

NRSnews

The newsletter of the Nest Record Scheme



ISSUE 30 • MAY 2014 INSIDE THIS EDITION

- 02 NEWS ROUNDUP
- 03 DAVID GLUE 1947–2014
- 04 A RECORDER REFLECTS
- 05 ALL-TIME TOP RECORDERS
- 06 A 13,000 PAGE SUMMARY
- 07 TREECREEPER BOXES
- 08 NRS ANNUAL TOTALS
- 10 NRS MENTORING
- 12 MOORLAND MONITORING
- 13 RUNWAY PLOVERS
- 14 ROCKIT SCIENCE
- 15 NRS LATEST RESULTS
- 16 SPOT THE NEST

This season sees the official launch of NRS mentoring. See the article on page 10, and visit www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/taking-part/nrs-mentoring to find your nearest mentor (screenshot below).



The NRS mentoring scheme is generously sponsored by

opticon
www.opticon.co.uk



Top: Bernard Pleasance, John Dries, Tony Davis, Josh Marshall and Richard Castell at the NRS 75th anniversary conference. Left: Veteran recorder David Warden photographing a nest box in 1949. Right: A young nest recorder checking a Song Thrush nest with a mirror in 2011.

75 years of nesting

The Hatching and Fledgling Inquiry was started by the BTO in 1939 to collect information on facets of basic breeding biology, such as incubation and fledging periods. In the first five years, 1,988 nest record cards were sent in by c.20 participants. Seventy five years on, the Nest Record Scheme (NRS) has c.660 active recorders and an amazing 1.6 million nest records have been collected, an invaluable dataset that has been used for scientific study far beyond the scope of the original inquiry. The survey we have today is a product of the BTO's unwavering commitment to citizen science and the dedication of more than 4,000 volunteers who have participated through the years. On 30 March this

year, 80 such volunteers came to the Nunnery for a day of celebrating the success of NRS and looking forward to its future. It was thrilling to see like-minded ornithologists from all over the country meeting up to talk about nest recording. We enjoyed talks from speakers including David Warden, a recorder since 1948, and Josh Marshall, a recorder since 2013! NRS mentor Mark Lawrence gave a talk to mark the official launch of NRS mentoring (see p 10), which was the perfect introduction to a discussion on how we train the next generation. For a full report on the day, see www.bto.org/nrs. In the meantime, enjoy this newsletter and wish NRS a happy 75th Birthday!

FROM THE EDITOR



Welcome to this special edition of *NRS News*, celebrating 75 years of the survey. This also happens to be an anniversary issue of the newsletter itself, since the first one (title above) was written by David Glue in May 1984. It is poignant that in this very issue we are remembering David (p 3), but perhaps we can take heart from knowing that, just as this newsletter was born of his determination to ensure that volunteers are welcomed, supported and nurtured, so it is testament to his work that today we can fill it with articles by and about enthusiastic nest recorders and the fantastic science they are helping to produce.

In this celebratory issue we are delighted to include a reflective piece by stalwart recorder Ron Louch (p 4) and acknowledge some of our longest-serving participants (p 5). Equally, in keeping with the 'passing on the baton' theme of the NRS conference (front page), it's great to have articles on getting started as a nester (Josh Marshall, p 12), setting up new projects (eg Amanda Biggins, p 14) and helping others to become nesters (South Devon Nesting Crew, p 10).

Please email questions or thoughts to nrs@bto.org, or chat with us on the Yahoo Forum (<http://yhoo.it/1INASu0>). A huge thanks as ever for your support and have a great season!

Carl Barimore Editor & NRS Organiser

NEWS ROUNDUP

Latest NRS results on the web

For those of you who haven't already seen, the preliminary results for a selection of species in 2013 can be found at www.bto.org/nrs-prelim-2013.

While it was a very late year, breeding success was generally close to the average for both migrants and residents. The long-term trends were revised in the autumn and published at www.bto.org/birdtrends earlier this year.

Schedule 1 submissions made easier

Previously, Schedule 1 holders monitoring nests for ringing and nest recording would also have to report on unoccupied sites by completing a separate Schedule 1 report form. Now it has been made possible to report on *all* nest sites via NRS and not have

to use a separate form at all. For more information, please see www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/taking-part/nrs-sch1-help

2014 NRS courses

Four more NRS courses have been scheduled this year, beginning with the one-day course in Armagh, Northern Ireland back on 19 April. Many thanks to tutors Tony Davis, Stephen Hewitt, Peter Kent, Bruce Taggart and Mike Toms. Details at <http://bit.ly/1lbroWC>

Thanks for photos

In NRS News 29 we asked for photos of nests of a number of species and we received over 330 images—so many that we're still going through them! Many thanks indeed to all who contributed.

NRS NEWS

NRS News is the annual newsletter for supporters of the Nest Record Scheme (NRS). The views expressed by the contributors to this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor, the Council of the BTO or its Committees.

NRS News is written by you, so please send your ideas and contributions to:

Carl Barimore,
NRS Organiser, Nest Record Scheme, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU
Tel: **(01842) 750050**
Fax: **(01842) 750030**
Email: nrs@bto.org

Desk-top publishing:

Carl Barimore & Jane Waters.

Printers: Swallowtail Print, Norwich.

Thanks to the proof readers for their efforts!

The Nest Record Scheme is funded by a partnership of the British Trust for Ornithology and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage, Natural Resources Wales, and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency).

The British Trust for Ornithology is a charity dedicated to researching birds found in the UK. For Membership details please contact Chris Morley at info@bto.org

Cover photos: BTO Collection and David Warden



British Trust for Ornithology

The Nunnery,
Thetford, Norfolk.
IP24 2PU

Tel: **(01842) 750050**

Fax: **(01842) 750030**

Email: nrs@bto.org

Web site: www.bto.org

Registered Charity
No 216652 (England & Wales)
No SC039193 (Scotland)

David Glue 1947–2014

Dr Humphrey Crick Previous Head of the Nest Record Scheme

David Glue was the founding father of a rejuvenated Nest Record Scheme in the 1980s, taking over as Nest Records Officer when the survey most needed his unique and personal brand of volunteer encouragement and engagement.

By the mid 1980s, NRS had been in the doldrums because staffing had been so pressed that there just wasn't time to look after it properly. Amazingly we were still receiving some 15,000 records per year, but the poor old nest recorder wasn't getting much back from the BTO. When David Glue was put on the job in 1984, he answered this problem by bringing out the first edition of *Nest Record News* and doing the simple thing of thanking people for their efforts. His personal typed letters extolling the virtues of a recorder's latest submission of nest records and providing enthusiasm for further efforts in the coming year were a highlight for so many contributors to the NRS.

The results were startling and within a year the number of records being submitted was back up to over 31,000. He started writing articles in *Nest Record News*, providing a round-up of the season based on phone calls to key recorders around the country, and these articles were very engaging, with memorable alliterative headings such as "Stilts Star as Shrikes Stumble" and "Stifling Summer Heat Helps and

Hinders".

David not only made sure that nest recorders felt valued but he produced papers that really advanced our knowledge of little-studied species. He would go through the cards and extract all the natural history on nest sites and breeding productivity for species such as Grasshopper Warbler, various owls and the woodpeckers. He was an expert in the analysis of owl pellets and published useful papers on their diets—in total he published over 60 papers, including the first NRS-based paper to appear in the world's top scientific journal, *Nature*, showing how climate change was leading to earlier laying dates.

David not only made an important impact on the Nest Record Scheme, but he was also key to the development of our garden bird work, running the Garden Bird Feeding Survey for many years, and helped set up the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry, a forerunner of WeBS. David joined the BTO in 1968, fresh from university and was a very enthusiastic member of staff, having been a very keen naturalist all his life. Everybody was deeply shocked when, in December 1971, he was involved in a car crash that left him wheelchair-bound, a tetraplegic for the rest of his life. But he was determined



BTO COLLECTION

David Glue at Beech Grove, Tring in the early 1980s.

not to be defined by this and came back to work as energetically as ever; it is certain that his love for his work at the BTO and the friendships with members and staff helped him keep going so enthusiastically. He had a truly remarkable strength of character that was bolstered by his strong Christian beliefs.

In addition to his BTO "family", his own family, daughters Sam and Mandy and brother Peter, were very important to him. He was also very lucky to be cared for so well by his live-in companion and carer Fran Bowman. He will be really missed by so many and in particular we will miss his letters, often signed off by his characteristic picture of an owl. It was a privilege to have known and worked with him.



John Little 1932–2013

Tony Waddell Friend and BTO ringer

John Little was first introduced to the BTO in the mid 1960s, when he was helping me ring Hobby chicks, but it wasn't until the early 1980s that John began sending nest records to the BTO. Given John's exceptional skill at

nest finding, together with his endless stamina (not to mention tree-climbing ability) it is no surprise to learn that, over the years, John's recording for NRS spanned 62 different species. However, his main interest was always ground-nesting birds of the

lowland heaths where he lived in Hindhead, Surrey. Over the course of 30 years, John submitted records of 41 Nightjar nests, 81 Woodlark, 61 Tree Pipit, 31 Stonechat, and 38 Skylark nests. John also carried out detailed studies of breeding pairs of Nightjar and Woodlark on Hankley Common for the BTO's Constant Nest Monitoring Plot survey.



TONY WADDELL

John Little at Hankley Common in 2003.

Reflections of a nest recorder

Since 1977, the duo Ron Louch and Dave Thompson have monitored 15,000 nests for the BTO, including 4,403 warbler nests. Ron delves into the history of one of the Scheme's most prolific nesting partnerships.

Dave Thompson (Tomp) and I had been friends and neighbours since childhood, growing up adjacent to well-wooded countryside in Oxfordshire. We spent years rambling around our local patch, developing a deep appreciation for its flora and fauna, even as our mates drifted away to marry and settle down! By 1969, Tomp was finding the odd nest and I had bought a decent camera with the intention of photographing birds feeding their young. Our casual interest in nesting changed in 1972 when a very special nest was found. Tomp was out walking one evening in June when suddenly his dog halted with ears pricked, ready to pounce on a grass tussock. Tomp examined the tussock and found a well-hidden nest containing six eggs. Tomp later showed me the nest but neither of us had a clue what species of bird it belonged to. So I consulted PAD Hollom's *Popular Handbook of British Birds* and we discovered that Tomp's dog had found a Grasshopper Warbler nest. It was that find, thanks to Tomp and especially his dog, Bruce, whose keen hearing had probably detected an incubation changeover or the male bringing food to the female, that instilled in us a life-long passion for nesting.

In the following years, we found our first nests of many exciting species, some of which are now extinct around Oxford, such as Willow Tit, Corn Bunting, Nightingale, Wood Warbler and Tree Pipit. Our first nests of Sparrowhawk, Hobby and Woodcock were also very special. In 1976,



RON LOUCH

Dave Thompson (above) and Ron Louch (above right) have undertaken all their nest recording around Oxfordshire.

Bruce Campbell, no less, via a friend, suggested that we send our nest records to the BTO. I remember my response: "what's the BTO?" I duly sent off our first batch of nest records and we have done so every year since.

It occurred to us that we were under-recording the bread-and-butter species on our patch, so, in the early 1980s, I insisted we begin monitoring every nest we encountered to its conclusion, from Blackbird to Nightingale, and that we try to compile quality nest histories. For example, a Blackcap nest found with two eggs would get a full clutch check six days later—two days after the expected incubation date—in order to glean clutch size and a first-egg date. Then, if a hatching-in-progress visit was timed accurately, the nest would be followed up (depending on species) 5–7 days later, then every 2–3 days until fledging or failure.

Finding warbler nests always gave us the most satisfaction. From the early 1980s, recording 100 warbler nests became our criterion for a good season—a feat we wouldn't have



imagined possible in the 1970s—and we would work hard to meet that target each year. I've been nesting alone since Tomp passed away in 2007, but I always have him in mind as I continue to work our patches and add records to our total. I once said to Tomp that our lifetime goal of 5,000 warbler nest records and 15,000 records overall was beyond reach. Well, last year the target grand total has been passed and the warbler total stands at 4,403.

Last year (2013), I recorded our latest Chiffchaff nest ever: a very well-hidden nest with four eggs, a metre up in dense, tall reeds emerging from a bramble patch at College Pond Reserve. Three young fledged on 28 August. But this nest was all the more special since it was at the site where it all began for Tomp and me back in 1972.

Ron Louch and Dave Thompson's top 10 species nest record totals.

Species	No. nest records
Blackbird	1,664
Song Thrush	1,160
Chiffchaff	1,113
Dunnock	1,112
Blackcap	985
Yellowhammer	696
Bullfinch	678
Whitethroat	671
Garden Warbler	437
Chaffinch	347

75 YEAR TOTALS

Since 1943, when James Fisher first listed and thanked participants in the Hatching and Fledgling Enquiry, it's been a tradition of the Nest Record Scheme to highlight outstanding contributions from recorders each season. This year being the 75th anniversary, we've put together a list of the 100 top NRS contributors ever in terms of numbers of

records submitted. These totals aren't definitive: in particular we have less accurate figures pre-1972 and there is currently a gap from 1985 to 1991 (see page 6 for why!). Nevertheless, the list demonstrates the massive volunteer effort that has gone into NRS over the years. As ever, we'd like to emphasise our gratitude to *all* nest recorders, not just those listed below.

Person or group	Year started	Records collected
National Trust, Farne Islands	1986	41,209
John Brook and others	1975	34,794
Merseyside Ringing Group	1960	24,867
Lancaster and District Birdwatching Society	1959	17,105
Bob Danson	1978	16,335
Birklands Ringing Group	1968	13,911
Peter Robinson	1991	13,322
David Warden	1948	13,266
Richardson, Fenwick, Grainger, Lonsdale	1946	13,171
Northumbria Ringing Group	1967	11,462
Bill Proctor	1976	11,348
Ron Louch and Dave Thompson	1976	10,309
Robert Stevens	1967	9,837
Kevin Briggs	1980	8,811
Rye Meads Ringing Group	1963	8,544
Bob Swann and Rob Swann	1966	8,303
Nagshead RSPB Reserve	1964	7,757
Max Meadows	1991	7,379
Paul Holness	1954	6,976
Sorby Breck Ringing Group	1986	6,904
Bristol Naturalists Society	1945	6,394
East Dales Ringing Group	1994	6,297
John Lloyd	1972	6,224
John Lawton-Roberts	1964	5,911
Robert Batty and Nick Bateman	1965	5,844
Forestry Commission	1970	5,789
Nigel Westwood	1954	5,613
Peter Roe	1996	5,432
Geoff Myers	1993	5,273
Ian Spence	1991	5,078
Jerry Lewis	1975	4,678
David Myers	1991	4,611
Philip Burton	1972	4,371
North-west Norfolk Ringing Group	1987	4,367
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	1963	4,152
South Derbyshire Ringing Group	1987	4,083
Reginald Lanaway	1965	3,998
Charles Mapletoft	1972	3,926
Dave Hazard	1991	3,652
Mike Russell	1991	3,524
Pat French	1991	3,522
David Oliver	1984	3,472
Isabel and David Hildred	1983	3,417
Jim Cheverton	1956	3,384
John Walshe	1993	3,377
Stephanie Tyler	1967	3,356
Frank Mawby	1991	3,339
Dave Francis	1968	3,276
Bruce Campbell	1972	3,276
Dave Garner	1970	3,272

Person or group	Year started	Records collected
Andrew Ramsay	1972	3,259
Grampian Ringing Group	1976	3,253
English Nature Devon Group	2009	3,250
Colin Davison	1983	3,165
Julian Driver	1968	3,130
Applegarth Wildlife Sanctuary	2000	3,077
North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory	1987	3,076
Newbury Ringing Group	1978	3,023
David Cox	1953	2,968
Alan Old	1982	2,959
John C Holt	1992	2,923
Jim Hodson and M Hodson	1995	2,901
Matt Prior	1992	2,894
Arden Ringing Group	1977	2,883
Thomas Dewdney	1976	2,766
Brian Standley	1975	2,748
John Callion	1977	2,693
South Devon Nesting Crew	1998	2,656
Mid Lincolnshire Ringing Group	1974	2,611
Keith Seaton	1997	2,591
Henry Mayer-Gross	1975	2,589
Netherwood and Cook	1980	2,572
H Church	1972	2,552
Nigel Lewis	1992	2,505
South West Lancashire Ringing Group	1974	2,500
Henry Robb	1974	2,489
Calf of Man Bird Observatory	1968	2,449
John Kieser	1975	2,445
Garth Lowe	1985	2,442
Anne Goodall	1966	2,435
Euan Cameron	1959	2,432
Gibraltar Point Bird Observatory	1951	2,308
Michael Mac	2006	2,301
Derek Holman	1969	2,300
Peter Johnson	1998	2,287
David Bowes	1996	2,276
Tees Ringing Group	1987	2,269
Robin Husbands	1992	2,268
Stanford Ringing Group	1980	2,252
Roger Peart	1972	2,247
Edward Cowley	1995	2,216
Jan Pritchard	1992	2,208
National Trust, Long Nanny	1988	2,150
Hugh Insley	1966	2,127
John Nuttall	1972	2,110
Jonathan Lingard	2007	2,100
Alan Ball, Keith Bowden and Bob Sheppard	2004	2,085
Richard Denyer	1975	2,074
Geoff Pearce	1979	2,063
Chris du Feu	1975	2,043

A 13,000 page summary...

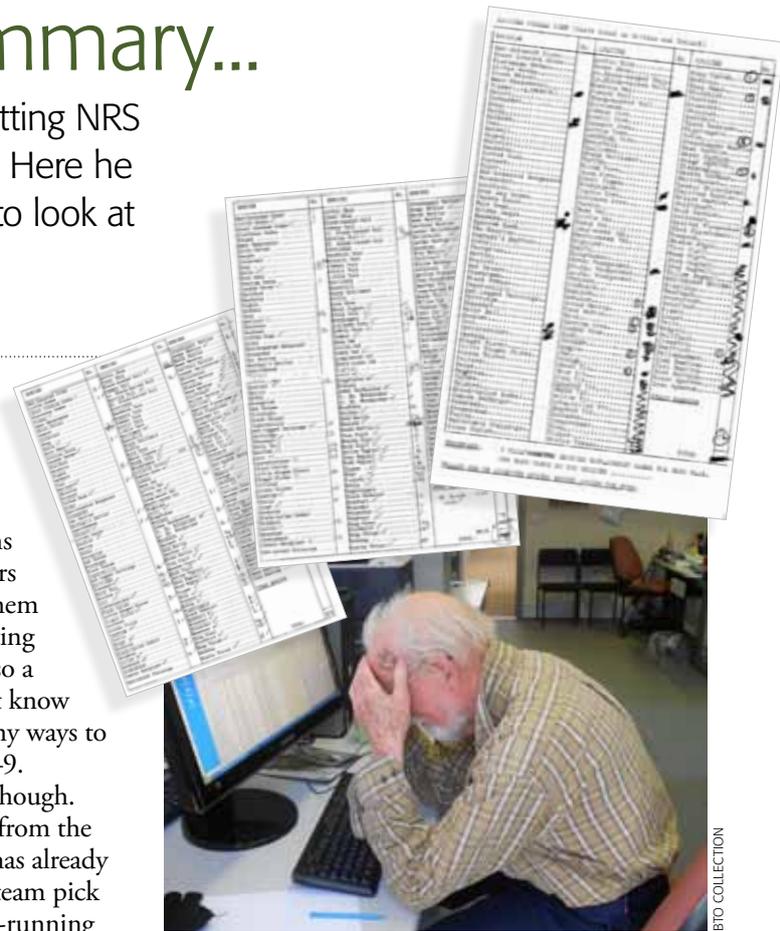
Volunteer Mike Wraight has been busy inputting NRS summary sheets that go right back to 1972. Here he explains how this information can be used to look at recorder participation over the decades.

M My volunteer inputting 'career' began soon after I became a trainee ringer. I was inputting ringing data from a CES site I help with, when a colleague suggested I contact BTO HQ and offer my services as a volunteer inputter. So I did and I was soon put in touch with the NRS team, who told me that they needed help inputting about 13,000 summary sheets dating back to 1972. Anyone who has sent in a batch of nest records on card will be familiar with filling out an accompanying summary sheet, on which they are to tally up by species how many records they are submitting.

So, in 2011, I began visiting the BTO's Demography office one day a week and to date I've input 6,075 summary sheets, with years 1985–91 still to go. The task hasn't been without its frustrations, however. The BTO's Digital Image Library, on which scanned copies of the sheets now reside, can be aggravatingly slow. It takes 18

seconds to call up a single image; therefore, by my calculations I've spent 30 hours just waiting for them to load! Deciphering handwriting is also a struggle—I didn't know there were so many ways to write numbers 1–9.

It is worth it, though. The information from the summary sheets has already helped the NRS team pick out valuable long-running datasets in the card archive from particular observers and prioritise those records for computerisation. Another obvious output is the ability to see how long people have been participating in NRS and how many records they've submitted historically (see page 5 for some of the results).



Mike Wraight at the Nunnery ringing office, stealing himself for a challenging-looking summary sheet (top).

What we've all found particularly fascinating, however, is the ability to visualise the change in the average nest recorder's focus on particular species over time. Table 1 summarises submissions for 20 representative species at 10-year intervals. Some of the trends will come as no surprise given the population trajectories of the species concerned, but the decline in the proportion of recorders monitoring Robin suggests that the concurrent drop in Song Thrush and Dunnock submissions is due to more than just the fall in breeding numbers. On a positive note, figures for the majority of open-nesting passerines display an up-turn between 2003 and 2013 and the number of participants sending in data for box-nesting species, from Barn Owl to Blue Tit, continues to increase.

When the remaining six years of summary sheets are input, we can start to look at these trends in more detail, and for a greater variety of species. In the meantime, the image library has just finished loading another summary sheet for me to input...

Table 1. The percentage of NRS participants in a given year who have submitted at least one record of a given species. The total number of participants each year is also given.

	1973	1983	1993	2003	2013
Number of participants	497	388	538	451	659
Sparrowhawk	5.2	8.2	8.2	6.7	4.1
Buzzard	5.0	11.1	7.4	8.0	7.3
Moorhen	29.6	17.8	18.8	13.1	10.2
Lapwing	17.1	16.2	18.2	12.6	6.7
Redshank	4.4	2.8	3.9	2.0	0.8
Barn Owl	4.8	8.8	10.2	15.1	19.1
Meadow Pipit	13.5	17.0	13.4	7.8	9.6
Dunnock	50.3	28.1	22.5	16.9	18.4
Robin	40.6	30.2	28.3	27.9	28.2
Blackbird	74.0	48.7	47.8	40.8	40.7
Song Thrush	62.4	41.2	26.0	22.4	18.5
Chiffchaff	4.6	3.9	3.9	4.7	9.3
Pied Flycatcher	4.8	8.5	15.1	12.2	9.9
Blue Tit	49.7	45.9	53.7	59.0	55.1
Magpie	10.3	12.1	9.3	4.2	5.6
Linnet	30.4	14.7	14.5	8.6	9.0

Certain *Certhia* revisited...

At the BTO annual conference NRS meeting in December 2013, nest recorder Dave Francis presented a new Treecreeper box design he had been developing. Here he explains the design in full.

For over 30 years I have run nestbox schemes in Northants, amounting to hundreds of boxes overall. Most of these boxes are the typical 'small hole' design and over the years they have been used by all five southern species of tit, as well as Wren, but never Treecreeper, even though they are common at all the study sites.

In the past, perhaps intrigued by its elusiveness, I had tried out both the conventional 'box' designs for Treecreeper: the wedge shape and bark lashed to a tree (see article 'Certain *Certhia*' in *NRS News* 27). No takers!

Then, a few years ago, I noticed that Treecreepers at my study site at Pitsford Water Nature Reserve were regularly nesting within upright stacks of fence panels and plywood sheets, and also behind notice boards in hides. These sites had a couple of features in

common: a large, narrow cavity and a narrow, upright slot entrance. So, I decided to build nest boxes to the same 'spec' and I put up six for the 2011 season. One was used by Treecreepers in 2011, two in 2012 and three boxes were used in 2013.

The new box design is illustrated below: I doubt the dimensions have to be exact. As for materials, I have used exterior-grade 19 mm plywood and also 35 x 20 mm roof-tile batten for the narrow sides and bottom. The nest cavity in my boxes, therefore, is 35 mm deep. The roof deliberately overhangs the body of the box to protect against weather: again the exact size isn't critical. A plastic 'guard' is fitted across the lower half of the box is to prevent contents falling out when the box is opened. For this I use DPC (damp proof course), which is available from any builders' merchant.

The narrow 18 mm entrance hole is evidently fine for Treecreepers and I have even found Blue Tits in the boxes! This season, I am going to experiment with a 15 mm slot. 'Watch this space', so to speak!



▲ The box with the inspection hatch lifted, showing the plastic 'guard'.



◀ The entrance slot is reduced to 18mm using a small wooden insert.



HELP US TO TRIAL DAVE'S NEW BOX DESIGN

Chris du Feu Author of *The BTO Nest Box Guide*

The oft-quoted but very rarely used wedge design of box for Treecreepers was proposed by JMD Mackenzie in *Scottish Naturalist* in 1956. He had a great deal of experience of Treecreeper nest finding in his study area near Perth and had been experimenting with pieces of bark placed against tree trunks. He designed the wedge in an attempt to provide an artificial site which would be widely used by Treecreepers but also inspectable by nest recorders and ringers. In some of his sites, which included commercial conifer plantations (and were thus short of natural nesting sites), a very few Treecreepers had already used conventional tit boxes. Of his wedge design Mackenzie said "they seem to be taken in preference to normal tit-boxes ... It is too early yet to know if they are generally acceptable when the birds get used to them."

Mackenzie was not trying to present a definitive, tried-and-tested design, and I am not aware of any other published studies that assess its value, yet the 'wedge' has been used in many places and copied from one published source to another. The nest recorders that I have talked to have had an almost universal lack of success with it.

Dave Francis' design is very welcome: however it is important to know whether or not the design is of wide acceptability (which I hope it is). To this end, the NRS Team would really like to hear from anyone who gives this box design a go. Crucially, they need information about boxes that remain unoccupied, as well as those that are used. To help the NRS Team with this trial, please visit www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/about/treecreeper or send an email to nrs@bto.org, detailing the number of boxes erected and the proportion occupied.

Nest Record Scheme totals

A summary of the number of records per species submitted to the Nest Record Scheme in 2012, 2013 and during 1939–2013 (as of April 2014).

Species preceded with a bullet-point are reported in the annual BirdTrends report (www.bto.org/birdtrends). An asterisk marks species that are on the NRS priority species list (www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/taking-part/nrs-priorities). Schedule 1 species are in italics (please note that this list relates to GB classification and varies for the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man).

Species	Code	2012	2013	Total
• Mute Swan*	MUTSW	136	105	7,590
<i>Whooper Swan</i>	WHOSW	0	0	28
<i>Bar-headed Goose</i>	BAHGO	0	0	9
<i>Greylag Goose</i>	GREGO	62	78	1,320
<i>Snow Goose</i>	SNOGO	0	0	8
<i>Canada Goose</i>	CANGO	124	123	5,469
<i>Barnacle Goose</i>	BARGO	1	2	79
<i>Egyptian Goose</i>	EGYGO	19	15	209
<i>Ruddy Shelduck</i>	RUDSH	0	0	5
<i>Shelduck</i>	SHELD	7	5	396
<i>Wood Duck</i>	WOODU	0	0	4
<i>Mandarin</i>	MANDA	31	32	908
<i>Wigeon</i>	WIGEO	1	0	188
<i>Gadwall</i>	GADWA	14	16	303
<i>Teal</i>	TEAL	2	3	248
<i>Mallard</i>	MALLA	170	144	10,444
<i>Pintail</i>	PINTA	0	0	23
<i>Garganey</i>	GARGA	0	0	11
<i>Shoveler</i>	SHOVE	6	4	245
<i>Red-crested Pochard</i>	RECPO	1	4	37
<i>Pochard</i>	POCHA	7	2	295
<i>Tufted Duck</i>	TUFDU	12	28	1,520
<i>Eider*</i>	EIDER	310	447	11,855
<i>Common Scoter</i>	COMSC	0	0	43
<i>Goldeneye</i>	GOLDE	16	12	323
<i>Red-breasted Merganser</i>	REBME	0	2	296
<i>Goosander</i>	GOOSA	8	13	455
<i>Ruddy Duck</i>	RUDDU	0	0	185
<i>Red Grouse</i>	REDGR	17	4	895
<i>Ptarmigan</i>	PTARM	0	2	135
<i>Black Grouse</i>	BLAGR	0	1	87
<i>Capercaillie</i>	CAPER	0	0	92
<i>Red-legged Partridge</i>	RELPA	4	3	518
<i>Grey Partridge</i>	GREPA	1	3	879
<i>Quail</i>	QUAIL	0	0	16
<i>Pheasant</i>	PHEAS	41	23	2,482
<i>Golden Pheasant</i>	GOLPH	0	0	6
• <i>Red-throated Diver*</i>	RETDI	20	23	2,548
<i>Black-throated Diver</i>	BLTDI	5	7	263
<i>Little Grebe</i>	LITGR	37	37	2,953
<i>Great Crested Grebe</i>	GRCGR	108	111	4,859
<i>Slavonian Grebe</i>	SLAGR	8	1	225
<i>Black-necked Grebe</i>	BLNGR	0	0	31
<i>Fulmar*</i>	FULMA	205	185	8,076

Species	Code	2012	2013	Total
<i>Manx Shearwater</i>	MANSH	80	2	715
<i>Storm Petrel</i>	STOPE	0	0	92
<i>Leach's Petrel</i>	LEAPE	0	0	75
<i>Gannet</i>	GANNE	0	0	33
<i>Cormorant*</i>	CORMO	128	138	2,826
<i>Shag*</i>	SHAG	442	601	17,223
<i>Bittern</i>	BITTE	1	1	41
<i>Little Egret</i>	LITEG	42	46	295
• <i>Grey Heron*</i>	GREHE	101	123	9,127
<i>Honey Buzzard</i>	HONBU	7	15	220
<i>Red Kite</i>	REDKI	411	487	2,376
<i>White-tailed Eagle</i>	WHTEA	1	1	18
<i>Marsh Harrier</i>	MARHA	28	32	246
• <i>Hen Harrier*</i>	HENHA	13	16	2,074
<i>Montagu's Harrier</i>	MONHA	0	0	47
<i>Goshawk</i>	GOSHA	106	162	1,895
• <i>Sparrowhawk*</i>	SPARR	62	53	6,052
• <i>Buzzard</i>	BUZZA	250	267	8,488
<i>Golden Eagle</i>	GOLEA	17	14	745
<i>Osprey</i>	OSPRE	19	15	178
• <i>Kestrel</i>	KESTR	492	390	11,598
• <i>Merlin*</i>	MERLI	60	50	4,271
• <i>Hobby</i>	HOBBY	63	80	1,514
• <i>Peregrine</i>	PEREG	171	227	4,207
<i>Water Rail</i>	WATRA	5	4	123
<i>Corncrake</i>	CORNC	0	1	33
• <i>Moorhen*</i>	MOORH	283	276	26,095
• <i>Coot</i>	COOT	768	570	24,690
• <i>Oystercatcher*</i>	OYSTE	457	617	20,221
<i>Black-winged Stilt</i>	BLWST	0	0	4
<i>Avocet</i>	AVOCE	45	80	1,142
<i>Stone-curlew</i>	STOCU	4	5	434
<i>Little Ringed Plover*</i>	LIRPL	43	58	3,087
• <i>Ringed Plover*</i>	RINPL	209	196	11,868
<i>Kentish Plover</i>	KENPL	0	0	19
<i>Dotterel</i>	DOTTE	1	5	270
• <i>Golden Plover*</i>	GOLPL	11	26	984
• <i>Lapwing*</i>	LAPWI	340	275	29,290
<i>Dunlin</i>	DUNLI	0	5	585
<i>Ruff</i>	RUFF	0	0	4
• <i>Snipe*</i>	SNIPE	5	21	1,891
<i>Woodcock</i>	WOODC	5	3	700
<i>Black-tailed Godwit</i>	BLTGO	0	0	43
<i>Whimbrel</i>	WHIMB	24	2	154
• <i>Curlew*</i>	CURLE	25	37	3,251
• <i>Common Sandpiper*</i>	COMSA	35	28	1,813
<i>Greenshank</i>	GRESH	6	2	217
• <i>Redshank*</i>	REDSH	31	49	3,609
<i>Red-necked Phalarope</i>	RENPH	0	0	163
<i>Arctic Skua</i>	ARCSK	2	4	383
<i>Great Skua</i>	GRESK	30	14	495
<i>Kittiwake*</i>	KITTI	847	783	21,306

Species	Code	2012	2013	Total
Black-headed Gull*	BLHGU	199	218	10,769
<i>Mediterranean Gull</i>	MEDGU	0	23	74
Common Gull*	COMGU	127	170	6,443
Lesser Black-backed Gull	LBBGU	27	18	4,822
Herring Gull	HERGU	84	69	7,978
Great Black-backed Gull	GBBGU	15	65	3,583
<i>Little Tern*</i>	LITTE	67	77	7,366
Sandwich Tern	SANTE	0	0	1,814
Common Tern*	COMTE	110	148	9,194
<i>Roseate Tern</i>	ROSTE	70	79	1,739
Arctic Tern*	ARCTE	967	1,528	15,894
Guillemot	GUILL	145	133	1,952
Razorbill	RAZOR	64	78	1,880
Black Guillemot	BLAGU	29	44	1,946
Puffin	PUFFI	31	0	1,236
Rock Dove	ROCDO	63	90	1,098
Feral Pigeon	FERPI	12	2	2,530
• Stock Dove	STODO	906	1,187	17,622
• Wood Pigeon	WOODP	825	780	34,961
• Collared Dove	COLDO	137	139	6,762
• Turtle Dove	TURDO	19	34	2,154
Ring-necked Parakeet	RINPA	3	1	155
Cuckoo	CUCKO	29	19	2,356
• <i>Barn Owl</i>	BAROW	2,320	881	23,519
• Little Owl	LITOW	149	167	3,484
• Tawny Owl	TAWOW	438	209	14,813
Long-eared Owl	LOEOW	17	6	907
Short-eared Owl	SHEOW	8	3	445
• Nightjar	NIJAR	91	76	2,482
Swift	SWIFT	74	74	3,597
<i>Kingfisher</i>	KINGF	28	31	903
<i>Wryneck</i>	WRYNE	0	0	23
Green Woodpecker	GREWO	10	13	595
• Great Spotted Woodpecker	GRSWO	118	120	3,292
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	LESWO	1	0	289
• <i>Woodlark</i>	WOODL	134	80	2,487
• Skylark*	SKYLA	77	78	9,032
• Sand Martin	SANMA	557	506	7,947
• Swallow	SWALL	2,716	2,515	86,360
House Martin	HOUMA	128	147	11,852
• Tree Pipit	TREPI	65	56	2,351
• Meadow Pipit*	MEAPI	335	307	11,313
Rock Pipit*	ROCPI	20	33	989
• Yellow Wagtail*	YELWA	14	9	1,151
• Grey Wagtail*	GREWA	131	121	7,271
• Pied Wagtail*	PIEWA	207	187	12,164
• Dipper*	DIPPE	558	355	13,321
• Wren*	WREN.	356	175	18,553
• Duncock*	DUNNO	482	310	33,893
• Robin	ROBIN	555	415	25,780
Nightingale	NIGAL	19	7	545
<i>Black Redstart</i>	BLARE	3	4	191
• Redstart*	REDST	246	235	8,232
• Whinchat*	WHINC	154	184	3,013
• Stonechat	STOCH	208	173	5,346
• Wheatear*	WHEAT	62	64	4,430
• Ring Ouzel*	RINO	73	48	2,074
• Blackbird*	BLABI	1,651	1,372	146,100
<i>Fieldfare</i>	FIELD	0	0	7
• Song Thrush*	SONTH	655	429	79,881

Species	Code	2012	2013	Total
<i>Redwing</i>	REDWI	2	0	129
• Mistle Thrush*	MISTH	74	71	8,836
<i>Cetti's Warbler</i>	CETWA	4	3	52
Grasshopper Warbler	GRAWA	14	8	509
<i>Savi's Warbler</i>	SAVWA	0	0	4
• Sedge Warbler*	SEDWA	53	46	5,407
<i>Marsh Warbler</i>	MARWA	0	0	170
• Reed Warbler	REEWA	923	611	22,239
• Blackcap	BLACA	266	142	5,041
• Garden Warbler	GARWA	62	42	2,621
Lesser Whitethroat	LESWH	9	7	1,044
• Whitethroat*	WHITE	139	180	7,591
<i>Dartford Warbler</i>	DARWA	25	11	636
• Wood Warbler*	WOOWA	113	95	3,310
• Chiffchaff	CHIFF	282	185	5,115
• Willow Warbler*	WILWA	374	228	15,309
Goldcrest	GOLDC	27	6	1,003
<i>Firecrest</i>	FIREC	5	0	14
• Spotted Flycatcher*	SPOFL	148	136	12,896
• Pied Flycatcher*	PIEFL	1,153	751	51,582
<i>Bearded Tit</i>	BEATI	6	13	406
• Long-tailed Tit	LOTTI	378	166	8,228
• Blue Tit	BLUTI	6,745	6,033	156,926
• Great Tit	GRETI	4,977	4,071	111,000
<i>Crested Tit</i>	CRETI	3	4	475
• Coal Tit	COATI	105	95	6,438
Willow Tit	WILTI	27	14	685
• Marsh Tit	MARTI	35	39	2,029
• Nuthatch	NUTHA	265	171	5,766
• Treecreeper	TREEC	61	63	3,084
<i>Golden Oriole</i>	GOLOR	0	0	42
<i>Red-backed Shrike</i>	REBSH	0	0	258
• Jay	JAY..	25	9	1,719
• Magpie*	MAGPI	71	81	8,791
<i>Chough</i>	CHOUG	29	27	1,143
• Jackdaw	JACKD	460	700	12,085
• Rook*	ROOK.	65	58	16,026
Hooded Crow	HOOCR	26	16	1,299
• Carrion Crow*	CARCR	111	116	9,042
• Raven	RAVEN	124	130	5,550
• Starling*	STARL	276	295	19,431
• House Sparrow	HOUSP	312	398	17,758
• Tree Sparrow	TRESP	2,043	1,705	40,077
• Chaffinch*	CHAFF	444	318	26,628
• Greenfinch*	GREFI	123	71	16,040
• Goldfinch	GOLDF	179	103	4,374
Siskin	SISKI	13	3	122
• Linnet*	LINNE	402	303	30,887
Twite	TWITE	9	2	1,252
• Lesser Redpoll*	LESRE	24	23	1,443
<i>Crossbill</i>	CROSS	38	0	224
• Bullfinch*	BULLF	100	91	6,577
Hawfinch	HAWFI	17	0	257
<i>Snow Bunting</i>	SNOB	0	0	202
• Yellowhammer*	YELHA	124	108	8,863
<i>Cirl Bunting</i>	CIRBU	0	0	673
• Reed Bunting*	REEBU	142	110	8,957
• Corn Bunting*	CORBU	77	44	1,378
OVERALL TOTAL		45,173	39,927	1,667,057

NRS mentoring: passing the baton

This year sees the full launch of the NRS mentoring scheme designed to make it easy for NRS participants to contact other experienced recorders for advice and training. Mark Lawrence, a nest recorder and NRS mentor from Devon, tells us more.

How do you find the nest of a Willow Warbler? A cleverly constructed dome of grass at the bottom of a gorse bush, it blends in so well that even the keenest eyes can fail to see the tiny entrance. Or how about a Crossbill nest, hidden high in the stands of a dark pine wood, with an incubating female sat waiting for her mate to come and feed her? What about a Stonechat nest, with a nearby male uttering his distinctive alarm note and a female getting ready to slip off and feed.

Every nester will have species they are interested in but just don't know how to go about monitoring. There are nest-finding courses and *A Field Guide to Monitoring Nests* to help with this, of course, but now there's also the option of getting one-to-one guidance and training by contacting a local *NRS mentor*. Mentors are experienced nest recorders who can help with anything, from the basics of getting started to training on how to find the nests of particular species.

My friends Mark Penney and Dave Scott and I have spent many thousands of hours on Dartmoor, Devon, focusing on nests of upland species like Meadow Pipit, Stonechat and Whinchat. We operate as an efficient team, finding and monitoring nests, ringing chicks, and contributing valuable data to the BTO. With Josh Marshall joining us last season, we've now named ourselves the

'South Devon Nesting Crew'.

However, I can remember when we were not so efficient. When Mark Penney and I were first learning to find Stonechat nests, we would spend over an hour trying to watch back a supposedly incubating female before realising that she wasn't yet down on eggs. Now we can often tell within five minutes whether a bird is nesting and what stage it is at.

Our experience has made us well aware of how time-consuming, frustrating, and trial-and-error it can be trying to teach oneself in the

The NRS mentoring scheme is generously sponsored by

opticon
www.opticon.co.uk

field and this is why we, as a group, like nothing better than to share our skill and knowledge with people who are keen and willing to learn. Even in a single day, a person's skill and knowledge can be brought on leaps and bounds, which is a thrill to see.

Back in the rather wet and windy season of 2012, we had a call from Rob and Stella Hubble, who wanted to gain some knowledge and experience monitoring upland ground-nesting species. Although they



Clockwise from top: Rob and Stella Hubble, Josh Marshall, an incubating Meadow Pipit.

had been nest recorders for many years, their knowledge of this group of birds was limited. It was a great thrill to be able to take this enthusiastic duo out onto the moors and show them the techniques we knew. After a few sessions, they were well equipped to begin searching for nests on their own patch. Since then, it's been a pleasure to read Rob and Stella's posts on the NRS Forum about their monitoring nests of Whinchat, Stonechat, Yellowhammer, and Meadow Pipit (one with a Cuckoo!).

Another person we've mentored is Jack Shutt, who wanted help with both training to find nests and training for a permit to ring chicks. One day, we had ringing visits planned for a whole host of broods, but we also managed to find 11 new Meadow Pipit nests, two new Stonechat nests, a Willow Warbler on eggs and a Chiffchaff on eggs—a record-breaking day for us. We called that day 'the Big 15' and I'm sure Jack will remember it for a long time. What an introduction to the world of the upland nest finder!

More recently we've been joined by Josh Marshall, who has demonstrated just how quickly one can progress in a relatively short space of time. Josh first joined us on a field session in late April 2013, when we found four new Stonechat nests together. Just the next day, Josh tracked down a Stonechat nest himself and over the course of the 2013 season he went on to find nests of Meadow Pipit, Yellowhammer, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Whitethroat and Whinchat. Josh is now planning a study on Tree Pipits for 2014 (see page 12).

So, whether you want help with the basics, such as getting to grips with the Code of Conduct, or you want to improve your skills, have a look at the online map (see right) and get in touch with a mentor. And, if you don't need help from a mentor, please sign up as one! Being a mentor needn't take up much time: just a single field session helping one new recorder a year is a very valuable contribution. For the South Devon Nesting Crew, it's now part of what we do.

Visit www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/taking-part/nrs-mentoring to find out about becoming an NRS mentor.

How to contact a mentor

Whether you're new to nest recording and want help getting to grips with the basics, or you wish to develop your nest finding and monitoring skills further, meeting a mentor is one way to get advice and training. Getting in touch with a mentor is easy via the BTO website. Here's how...

1



▲ Visit www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/taking-part/nrs-mentoring and use the map to find a mentor near you.

2



▲ Click on a pin to bring up more information about a mentor, including any species they specialise in monitoring. This also brings up a link for contacting them.

3

NRS Mentoring - request form

Request to be made to mentor - Mike Toms

Please complete the form below to send a request to the mentor you have selected. If you are you give your date of birth.

First name: *

Surname: *

Email address: *

▲ Clicking 'Contact this mentor' brings up a web form. Complete the form and click 'Submit' to send a request.

When you send a request to a mentor, a copy is also sent to the BTO. Please bear in mind that mentors are also volunteers, so they may take a couple of weeks to get back to you and their availability can be limited at certain times. More information about mentoring is given on the webpage and also in the FAQ at www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs/taking-part/nrs-mentoring/nrs-mentoring-faq

NRS SPECIES SPOTLIGHT



Made on the moors

In 2013, Devon and Cornwall Police Wildlife Crime Officer Josh Marshall met Devon nest recorders Mark Lawrence, Mark Penney and Dave Scott to give nest recording a try. One season on, Josh shares what he has learned about finding Tree Pipit nests.

The 2013 season was my first as a Nest Record Scheme (NRS) participant and it began on Dartmoor with NRS mentors Mark Lawrence, Mark Penney and Dave Scott. Going from the Code of Conduct and the basics of nest recording, they were soon teaching me how to find Stonechat nests and this gave me an excellent grounding for monitoring other species. Tree Pipit became my focus for the season, so here's a 'beginner's look' at finding their nests.

My study area on Dartmoor was moorland flanked by an oak-woodland valley. Most of the territories I located ran along this flank, where the oak trees ended and the ground was covered with bracken. Lots of the nests I found were hidden in dead bracken.

The first thing to do when looking for a Tree Pipit nest is to locate a pair of birds. A singing male is obviously a good start and he can sing right through incubation, though display flights may not continue. That said, I have often thought a quiet patch vacant, only to visit again a few weeks later and find birds carrying food!

The next step is to try to locate the female. Listening for contact calls is the most effective method when the female is incubating. She will leave the nest every 45 minutes or so to feed and the male will often turn up to call her off with a distinctive 'zeep' call—when you hear it, pay attention! If you subsequently see one or both birds leaving the spot, wait and watch for their return. Make sure you are far enough back to have a wide view of the site, since the female may land 10–20 metres from the nest and walk in.

Most of the time, the male will guard the female on feeding visits to and from the nest, so keeping an eye



A Tree Pipit nest is a substantial grass cup, usually well-hidden under vegetation. This nest contains two unhatched olive-brown eggs, but colouring is very variable.

DAVE SCOTT

on her means telling her apart from the male. The female may utter a very discreet 'dip...dip' call in flight and, on landing, as with many species, she will often wipe her bill, defaecate and ruffle or preen her feathers. Once you've identified the female on her return to the site, watch her and note carefully exactly where she disappears into vegetation. If she is calling, she may continue to do so right up until she is back on the nest, so note this too.

Next, carefully approach the spot you have noted (keeping an eye on it and your feet at the same time!) and gently and methodically tap the surrounding ground and vegetation with a stick to try to flush the female. Tree Pipits sit incredibly tight; when a female does flush she will typically run away feigning injury. Nests are generally well hidden and if after a short time a nest isn't found, it's best to leave a discreet marker that can be seen from a distance, e.g. a cane, and then retreat and try again later. Of course, it's also important to leave a marker once a nest has been found, else when you do a follow-up visit you will have to find it all over again!

It is of course much easier to watch adults back to a nest when they are feeding chicks. However, like many ground-nesting songbirds, Tree Pipits are very wary of being watched at this stage, so camouflage or a good hiding place is essential! If you see one or both birds perching with food and alarming continuously, you are keeping them from visiting their nest.

When watching an adult feeding chicks, pay attention to where it leaves after taking in food (check it is no longer carrying), as this will usually be very close to the nest. When I watch an adult disappear into vegetation with food, I will then stand up, ready to get a better view when it re-emerges.

Overall, I monitored nine Tree Pipit nests in 2013: four were found during incubation and five at chick stage. I would encourage recorders to take a look at the NRS priority species (pages 8–9) and have a go at some of these under-recorded species. With one season of mentoring, I monitored over 15% of the 56 Tree Pipit records submitted to the NRS in 2013. Now the birds are coming back I'm looking forward to improving my techniques some more!

Runway recording

As part of Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust's West Berkshire Living Landscapes project, Newbury Ringing Group were asked to assist with monitoring plover nests on an airfield turned local common. Group member Jan Legg tells us more.

In early spring 2010 the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust and West Berkshire Council asked Newbury Ringing Group (NRG) to help with a three-year funded survey of breeding Lapwing, Ringed Plover and Little Ringed Plover at Greenham and Crookham Commons, which is a former airfield, vacated and returned to common land in the mid 1990s. The plovers there have tended to nest on areas of gravel where the runway once stood and aircraft hard-standings.

The survey was part of monitoring work associated with the West Berkshire Living Landscapes Project (<http://bit.ly/Qfj1t9>) and it had fairly broad aims, including finding out numbers of breeding birds present, and their productivity. The project would also assess the practicalities of a voluntary scheme to minimise disturbance by

dog walkers by designating areas not for dogs or for dogs on leads only, depending on where birds were found to be nesting. NRG was brought in to the project to advise and assist with nest finding and monitoring, and ringing of chicks. Of course, we ensured that this included completing BTO nest records!

From the outset, organised teams of voluntary wardens provided most of the manpower for the project. As well as policing the dog 'zones', they carried out twice-daily visits to record plover breeding activity. NRG members made additional visits to follow up on observations by finding nests and ringing chicks.

At the beginning of each season, likely nesting areas were watched (often using cars as hides) and when a bird was seen continuously brooding, the nest would be found and the position logged with a hand-held GPS. Eggs were counted, and in the case of Lapwings, measured and weighed (which we were licensed to do) to aid in estimating hatching dates. Subsequently, when clutches were hatching, NRG members would visit daily to ring chicks.

Plover chicks are nidifugous and so remain near the nest site for only about a day before moving away with their parents. At this time, when approached, Ringed Plover chicks usually group together in or near the nest, Lapwing tend to scatter but only within a radius of about 3 m. Little Ringed Plover chicks, when approached, often run some distance from the nest and so these broods were the most challenging to ring.

Broods were recorded twice daily for as long as possible, and we undertook to recapture and colour-ring Lapwing chicks that survived to seven days, though this amounted

Table 1. Number of plover nests located at Greenham and Crookham Commons.

	Lapwing	Ringed Plover	Little Ringed Plover
2010	18	3	5
2011	16	4	4
2012	4	3	0
2013	0	3	0

to very few. In 2010, two colour-ringed birds became celebrities with locals and one, named Rocky, was later reported twice in flocks at a nearby gravel pit in September that year. In fact, interaction with the public was a very successful part of the project. Information boards were updated weekly and every Saturday wardens would give a tour of the survey areas, which proved very popular.

In the first season, 2010, nesting was synchronous: first nests hatched in late April and second or replacements in late May. In subsequent seasons, however, nesting started later and was less coordinated.

Over the study period, many Lapwing nests were predated. The usual daytime predator was Carrion Crow, especially when broods were hatching. One bird would fly over a nest, causing both Lapwing adults to intercept, and another crow would then fly in, pick off each chick and deposit them in nearby cover.

The monitoring project ended at the end of the 2012 season but two NRG members continued monitoring nests in 2013. Numbers of nesting plovers at the site are dwindling however (see Table 1) and this will probably continue given that gravel areas are scrubbing over and nest predation levels seem to be high. The Living Landscapes Project, however, brings hope that more resources will become available for practical conservation.



Top: Lapwing nests usually have some sort of minimal lining. Bottom: Ringed Plover chicks often huddle when approached—easier for ringers!

Rockit science

Amanda Biggins of Grampian Ringing Group has been studying Rock Pipits in Northeast Scotland for the last four years.

With a 'C' permit ringing licence on the way and a decision to make about what to do with it, I settled on beginning a colour-ringing project at my patch of coastline in Aberdeenshire. After considering a number of options, I decided on Rock Pipit, a local breeding species that I thought was quite overlooked in terms of ringing and nest recording. My ringing group, Grampian RG, already had a local site where they had been finding nests to ring chicks for several years. Here, Rock Pipits were nesting on grassy banks bordering the shore and so nests were relatively accessible (compared to the cliff sites they can use!) and territories could be watched easily from the shore below—ideal for nest finding. So, I began a project at this site in September 2009.

Male Rock Pipits usually begin singing in March, although young males at this time may not settle, despite singing. Paired males then go quiet when females are on eggs, while unpaired males continue to sing throughout the season. Pairs can raise two successful broods in a season—I have recorded chicks in the nest from late April until the end of July.

At my site the nests themselves are usually found in holes in grass tussocks, earth or rock, and occasionally underneath tall vegetation. Nest entrances—a hole the diameter of a camera lens—are often concealed by the leaves of broadleaved herbs, such as coltsfoot or hogweed.

I quickly found out that, when it comes to finding nests, following birds at the nest-building stage is an opportunity not to be missed. The female alone chooses the site and builds the nest, occasionally outwith the male's territory. Although females can fairly easily be watched carrying big beakfuls of nesting material, I have in the past been 'thrown' by confusing behaviours: one female was observed carrying material for three weeks in a row, whilst another was found to have a brood of newly hatched chicks the week after apparently building. When I've pinpointed a site by watching the female visit with material, I tend not to look for the nest straightaway, instead marking the spot closely enough so that I can do a search later during clutch-building.

As with other pipits,

an incubating female will fly away from the nest regularly to feed, presenting opportunities to watch her back, although it can be hard to tell her from the accompanying male, who mate-guards continuously. Adults feeding chicks also provide an opportunity to locate nests, of course, although at this stage adults become extra wary.

Young Rock Pipits really live up to their name when they first leave the nest. They tend to vacate the vegetated slopes and hide among the boulders on the rocky shore, while both adults continue to feed.

In the four nesting seasons the project has been running, I've found and monitored 48 nests, which is 61% of the NRS Rock Pipit record total over that period. Colour-ringing breeding adults and their young has borne fruit too. The return rate of females is lower than males and some even disappear during the breeding season, possibly predated on the nest. This is congruous with the shortage of females in our study area; even with an increased population and polygyny by one male, there were still two unmated males in 2013.

The survival of fledglings appears to be very low. Of the few birds ringed as chicks that have been found breeding the following spring, the distances between hatching and breeding territories are 0.5–3.5 km. One fledgling was recorded 32 km from where it hatched, but was seen back near the natal area before the breeding season.

I look forward to continuing with the project in 2014 and am extremely grateful for all the help I've received thus far from Grampian RG and the many colour-ring 'spotters'. I hope more people will be inspired to have a go at species-focused projects like this, both ringers and nest recorders!

More details about this project can be found on the Grampian RG blog: <http://grampianringing.blogspot.co.uk>



The typical nesting habitat at the study site. A white arrow marks the location of an active nest. INSET: A Rock Pipit nest tucked into a cavity underneath a rock.

NRS LATEST RESULTS

The benefits of seeing double

'Seeing the season through' has been a familiar refrain of the Nest Record Scheme for years. Head of Nest Record Scheme, Dave Leech, explains how these data help us examine regional variation in seasonal nesting effort.

It's all kicking off here. Mike Toms found the third Nunnery Ringing Group Chiffchaff nest of the year this morning, still under construction, I've had one lined at Cranwich since the weekend and Carl's got another laying up at Wicken. Best of all, 13-year-old Toby Carter, one of the NRS workshop participants at yesterday's 'A Focus on Nature' (www.afocusonnature.org) event here at The Nunnery, just tweeted that he's found his first this morning, watching an adult carrying a feather back to a patch of bramble. The migrants are back—and they're building!

We love our *Phylloscopus* nests here in Thetford and we're fortunate still to have a double-figure population of Willow Warblers on the BTO reserve to supplement the dozen or so Chiffchaff territories. I find my fair share of the early nests but come May, the allure of the reedbeds is just too strong and I move to new challenges, such as staying upright and dry. Fortunately, the growing Nunnery RG nesting team, ably led by Mike, are on hand to ring the first-brood chicks and, crucially, to locate the replacements and second attempts. While this does become more difficult as the vegetation grows up and the first wave of fledged youngsters, noisily zipping around the woodland scrub, add an extra layer of background distraction, it is important that the NRS dataset is representative of the whole season, not just those nests produced at the outset.

It's great to see an increasing number of nest recorders taking a more project-based approach to monitoring, mirroring a similar shift in focus within the Ringing Scheme. One of the strengths of these studies is that effort is maintained throughout the season and I try to do the same with my Reed Warblers, continuing to search the

beds systematically into August, until I'm convinced that there are no more nesting attempts to be found. Figure 1 compares my laying dates in 2013 with those submitted to NRS from other sites and suggests that, while the situation has improved, Cranwich is still turning up a larger number of late-season nests than would be predicted by chance (almost 20% of nests located in the last four weeks, relative to 6% nationally). If we look at Coot (Fig 2), the situation is reversed, with over half of nests initiated prior to mid April, a figure that falls to just 8% across the rest of the NRS dataset.

The timing of laying will obviously vary across sites, but the magnitude of this difference suggests that some variation in seasonal effort is also implicated. I suspect that this is most pronounced among widespread early breeders such as Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin and Woodpigeon, which receive less attention once the more 'exciting' migrants return—I'm certainly guilty of this, and of failing to check nestboxes routinely for Great Tit second broods, a bias I intend to correct having been caught out by several pairs in 2013.

The breeding season is a hectic time and there is only so much we can all do. The aim of this article is really to stimulate those who have the opportunity to visit their local patch a little earlier or later than you might otherwise—the numbers of nests at these times may be lower, but their value is huge.

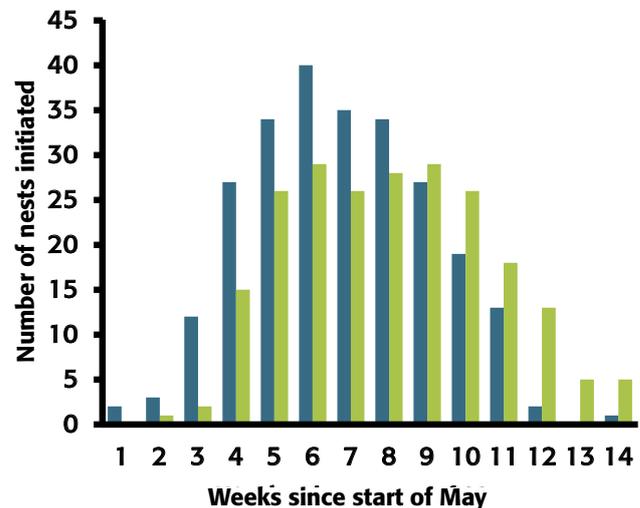


Figure 1. The average number of Reed Warbler nests monitored for NRS initiated per week (blue) compared to the total number of Cranwich Reed Warbler nests initiated per week (green).

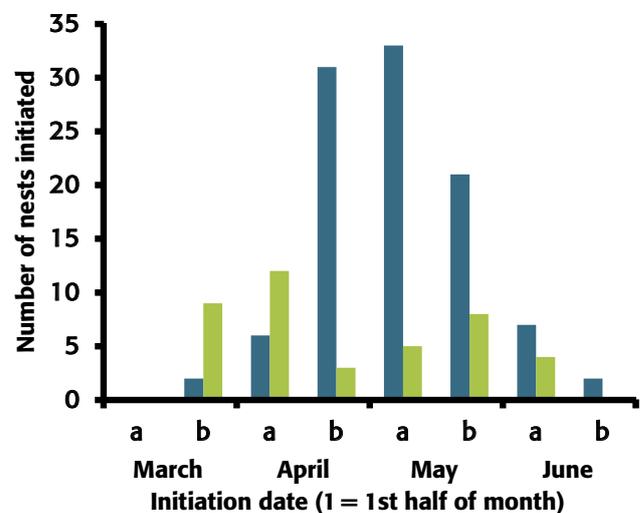


Figure 2. The number of Coot nests initiated in each half of the month from March to June, for all nests monitored for NRS in 2013 (blue) and Cranwich nests in 2013 (green).

SPOT THE NEST

Thank you to the 23 of you who took part in last issue's competition, all of whom spotted the 'hidden' Curlew nest in square 5A. First name out of the hat was Ian Haines, who wins an NRS pint glass—congratulations Ian! This issue we have the hopefully more difficult challenge of spotting whereabouts on this tower block in Vauxhall, Central London, Michael Mac recorded a Kestrel nesting in 2009. Answers to nrs@bto.org by 1 December. First correct answer out of the hat wins a NRS pint glass.



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

To obtain a Schedule 1 permit for nest recording on behalf of the BTO, please visit the internet pages at www.bto.org/schedule1 or contact

Jez Blackburn at the BTO. A first-time permit application must be accompanied by two references from respected ornithologists (*eg* 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. 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 (*eg* Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage).

The NRS team & contacts

Carl Barimore

NRS Organiser

The main point of contact for nest recorders.

Hazel Evans

NRS Secretary

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

Dr Dave Leech

Head of NRS, CES and RAS

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



Web addresses

NRS webpage: www.bto.org/nrs

IPMR webpage: www.bto.org/software/ipmr

Latest trends: www.bto.org/birdtrends

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

Email addresses

General NRS enquiries: nrs@bto.org

IPMR submissions: nrs.data@bto.org

Schedule 1 renewals & applications: ringing.schedule1@bto.org