	1,601	35,977
• <b>Chaffinch</b>	CHAFF	364	316	25,828
• <b>Greenfinch</b>	GREFI	139	84	15,834
• <b>Goldfinch*</b>	GOLDF	128	100	4,077
<b>Siskin</b>	SISKI	8	4	106
• <b>Linnet</b>	LINNE	283	297	30,149
<b>Twite*</b>	TWITE	3	1	1,241
• <b>Redpoll*</b>	LESRE	9	11	1,395
<b>Crossbill</b>	CROSS	12	5	186
• <b>Bullfinch*</b>	BULLF	77	90	6,382
<b>Hawfinch</b>	HAWFI	4	9	240
<b>Snow Bunting</b>	SNOBU	0	0	202
• <b>Yellowhammer*</b>	YELHA	85	118	8,629
<b>Cirl Bunting</b>	CIRBU	64	74	673
• <b>Reed Bunting*</b>	REEBU	93	88	8,688
• <b>Corn Bunting*</b>	CORBU	75	130	1,256
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>		40,070	37,252	1,574,437

## 2011 TOP NESTERS

### Bumper Whitethroat year

By way of encouragement, this section highlights the fieldwork feats of some of our busiest nest recorders. However, it is important to note that most nest records are collected by people who monitor only a few nests each year, so a big thanks is due to *all* participants, not just those that make these lists.

Last season was a bumper year for Whitethroat nest records, no doubt partly because of good numbers of birds but also because of recorders' fantastic response to our requests for more warbler records. The annual total has trebled from 70 Whitethroat nest records in 2005 to 235 this year!



Whitethroat nest: a substantial cup woven into vegetation

MIKE TOMES

#### Top 10 Whitethroat recorders in 2011

Recorder	Total
Ron Louch	50
Adrian Scott	20
Mark Lawrence and Mark Penney	18
John Secker	12
Jeremy Gates	11
Rye Meads Ringing Group	9
Colin Davison	8
Mark Dadds	7
John Walshe	6
Chris Benson	5
Bristol Naturalists Society	5
Graham Button and Richard Tomlinson	5
Richard Castell	5
Thetford Forest Ringing Group	5

#### Top 6 Oystercatcher recorders in 2011

Recorder	Total
Neil Lawton	69
Kevin Briggs	68
Lancaster & District Birdwatching Soc	41
David Myers	24
Alistair Duncan	22
Colin Moody	19

#### Top 10 nest recorders in Scotland 2011

Recorder	Total
Colin Davison	315
David Oliver	255
Ted Cowley	248
Sean Morris	168
Bob and Rob Swann	144
Tay Ringing Group	101
Grampian Ringing Group	91
Historic Scotland Ranger Service	79
Geoff Shaw	77
Guillam McIvor	76

#### Recorders or groups who collected over 100 records in 2011

Farne Islands National Trust 1,354 • Merseyside RG 717 • John Brook 507 • Newbury RG 473 • South Manchester RG 452 • Alan Ball & Bob Sheppard 452 • Keith Seaton 448 • David Warden 445 • Ron Louch & Dave Thompson 444 • David Myers 435 • Arden RG 417 • Birklands RG 407 • Tom Dewdney 401 • Kevin Briggs 380 • Peter Roe 374 • Thetford Forest RG 357 • Mid-Lincolnshire RG 341 • Keith Bowden 337 • East Dales RG 324 • Lancaster & District Birdwatching Society 316 • Colin Davison 315 • Stephen Carter 315 • Kane Brides 300 • Rye Meads RG 296 • Bob Danson 291 • Michael Mac 279 • Nunnery RG 271 • Geoff Myers 269 • Stanford RG 267 • Mark Lawrence & Mark Penney 265 • Dave Hazard 263 • Frank Mawby 258 • David Coker 256 • David Oliver 255 • Wicken Fen RG 255 • Ted Cowley 248 • Jonathan Lingard 246 • Roger Short, Helen Williams & David Scott 244 • Paul Slater 243 • John Lawton-Roberts 242 • Sarah & Philip Bone 234 • Sorby Breck RG 227 • Allan Hale 226 • Paul Robinson 221 • John Walshe 219 • Rye Bay RG 216 • North West Norfolk RG 212 • Ian Spence 211 • Dartford RG 211 • Nigel Lewis 210 • Jerry Lewis 209 • Derek Holman & Karl Ivens 204 • Dave Short 197 • George Candelin 193 • Noel Fenwick & Julie Brigden 192 • Jan Pritchard 191 • Dave Francis 190 • Neil Lawton 190 • John Allenby 187 • Anne Goodall 183 • Robert Stevens 182 • Mike Netherwood & Mick Cook 172 • Sean Morris 168 • Mike Russell 168 • Derek Keates & Melvyn Preston 165 • Peter Robinson 162 • Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project 162 • Garth Lowe 159 • Paul Holness 154 • Philip Harris 153 • BIAZA Nest Recording Project 152 • Manx RG 151 • Simon Cox 151 • Ronald Clevely 149 • Dave Garner & Phillip Miller 148 • Cwm Clydach RSPB Reserve 148 • Jeremy Gates 146 • John Hyde 146 • Bob & Rob Swann 144 • Peter Rose 143 • Spurn Point Bird Observatory 142 • Graham Uney 138 • Graham Button & Richard Tomlinson 135 • Paul Cammack 132 • John High 127 • Tim Ball 127 • Vincent Lea & Louise Bacon 125 • John Lloyd 124 • Northumbria RG 124 • Robin Husbands 123 • Gerald Murphy 123 • Dawn Pickett 121 • Mike Rogers 120 • Rosemary Setchfield 118 • Moor Piece NR Nestbox Scheme 118 • Waveney RG 112 • Paul Fenwick 111 • Michael Thomas 111 • Kevan Brett 110 • Nigel Goodgame 109 • Roger Peart 108 • South West Lancashire RG 107 • Mervyn Greening 107 • Felicity Burge 107 • Steph Tyler 106 • Bristol Naturalists Society 105 • Anthony Williams & Paul Tabor 104 • Alan Lowe 102 • Tay RG 101 • Brian Rickett 101 • Reginald Lanaway 100 • Scott Jarvis 100

# A match made in Ripon

The increased integration of the Ringing Scheme and the Nest Record Scheme over the past few years has greatly increased the value of the data collected by both surveys. East Dales RG has helped pioneer this approach.

**Jill Warwick** East Dales Ringing Group

**N**est recording has always been a part of our ringing group since its formation in 1996. The number of nesting attempts monitored and ringed annually has grown nearly every year and in 2010 it reached 503, all now submitted via IPMR. This has happened somewhat organically as the group itself has grown in membership; older studies have expanded, new studies have begun and in some cases new members have brought sites and projects into the group with them. The group has always approached its various activities with the same ethos of adding as much value to our efforts as possible—if we are ringing chicks, why not record the nests? If we are recording nests, why not ring the chicks?

## Nest box studies

One of EDRG's earliest activities was monitoring Pied Flycatcher nest boxes. Ringing chicks and catching and ringing adults had already been undertaken at two study sites for some time and the group incorporated nest recording into the monitoring work. It was a very small task to include counting eggs and chicks to the protocol for box visits, for transferring to cards later.

The group also monitors nest boxes occupied by a Tree Sparrow population along the edge of a private woodland nature reserve. As well as monitoring nesting attempts in the boxes and ringing any chicks, the group carries out ringing at two feeding stations during the winter months.

## New (or old?) RAS sites

When the Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) project was launched in 1998, the group immediately

recognised that several of its existing activities already “ticked all the boxes” and could be adapted for RAS with little extra effort, making them of even greater value to conservation. These were two long-running Pied Flycatcher studies, two sites where artificial House Martin nests were being monitored, a Sand Martin colony and, more unusually, an almost unique colour-ringing study of Little Ringed Plover (see *Nest Record News* No. 23).

## Waders

The group is in the fortunate position to have access to arable farmland and rough grazing pastures that border moorland which still hold reasonable numbers of breeding waders. For many years the group has been monitoring the breeding populations there.

Quite often, for species like Lapwing, Curlew, Oystercatcher and Redshank, the precise location of the nest scrape is not actually found, but from experience gained by ringing the young (at ‘DO’ or ‘IP’ stages), we can age the brood quite accurately. Core areas are usually revisited every two weeks and we are often able to re-locate and monitor the progress of individual broods to fledging.

## Working with others

The ringing group has been able to ‘run’ several monitoring studies by working with staff/volunteers at local nature reserves. One of these studies is a nest box scheme at the magnificent World Heritage Site of Fountains Abbey (and adjacent Studley Park), owned by the National Trust. EDRG advises staff/volunteers on nest box siting and monitoring and they pass data back to us. The National Trust, in return, gain demographic data on

PHOTOS: JILL WARWICK



**ABOVE:** One of the many ringing demos held by the group each year. **BELOW:** Pied Flycatcher chicks in a nest box at one of EDRG's study sites.

breeding birds, which helps to inform site management plans.

## The future

EDRG has always looked for new opportunities via access to sites, collaborations and enthusiastic new members—now we also look to new technology. The group has long had ringing permission at a Sand Martin colony over a large riverine shingle bank. Accessing the colony is easy, but inspecting the nest chambers is more of a challenge, hence no nest recording. Now in 2012, the group will have its own endoscope...

For more information about East Dales Ringing Group, visit their website: [www.eastdalesringinggroup.org.uk](http://www.eastdalesringinggroup.org.uk)

# Wood Warblers on the wane?

When it came to his MSc dissertation project, Tony Davis turned to his first love—Wood Warblers. Fifty one nests found and a lot of data crunching later, Tony writes about his study on a local population.

**Tony Davis** Nest recorder and NRS course tutor

In the 1990s, I spent a number of years studying a declining local population of Wood Warblers until it finally disappeared. At the time, I was fairly certain of the reasons for this decline but I hadn't collected data that could be used for a scientific analysis. Then, last year, I had to come up with a project for my MSc dissertation. I settled on a study of Wood Warbler productivity—a chance to do what I didn't do last time!

Of course, I had to find a new Wood Warbler population to study. I knew there was still a relatively large population in the New Forest, so I chose an area of mixed woodland to the west of Lyndhurst that, according to Hampshire Ornithological Society records, supported a particularly good population of Wood Warblers.

The project was to involve finding and monitoring Wood Warbler nests over the 2011 season in order to measure breeding performance and to see whether predation had a major effect on overall productivity.

Before embarking on any nest-finding, I thoroughly surveyed the study area for Wood Warblers and plotted the locations of sightings on a 1:25000 map, using a GIS program. This early-season territory mapping proved invaluable later in the season when I had to relocate territories and the birds were much quieter.

I found 51 nests during the season, with first egg dates ranging from 28 April to 15 June. I found no instances of double-brooding and I only saw two replacement nests, though I may have missed some where the first attempts failed before the adults were colour ringed. Interestingly, with both replacement nests, the males had moved territory and changed partners.



LEFT: A female Wood Warbler peeps out from its domed nest. INSET: Success! A Wood Warbler just after fledging.

PHOTOS: TONY DAVIS

I also observed two cases of adults feeding the young of other pairs after their own nesting attempts had failed.

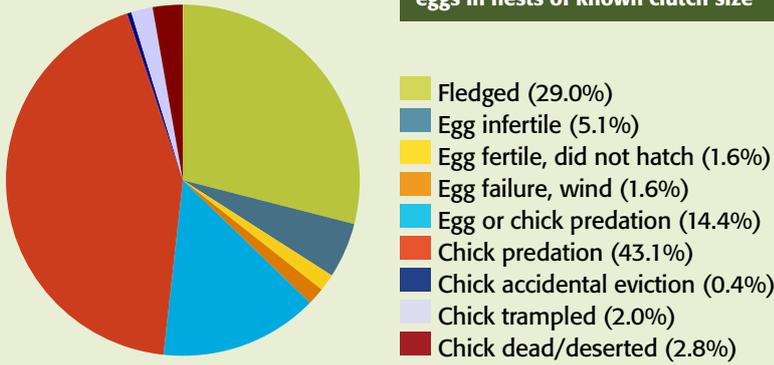
**'As someone who has always wondered why the NRS makes such a fuss about multiple nest visits, I am now a convert to the cause!'**

Having collected data for a single season at the study site, I wanted to compare the productivity of 'my' Wood Warblers with the 'national average'. To do this, I made use of the NRS Wood Warbler dataset—2,602 records going back to 1966. As well as comparing egg and brood sizes, I wanted to compare failure rates, so I came up with egg-stage and chick-

stage failure rates and the overall summary statistic 'fledglings per breeding attempt'. I discovered that having multi-visit nest records was essential for calculating these figures. As someone who has always wondered why the NRS makes such a fuss about multiple nest visits, I am now a convert to the cause!

The mean clutch size of the nests monitored at the study site was just under 5.5, similar to the overall mean of the NRS dataset. The egg-stage failure rate was also similar to the national dataset and was very low; the only definite case I recorded was when a tree fell on a nest during high winds! However, there was no similarity when it came to chick-stage failure rate, which was much higher

**Fig 1. Outcomes of 255 Wood Warbler eggs in nests of known clutch size**



at the study site than in almost any year for the national dataset. This relatively high failure rate at the chick stage meant that the mean number of fledglings per breeding attempt for my study population was only 1.3, again poor compared to most years for the national dataset.

To assess what this low productivity might mean for the Wood Warbler study population, I wanted to calculate the level of productivity required to maintain a stable population of Wood Warblers. To do this, I also needed survival rates, but there were no

published figures for Wood Warbler in the UK, so I ‘adopted’ figures for a close ecological relative, the Willow Warbler. I calculated that Wood Warbler pairs would each need to produce 5.3–6.5 young per year for the population to remain the same size. Even allowing for shortcomings with this method, it suggests that the productivity of the Wood Warbler study population in 2011 was too low.

So what were the reasons for the poor productivity at the study site in 2011? Figure 1 shows the fate of every egg laid in nests where the clutch

size was known. About 30% of eggs resulted in a fledged bird, whereas over half were lost to predation. Other causes of failure accounted for only a small number of eggs. It is clear then, that predation had a big effect on Wood Warbler productivity in the New Forest in 2011.

This study will continue in 2012, and we are planning to use nest cameras to look at what predators are visiting the nests. Given the current conservation status of Wood Warbler in the UK and the Continent, it is hoped that this and other studies by Wood Warbler enthusiasts around the country will begin to provide the biological facts needed to turn around the fortunes of this beautiful bird.

.....  
 Tony Davis would like to thank the Forestry Commission for permission to carry out the study on Crown Lands in the New Forest; the BTO for access to the NRS dataset on Wood Warblers, and Dave Leech, Carl Barimore and Mike Toms of the BTO and Liz Charman and John Mallord of the RSPB for their enthusiastic help and advice.

## Mark Farmer 1950-2011

**Peter Castell** gives a short account of his friend and fellow nest finder

The death of Mark Farmer in August 2011 is a great loss to his fellow nesting friends, especially those who shared international nesting trips with him. He had a wonderful ability to make friends wherever he went, in every country, even in the most remote villages, and irrespective of any language barrier.

He grew up in Cornwall, where he was inspired to look for nests by his grandfather. At the age of 15 he joined the Armed Forces and served for 25 years, based in several countries, including Germany, Northern Ireland,

Hong Kong, Cyprus and The Falkland Islands. After leaving the army he worked as a blacksmith in a forge attached to his cottage in rural Gloucestershire. He retired from work in March 2011 and then moved to Somerset, where he planned to study nesting birds on Exmoor.

He was a very experienced nester, taking part in trips to Arctic Russia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, the Canary Islands and most parts of Europe, including Iceland and Lapland. He enjoyed wading in marshes and found nests of Great Bittern and Savi’s Warbler in Poland.

A great team player, Mark made significant contributions to the Birdguides DVD-Rom *Breeding Birds of the Western Palearctic* and to the breeding accounts in *The Birds of Turkey*. He also

submitted many records to the Nest Record Scheme.

He will be remembered, with great affection, by his widow Barbara, daughter Sarah, stepson Alex and by his many friends and fellow nesters.

**Mark boating out to a Black Tern’s nest in Poland**



# A tale of two counties

The Barn Owl is now the third highest species for nest record submissions, thanks to the efforts of dozens of local Barn Owl groups. Here we look at the formation of two of the newest and largest groups: Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project and the Aylesbury Vale District Council Barn Owl Scheme.

**Alec Hillier** SCBOP Recorder and **Dave Short** AVDC Barn Owl Conservation Officer



In 2005, after finding Barn Owls present but no obvious nest sites, two local ornithologists persuaded the Benacre Estate in Suffolk to buy and install six Barn Owl nest boxes in barns. Later, when two nearby farmers wanted to erect owl boxes in trees, Suffolk Ornithologists Group (SOG) provided them with funding for materials and an A-frame design. Meanwhile, over at Mutford, the Lowestoft Bird Club put up three boxes on a member's farm.

These separate but kindred efforts sparked interest and led to various Barn Owl enthusiasts from across the county coming together to form the SOG Barn Owl Project.

The Suffolk population of Barn Owls has been mostly confined to the eastern half of the county, between Waveney and Blyth Valleys. A principal aim of the new project was to extend the birds' breeding range west of its stronghold by providing nest boxes and roosting sites.

Establishing relationships with other

local groups was to prove vital to the project in many ways, but especially when it came to having a steady supply of owl boxes. After an initial round of publicity that prompted a huge demand for nest boxes, we approached a charity in South Lowestoft called Special Objectives for the Local Disabled (SOLD), which provides employment for local disabled people. By 2010, SOLD had manufactured 500 boxes and made many improvements to the A-frame design. Currently, all our boxes are made by prisoners at HMP Hollesley, where possible, using spare wood provided by local timber merchants, boat builders and packaging firms.

Manufacturing so many boxes required funds, of course, as did putting them up. We decided to ask landowners and volunteers to pay for their own boxes to encourage them to 'take ownership' and look after them. We helped with this, advising on how to raise money for boxes by applying for small grants and pots of money.

This approach was very successful and has proven to be a sustainable source of funding.

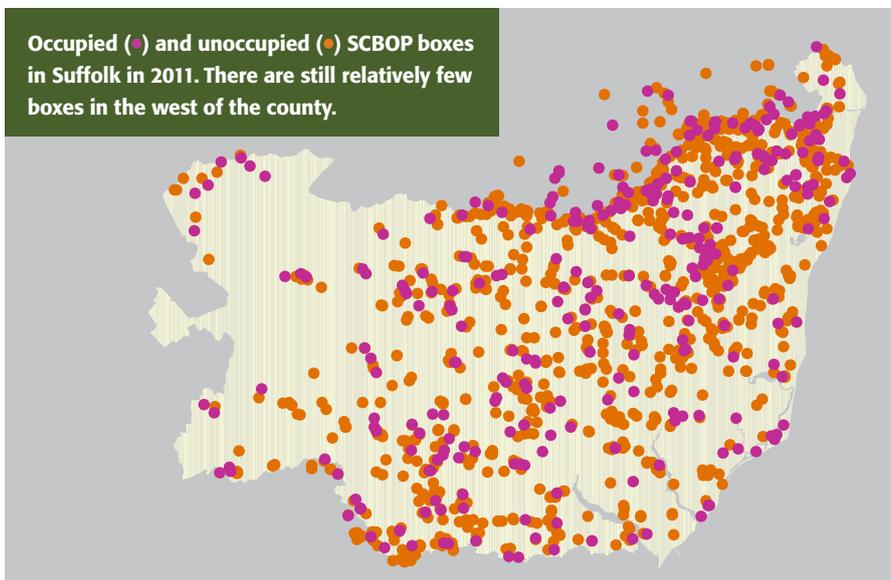
More publicity via local radio, TV, press, local shows and the web, brought about further demand for boxes from landowners and wildlife groups, but it also led to contact with other local owl box projects, many of which were brought on-board.

By 2007, administering the Barn Owl Project had become too big a task for the existing group of volunteers, so Suffolk Wildlife Trust agreed to take it on, with SOG assuming an advisory role; subsequently, it became the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project.

The project's network of nest boxes continues to expand through landowner involvement. Project 'advisors' visit potential sites on request to assess their suitability and advise on habitat improvement. Landowners can then buy boxes or make their own and are given help to erect them. Over the past five years, over 650 new owl boxes have been put up across Suffolk, contributing to a total of 1,300 boxes currently being maintained and monitored by the project.

With a large network of boxes established, a big chunk of the project's current work is monitoring what goes on in them, both to keep track of the Suffolk Barn Owl population and to contribute to the BTO's ringing and Nest Record Schemes. Monitoring so many boxes, together with helping landowners put up new ones, requires many volunteers and lots of organisation. SWT Project Coordinator Oka Last oversees a network of 11 area coordinators, who in turn organise volunteers in their areas. The Project currently has 115 trained monitoring volunteers on

Occupied (●) and unoccupied (●) SCBOP boxes in Suffolk in 2011. There are still relatively few boxes in the west of the county.



its Schedule 1 licence, including 20 ringers. Having so many volunteers reduces the reliance on any one person and keeps the project 'local'—no driving across the county to monitor or ring a brood of chicks!

In 2011, Barn Owls occupied 300 of the 1,300 boxes; the number of pairs was the highest ever recorded in Suffolk. From these, 193 nesting attempts were recorded and 395 chicks ringed—both very significant contributions to the BTO's national monitoring schemes.

**T**he Aylesbury Vale District Council Barn Owl Scheme was officially launched in December 2010 after the award of grant aid from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Waste Recycling Environmental Ltd and the Community Chest. It really began some eight years earlier, however, when the Council's Biodiversity Team began erecting Barn Owl boxes around Aylesbury Vale. Early on, HMP Springhill was approached for help with nest box building and the prison's wonderful John Winters workshop team now supplies all of the Scheme's boxes, having manufactured over 800 since 2003. Furthermore, 10 prisoners have provided over 200 days of volunteer time outside the prison via the Employment Links Team, which provides community work experience for prisoners coming to the end of their sentences. This link up has been hugely rewarding for the prisoners and could provide a template for other organizations to follow.

From 2007, volunteers coordinated their monitoring with the BTO's Nest Record Scheme. Later on the kind involvement of Henry Meyer-Gross enabled members of the group to train to ring the birds, which has significantly improved the Scheme's monitoring capabilities. The Scheme now has an 'A' permit holder who oversees ringing operations and another 'C' permit holder. There are also a further 10 volunteers with accredited agent status on the Scheme's Schedule 1 licence who inspect boxes and monitor nesting attempts. Landowner relationships have been pivotal to the Scheme's expansion, of course, but as the network of boxes has grown, landowners have been



**ABOVE: Dave Short rings a Kestrel chick with a group of Air Cadets. LEFT: One of the AVDC Barn Owl project boxes outside HMP Springhill. BELOW: Dave Short preparing to put up a Barn Owl pole box.**



PHOTOS: AYLESBURY VALE DISTRICT COUNCIL

encouraged to help with monitoring by reporting any casual sightings of owls near boxes.

### **'More than 500 children have experienced the joy of dissecting an owl pellet.'**

Publicity has also been very important both for raising the profile of the Scheme and recruiting new volunteers. The popularity and charisma of the Barn Owl has no doubt helped with this. The Scheme has so far appeared on television shows 'Countryfile' and 'The One Show', as well as various local radio stations. Community involvement has also been an important focus and many groups have been invited out on days erecting and maintaining boxes, including Duke of Edinburgh award students, Air Cadets and even the local constabulary. Over 150 talks have been given in the local community and more than 500 children have experienced the joy of dissecting a Barn Owl pellet!

The Scheme is now one of the

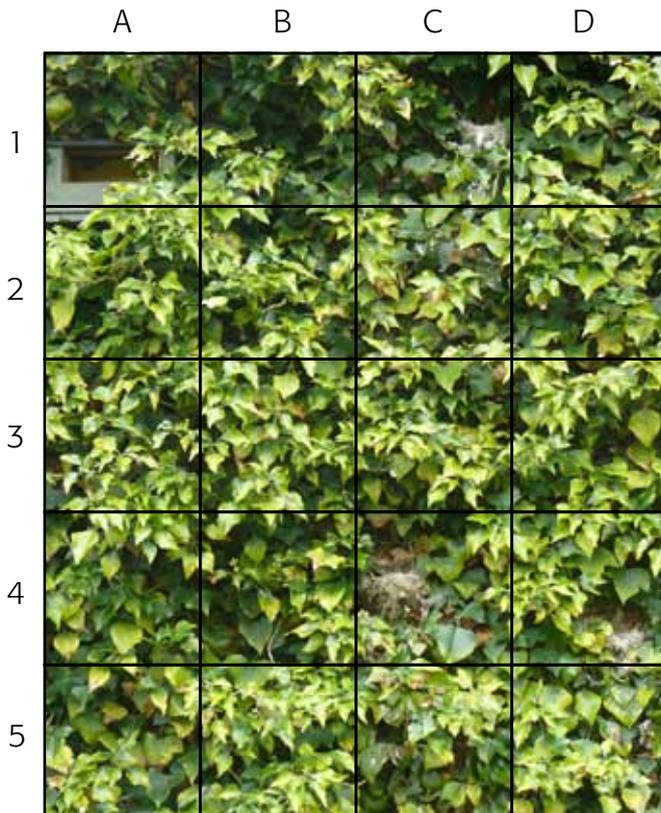
largest Barn Owl conservation efforts in the country, with a network of over 600 boxes. In the summer of 2010, grant aid of almost £90,000 was secured and the Scheme was given an official launch at an event attended by landowners, volunteers, school children and dignitaries. The secured funding has enabled the Scheme to recruit a part-time Project Officer and established some firm goals and time lines to achieve them. These include promoting Barn Owl conservation, safeguarding habitat, erecting boxes and encouraging recording and monitoring. Alongside these, there is the important task to ensure the Scheme is set up to continue sustainably after the funding period has ended.

More information on both these Barn Owl projects can be found at [www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/species-and-habitats/barn-owl-project/](http://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/species-and-habitats/barn-owl-project/) and [www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity-wildlife-and-conservation/species-conservation/barn-owl-project/](http://www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity-wildlife-and-conservation/species-conservation/barn-owl-project/)

## SPOT THE NEST

### Greenfinch guesstimate

Many thanks to Keith Johnson from Hampshire for this excellent photo of the remains of three consecutive Greenfinch nesting attempts in the same season, in the same clump of ivy. But which of them is the most recent nesting attempt? Email answers to [nrs@bto.org](mailto:nrs@bto.org) by 1 December. First correct answer out of a hat wins a mirror on a stick. Hint: none of them are in the open-fronted nest box.



### SCHEDULE 1 LICENSING INFORMATION

## Species specially protected by wildlife legislation

The species listed in *italics* on pages 8–9 are specially protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended by the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and the Wildlife (NI) order of 1985. It is an offence to intentionally disturb these birds while they are building a nest, or are in, on or near a nest containing eggs or young; or to disturb dependent young even if not in the nest.

You must obtain a Schedule 1 licence to visit the nest of a Schedule 1 species. Any nests found by accident should not be visited a second time without a licence.

To obtain a Schedule 1 licence for nest recording and/or bird ringing on behalf of the BTO, please contact the BTO Licensing Officer, Jez Blackburn ([jez.blackburn@bto.org](mailto:jez.blackburn@bto.org)), for an

application form. A first-time licence application must be accompanied by two references from 'respected' ornithologists (e.g. County Recorder, BTO Regional Rep, Bird Club Chairman, BTO Ringer, other Schedule 1 licence holder).

Licences are issued annually and must be renewed each season by submitting a renewal application and a report of monitoring activities the previous season. Please note that applications received after February may take longer to process owing to the volume of applications received at that time.

To obtain a Schedule 1 licence to approach nests for purposes other than BTO surveys, please contact the relevant Government body (e.g. Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage).

### The NRS team & contacts

#### Carl Barimore

*NRS Organiser*

The main point of contact for nest recorders.

#### David Glue

*Research Ecologist*

Provides advice based on a long involvement with the Scheme.

#### Dr Dave Leech

*Head of NRS, CES and RAS*

Oversees the running of the Nest Record Scheme and undertakes research using the data collected.

#### Debbie Nicholls

*NRS Secretary*

Provides secretarial support to the Scheme, including processing records and sending out materials.

#### Useful online addresses

NRS webpage: [www.bto.org/nrs](http://www.bto.org/nrs)

IPMR webpage: [www.bto.org/software/ipmr](http://www.bto.org/software/ipmr)

Latest trends: [www.bto.org/birdtrends](http://www.bto.org/birdtrends)

Online forum: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nrsforum>

General NRS enquiries: [nrs@bto.org](mailto:nrs@bto.org)

IPMR submissions: [nrs.data@bto.org](mailto:nrs.data@bto.org)



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