Nest Record *News*

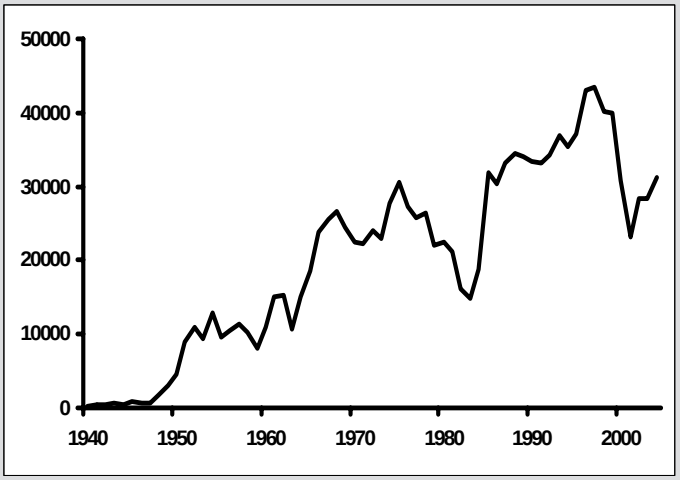
A newsletter for supporters of the NEST RECORD SCHEME, forming part of the BTO's Integrated Population Monitoring programme funded by a partnership of the British Trust for Ornithology and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Countryside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

June 2005 Number 21

Nest Record Scheme in full flight

Welcome to the 21st edition of *Nest Record News*. As you'll see once you delve inside, the Nest Records Unit has had another very eventful year and 2005 finds the NRS in very rude health. The only downside of having so much to write about is that it takes so long to write about it, so apologies to everybody for the extended incubation period of this newsletter!

Number of nest records received 1939 to 2004

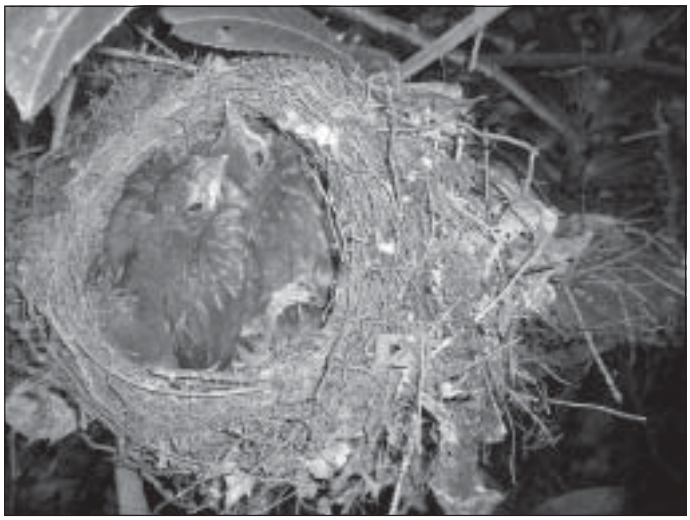


As you can see from the graph above, over 31,000 records from the 2004 season have been submitted to the Nest Records Unit thus far, a 10% increase on the previous year and the highest total since 1999. We're incredibly grateful to the 438 people and groups who contributed to this total - yet again, a tremendous effort. If you haven't had a chance to send in your records yet we'd still be very pleased to receive them. Feel free to contact us at nest.records@bto.org with any queries.

The NRS Forum continued to flourish in 2004, now having a membership of over 100 nest recorders (see page 2), and the proportion of records submitted electronically via IPMR increased for the fifth year running (see page 15). Last year also witnessed the inaugural Orford Ness pullus ringing course (see page 16), which resulted in the ringing of over 230 pulli whilst giving participants a chance to experience both nest-finding and nest-recording first hand. The NRS also featured heavily at Swanwick for the second year running, with the BTO's prestigious Tucker Medal awarded to David Warden for his important contributions to the NRS and to other BTO schemes and four other nest recorders speaking at the very well-attended Nest Records Meeting (see page 15).

Another great aspect of the 2004 season was the number of recorders who responded to our request for *Nest Record News* articles. As a result, this edition is packed with information about nest finding techniques, novel breeding habitats and unusual nest sites all provided by the experts – you. Thanks very much to everyone who contributed and if their efforts have inspired other recorders to put pen to paper, please send articles for future editions of NRN to the Nest Records Unit at the usual address.

Enjoy the rest of the 2005 season and keep up the good work!



Alhough the total number of records received annually is currently on the increase, the number received for open-nesters continues to decline, even for common species such as Blackbird. The nest finding section of this edition of *Nest Record News* (pages 5-8) contains hints and tips for finding the nests of a wide variety of species. Photo: Simon Thurgood

RETURNING YOUR 2005 NEST RECORDS

To ensure that your nest records are included in the annual totals, please try to return your records to us before Christmas 2005 or by **1 FEBRUARY 2006** at the latest.

The NRS Yahoo! email forum – it's good to talk

As the NRS Forum approaches its second birthday, membership has expanded to 116 recorders, approximately 25% of the active recorders in the country – an impressive total considering that by no means everyone has got access to email. 2005 even saw the Forum go international, with keen Dutch nest finder Peter Alblas joining the ranks.

The Forum was set up with the express intent of helping nest recorders to exchange ideas and techniques and to keep each other posted on the season's progress as events unfolded. Thus far, over 350 messages have been posted - topics of discussion over the past 12 months include:

- **Open-nesting species re-using old nests**
- **Marking Lapwing nests**
- **Hornets in nest boxes**
- **Early nesting attempts in 2005**
- **Finding Woodcock nests**
- **Dead adult birds found on the nest**

Many thanks to all contributors for making the NRS Forum such a lively and informative discussion group!

To be able to receive emails and post them on the Forum, you **DO NOT** have to be registered with Yahoo! Groups (contrary to the information in last year's NRN – sorry about that!). Simply send an email to nrsforum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com and we can add you to the list of members. Once you've had an email saying that you've been accepted onto the group, you can post messages by sending them to nrsforum@yahoogroups.com. Membership is restricted to registered ringers and nest recorders and all messages are moderated by the Nest Records Unit so that no junk emails can be posted on the site.

If you do wish to become a Yahoo! Groups member (it's free) you can also gain access to the NRS Forum website which allows you to browse all the messages that have ever been posted on the site at leisure – visit the website at http://uk.groups.yahoo.com, click on the 'New Users' link and follow the instructions to sign up.

Staff changes

Two members of the NRS team have recently moved on to pastures new: Peter Beaven and Angela Rickard. We thank them warmly for all their hard and effective work in supporting the Scheme. Angela's role has been taken over by Mandy Andrews and we hope to appoint a new Nest Records Officer soon.

Contents

We are very grateful to Jane Waters for DTPing Nest Record News, to Mark Grantham for help in its production and Bridget Griffin. Karen Wright, Alex Banks, Jacquie Clark and Su Gough for proof-reading

Results from the 2004 NRS Analyses

Each year the records submitted to the Nest Record Unit are computerised and trends are calculated for a range of breeding parameters, including clutch size, brood size and nest failure rates at the egg and young stages. Humphrey Crick summarises the main results from the latest analyses.

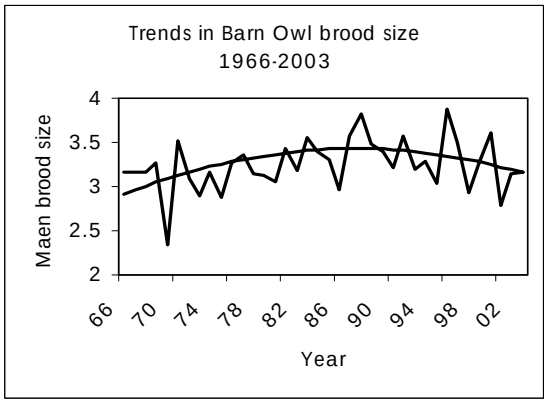
- **Newly detected declines in breeding performance for Barn Owl, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail and Wheatear.**
- **Continuing declines in breeding performance for Bullfinch, Dunnock, Grey Wagtail, Lapwing, Linnet, Moorhen, Reed Bunting, Ringed Plover, Willow Warbler, Yellowhammer and Yellow Wagtail.**
- **More species laying earlier, up from 42% to 48% of 64 species monitored.**

As the collection of Nest Record data requires so much focus on the individual nesting attempt, it can be easy to underestimate the part nest recorders play in bird conservation at a national level. Each year, your data are gathered together at The Nunnery and used to generate annual trends highlighting statistically significant changes in the reproductive performance of the UK's avifauna. The results of these analyses are sent to the UK Government's Wildlife Advisor, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, as part of the Partnership between the BTO and JNCC, where they help to influence environmental policy in the UK. They are also made available to nest recorders and the general public as part of the Wider Countryside Report which can be found on the internet at: http://www.bto.org/birdtrends2004/.

Thanks to your records, the latest annual Nest Record Scheme analyses have detected declines in the breeding performance of 15 species, four of which have only been identified for the first time this year.

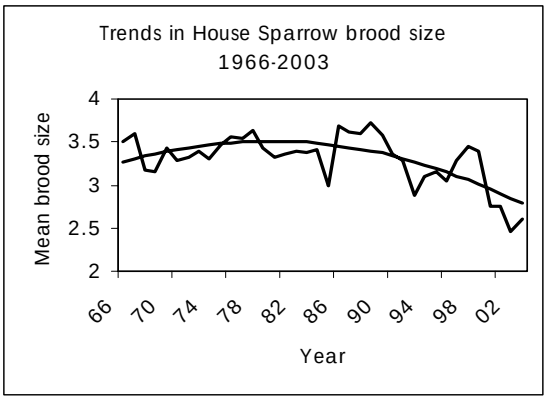
Newly identified declines

Barn Owl: Using information from both the Nest Record Scheme and the Barn Owl Monitoring Programme (BOMP), we have been able to detect a downward trend in average brood size, from 3.43 chicks in 1987 to 3.16 in 2003. This decline is the result of a series of poor years in the 1990's and 2000's, particularly in 1998 and 2001, and may result from a decrease in food availability during the breeding season.



Pied Wagtail: Pied Wagtail populations nationally have fluctuated a great deal since the 1960's, but those monitored by the Waterways Bird Survey have declined by nearly 50% since 1975. It is thus of some concern that both average clutch and brood sizes show significant declines: clutch size from 5.14 in 1966 to 4.94 in 2003, and brood size from 4.52 in 1980 to 4.16 in 2003, although these may be counter-balanced somewhat by improvements in nest survival at the egg stage. The species has been little studied (surprisingly) and thus the causes of declining productivity are as yet unclear.

House Sparrow: The BTO recently led on a detailed House Sparrow study for DEFRA and concluded that although decreases in sparrow abundance in rural areas had been caused by a reduction in survival rates, subsequent improvements in breeding performance had helped to prevent further population decline. However, the latest analysis of the NRS dataset indicates that average brood size has declined markedly since the early 1990s and is currently almost an entire chick less than it was 15 years ago, a worrying development. Work by Kate Vincent at the University of Leicester has suggested that the availability of insect food for chicks may be limited in certain situations and the declining brood sizes may reflect this situation at a national level.



Wheatear: This charismatic species was not well monitored by BTO schemes until the inception of the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey in 1994. The only long-term information comes from the *New Breeding Bird Atlas* (1988-1991), which suggested that losses had occurred on the margins of its main range since the first atlas in 1968-72. The decline in its average brood size from 5.1 in 1963 to 4.5 in 2003 is relatively large and warrants further study, given the lack of information about the species' long-term status.

Other trends

Both the four species above and the other 11 that were already on the *NRS Concern List* have (a) shown a decline in breeding performance over the past 15-38 years *and* (b) are either on the Red or Amber List of Conservation Concern of uncertain population status. The majority of these species have shown declines in nest survival at either the egg or chick stage, indicating that the proportion of their nests that fail to produce any fledglings has increased over the past 15-38 years.

Ever since the Nest Record Scheme first reported that many birds had advanced their laying dates in response to global warming, we have kept a keen eye on how these trends towards earlier laying have developed. In the previous analysis of NRS data we found that 25 of 60 species (42%) showed statistically significant trends towards earlier laying - this year the figure has increased to 31 of 64 species (48%), providing some of the strongest evidence that global warming is continuing to affect our wildlife.

Such internationally important results would not be possible without your interest and fascination in recording the nesting progress of so many nests each year. We are extremely grateful to you for contributing to, and being part of, this important scheme.

Recorder's eye view – 2004 roundup

How did you feel the 2004 season went? Here's a summary of some of the observations made by ringers and nest recorders in correspondence with the BTO.

Nestbox species

Following the very poor breeding season experienced by both Blue and Great Tits in many areas of the UK during 2003, we anxiously awaited news of their progress in 2004. As usual, while there was substantial regional variation, the overall picture seemed to be one of average breeding performance, but still a vast improvement on the situation during the previous year.

While a fall in Great Tit occupancy rates was reported by David Grieve (Lothian), Gordon Vaughan (Devon) and Jan Legg (Berkshire), occupancy increased by 20% for both Great and Blue Tits at the boxes monitored by Rye Meads RG (Hertfordshire), and Ian Proctor (Gloucestershire) reported the highest Blue Tit occupancy rate in his study area since 1948. Large clutches and broods were reported for Great Tits by Ian Livingstone (Clyde) and Frank Mawby (Cumbria) and for both Blue and Great Tits by Bob Swann (Highland), Norman McCanch (Kent) and Alan Garner (Cheshire). Even in those tit populations where brood and clutch sizes were similar to those the previous year, as was observed by David Counsell (Kent), John Wilson (Lancashire) and Bruce Lynch (Tay), fledging success was much higher than in 2003 with fewer chicks dying in the boxes. John Mitchell (Kent) also commented that good numbers of Great Tit chicks fledged successfully and Gordon Vaughan reported the highest number of chicks fledged per box since 1993.

It wasn't all good news, though. Dave Hazard's (South Yorkshire) Great Tit population not only suffered from heavy predation but also from an abundance of infertile eggs. Chris du Feu (Nottinghamshire) found that, while Weasel predation at his site at Treswell Wood was down, possibly due to an increase in the local small mammal population that provides an alternative food source, clutch sizes were small and hatching success was poor. Interestingly, Jan Legg observed that while early Blue Tit broods were successful, those breeding at 'normal' times were notably less so. Pied Flycatcher occupancy rates at Ian Proctor's site were the lowest since 1948, but fortunately, elsewhere the species seemed to prosper, with Gordon Vaughan reporting the highest mean number of chicks fledged per box since 1976.

Last year also saw the final year of the Grampian RG Tawny Owl study that John Massie established in 1978, aided and abetted in the field by Robbie Walker. This project has produced a wealth of information for the Nest Record Scheme and we'd like to take this opportunity to extend our thanks to everyone involved. John and Robbie reported a poor breeding season in 2004, with small clutch sizes and some owls electing not to breed, presumably because of heavy snows between mid-January and March leading to a loss of body condition. Nestling mortality was also high, with 50% of chicks failing to fledge due to starvation or ingestion. Examination of food items found at the nest suggested that Short-tailed Vole numbers were low, with parents bringing young alternative prey such as rats, birds and amphibians.

Open nesting passerines

Reports of Willow Warbler breeding success were mixed. Those on Jim Cobb's site in Fife had a poor season due to a combination of heavy rainfall and predation, while John Little in Surrey reported that numbers of breeding birds were higher than in 2003. However, the number of Tree Pipits at John's site had decreased by a third relative to the previous year and Yellowhammer numbers had fallen from 10 pairs in 2003 to just two in 2004. Jim Hodson (West Yorkshire) reported that while his Long-tailed Tits had experienced the best season in the 10 years he'd been monitoring them, the Twite pairs he monitored in the Pennines had been less fortunate, displaying a reduction in the number of repeat breeding attempts. Also of interest was a note from Bill Kennedy (Londonderry) who informed us of a Blackcap nest he had found that was more than 2 m off the ground.

Willow Warblers in Fife had a poor year in 2004 due to both heavy rainfall and predation. Photo: Richard Vaughan

Sparrowhawks

Reg Woodard (Suffolk) found fewer Sparrowhawk nests in 2004 than in 2003, possibly due to wet weather in late April and early May which might have deterred some pairs from breeding. One of the young that was produced appeared to have died from chilling after a heavy thunderstorm. Reg's notes on the types of prey species found in the nest were fascinating – while Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Blackbird, Dunnock and Starling were fairly predictable, Green Woodpecker, Turtle Dove and Grey Partridge were less so!

One bit of sad news that the Nest Records Unit received in 2004 is that ill health has forced Gordon Vaughan to reluctantly cease monitoring the nestboxes at Okehampton, Devon. Thanks largely to the efforts of Gordon and his team, the local Pied Flycatcher population increased from a single pair in 1970 to 68 nests with eggs in 1989, making it the largest population in Southern England at the time. In total, in the 31 years of monitoring up to and including 2004, 1,246 flycatcher nests with eggs have been recorded, an amazing contribution at a national scale and one for which were are extremely grateful. Boxes erected for the birds also provided suitable homes for dormice, sustaining the largest population in South West England and allowing Gordon to monitor something else in his theoretical 'spare time'. Fortunately, Gordon has managed to recruit the services of another nest recorder to cover a substantial proportion of the Okehampton boxes in the future. We wish Gordon all the best and hope that he continues to enjoy reading about the ups and downs of nestbox populations in *Nest Record News.*

Nest finding

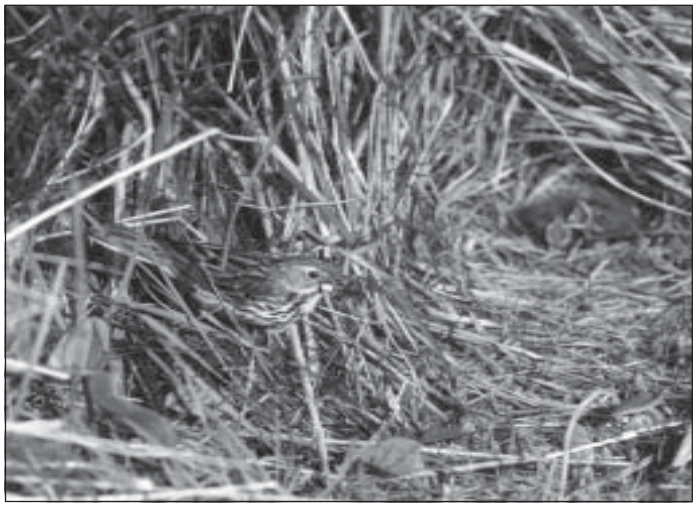
The next four pages feature a series of articles giving hints and tips on searching for different species' nests, all sent in by experienced nest recorders. Many thanks to everyone who contributed - we hope that their efforts will inspire you to go out and have a go at finding some of these nests yourselves.

A method for searching for ground-nesting bird nests

Searching for the nests of elusive ground-nesting birds can be hard work and produce few results. Most nests are discovered accidentally as one walks through breeding habitat and when the incubating bird 'flushes' at one's feet. Others are found by watching parents shuttling to and from a nest in order to feed their chicks. The latter is particularly time-consuming, especially when eggs are being incubated and there is little activity at the nest. The ornithologist may also be interested in nest survival probabilities (see Mayfield 1975) and measuring clutch size, egg hatching rate and fledging success. It is therefore important to adopt a simple and efficient method of finding nests at the earliest stage possible.

Dragging a rope over open country has been described by Campbell & Ferguson-Lees (1972) as a means of finding ground-nesting bird nests. The motion of the rope over or near a bird's nest is sufficient to flush it if it is incubating or present at the nest, thus giving away the location. The authors suggest that two people carry a rope (of up to 40 m in length) whilst a third person walks behind watching for birds as they rise and freeing the rope if it catches. The limitation of this method is that the rope catches on boulders or bushes and is only really suitable for use in uniform grassland and heaths. In addition, the rope can become waterlogged and uncomfortable to use after prolonged periods of time

Here, we suggest an alternative method of searching for ground-nesting bird nests, for use in all terrains, by modifying the Campbell & Ferguson-Lees rope dragging technique.



Carefully flushing birds may be the most efficient way to locate well concealed Meadow Pipit nests. Photo:G Olioso

Methods and materials

We used 10 m of lightweight, marine rope (coated to be water-resistant) and attached tin cans at 1 m intervals suspended by 50 cm lengths of string (Figure 1). Keeping tension in the rope prevents it from catching on boulders and bushes. It is the motion of the tin cans near the nest that is thought to flush the incubating bird.

Between 1 May and 31 July 2004, we searched for Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* nests at Glen Finglas, Scotland in 24 defined experimental plots of 3.3 ha as part of another scientific study. During this period, we searched each plot twice using this technique. The plots were on steep slopes that consisted mainly of uneven, rough grassland with tussocks. We searched each plot by walking evenly spaced transects back and forth, guided by a Global Positioning System (GPS) until the whole area was covered. Each search took approximately 1 hour per plot. On discovery of a nest, we recorded nest location using the GPS and marked the nest discretely with a short cane for future re-location.

Results

We found a total of 29 Meadow Pipit nests containing eggs using this technique (0.604 nests per plot searched). Most nests were found early in the season (i.e. May) with second clutches and re-nesting attempts (e.g. after predation) found in late-June and July.

Discussion

By modifying a method described by Campbell & Ferguson-Lees (1972), we have demonstrated a successful technique for searching for ground-nesting bird nests in upland habitats. We have overcome the limitations of Campbell & Ferguson-Lees technique by shortening the rope, using light-weight, water-resistant marine rope and adding tin cans at regular intervals to maximise the chances of flushing a bird from the nest. We suggest that this method could be successfully used in a variety of grassland/shrub habitats.

We found no evidence of Meadow Pipits abandoning a nest that had been discovered using this technique. However, this may not be the case with all ground-nesting species. We suggest caution should be exercised and adequate research undertaken before embarking on species-specific studies, or on areas where a variety of species (with different tolerance levels to disturbance) might be nesting.

References

Campbell, B. & Ferguson-Lees, J. (1972) *A Field Guide to Birds' Nests*. Constable, London.

Mayfield, H.F. (1975) Suggestions for calculating nest success. *Wilson Bulletin* **87**: 456-466.

Darren Evans, Sharon Evans & Andy Dowse

Figure 1. A technique for searching for ground-nesting bird nests. One person takes the lead in walking the transect, whilst the other is responsible for keeping the tension in the rope and watching the rope for bird flushes.

Some hints on finding open-nesting passerine nests

Contributions of nest record cards for open-nesting passerines have declined significantly in recent years (see *Nest Record News* no. 20, page 5). Many people that I have spoken to don't look for such nests as they are thought to be too hard to find. While certain species can be quite tricky, some such as Willow Warbler are very easy. It is hoped that the generic tips given below will encourage more people to give this type of nest finding a go.

The first thing that you need to do is to locate a pair that is actually 'doing something'. This is usually done by finding birds that are making alarm calls. If you are interested in finding the nests of a particular species, it is often helpful to locate territories early in the season. You can then return at a suitable time and wait in the territory until the birds take exception to your presence! Once you have found a bird that is making alarm calls, you need to sit or crouch down in a place where you have the best view of the areas where the nest is most likely to be. If the bird refuses to return to its nest after a few minutes (particularly if it approaches you closely) you may need to move further away. You can often judge roughly where the bird wants to go by taking the mid-point of the perches that the bird is using.

Use binoculars rather than a telescope to watch the bird back to its nest. A telescope foreshortens the view so significantly that it is very difficult to judge exactly where the bird has disappeared. When the bird disappears into a suitable nesting place, stay where you are and keep looking at the spot through your binoculars. If the bird is feeding young you should wait for it to reappear and should search for the nest in the area where it flies out rather than where it landed, as its exit from the nest is likely to be by a more direct route (especially if it is carrying a faecal sac). When you think you know where the nest is, carry on looking at the site through your binoculars until you have located distinctive features in the vegetation that you can recognise when you walk to the nest site as the area will look very different when you get there! It is often advisable to see a bird leave the nest site twice so that you are absolutely sure that you have pinpointed the correct place.

When you walk to the nest site, it is ESSENTIAL that you avoid all risk of trampling the nest or causing damage to the vegetation that may lead a predator to the nest. Make sure that you don't put your feet anywhere that a nest may be hidden once you get to within five metres of the nest site. Carry a stick at all times; you can use this to part the vegetation, both to see where to put your feet and to look for the nest.

Once you have found the nest and recorded its contents, you should do your gardening as you leave! Use your stick to remove all trace of your footprints in the vegetation.

If you haven't found the nest within a couple of minutes, it may be helpful to place markers on the vegetation and have another go at watching the birds back. I use yellow insulating tape and, in uniform habitat, put two small pieces on prominent bits of vegetation; one to the left or right of where I think the nest is and one in front or behind. If you need to leave a marker in order to refind the nest on future visits, never leave it immediately next to the nest. Put it two or three metres away and make a note of where the nest is in relation to the marker. Yellow seems to be the best colour for markers as it stands out well but there are many yellow flowers so it doesn't attract attention from passers-by.

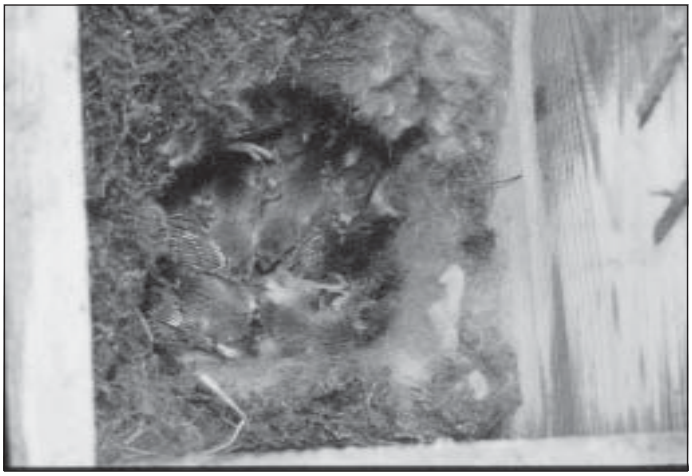
You may find it helpful to concentrate your efforts on a small number of species as you will find that developing a detailed knowledge of a particular species makes a huge difference to the ease of finding their nests. Different species will have different tolerance of how close you can be to the nest before they will return. You will also learn what typical nesting sites are like for each species and that the behaviour of the birds is of significant help in finding their nests. Good luck!

Tony Davis

How to find a Marsh Tit nest

The courtship-feeding period, which begins during the first few weeks of April, provides the best opportunity to search for Marsh Tit nests because the female is highly vocal as she follows the male with a continuous, squeaking begging call. The birds often favour shrubs when feeding, especially hawthorn, taking early caterpillars.

Locating the nest hole becomes easier as incubation progresses. Move slowly around the area where courtship feeding or other activity has been seen and listen for the male's 'pitchou' call, which he gives freely while collecting food. Walk towards the call and wait to hear it again, then locate the bird as he collects food and watch which way he flies off with it - it will be a direct line to the nest, up to 30 m away. Follow the male, who will sit a short distance from the nest with a beak full of food, calling repeatedly to scold you, and withdraw slightly until he flies to the nest site.



Marsh Tit nests can be quite difficult to find, especially if you don't have the luxury of birds kindly using your nest boxes as above. Richard's hints should help us all to pin down more natural nests of this declining Red-listed species. Photo: Chris du Feu

In early incubation the female will be called off the nest for a rapid food interchange. She may then resume begging for several minutes and follow the male around the nest area before making a sudden silent dash back to the nest hole. Some nests can be found by following the female and waiting for her to re-emerge from likely-looking holes. Later into incubation, however, and just after hatching, the male will carry the food directly into the nest and is easier to follow. The nest itself will be a small hole leading to a narrow crevice, anywhere from ground level to 10 m or more, most often in live wood. The chicks can be heard from around five days old, finally making site location easy.

Richard K Broughton

Tracking the elusive Yellowhammer

The Yellowhammer is a priority species for the NRS as relatively few records are received each year (currently c. 130 p.a.), potentially hindering attempts to understand recent declines in abundance. To encourage more recorders to have a go, this article draws on experience from various Yellowhammer research projects. Many of the issues and techniques described apply equally to other open-nesting farmland passerines.

Farmland Yellowhammers breed in arable or mixed arable-grass areas. The season is prolonged, with two or three nesting attempts between mid-April and late August. Early nests are built near the ground in ditches or hedges, often concealed in the tops of grass clumps. Later nests are built higher up in hedges - those in the outer-top edges of trimmed hedges can be particularly difficult to see. Nests are largely built of dead grass, so most nest-building takes place when the grass is damp and pliable, e.g. in the early morning dew or after rain. A nest takes at least a day to build, eggs are laid at one per day and incubation starts when the last egg is laid. The chicks hatch 12 days later and are flightless till about 14 days old, but usually leave the nest at eight to ten days old. Pairs often re-nest quickly, except during hot, dry weather.

Cold-searching in likely nesting habitat is not advisable due both to the risks associated with disturbing adults at the nest (described below) and because the nests are so easily overlooked. Following incubating females back from feeding sites is therefore the best way to find nests. Spring-tilled crops (particularly barley), lanes and areas where grain is put out for livestock are all good places to look. It takes about 20 minutes for a warm egg to cool to risky levels and 20 minutes of incubation to warm it back up. Consequently incubating females alternate between 20 minutes feeding (maximum) and 20 minutes incubation (minimum) – females feeding beyond 20 minutes are therefore not incubating. Incubating females are escorted by their mates who watch for predators. The female gives a slightly deeper contact call to request an escort. When the chicks hatch it is easy to follow parents back to the nest with food. Rarely, males may take food to a sitting female. They often do this once and then stop, in contrast to the repeated visits of a pair feeding chicks. The parents often deposit the chicks' large faecal sacs in habitual latrines near the nest. Latrines on overhead power-lines are highly visible and can help locate nests.

Yellowhammer nests are best found by following females back. Photo: Derek Belsey

There are two risks associated with visiting nests to record the contents: clutch abandonment and brood explosions. Yellowhammers are reputedly bad at abandoning new clutches. When disturbed from the nest, a high proportion of sitting females quietly hop off a short distance into cover, rather than fly off. When visiting a nest, it is vital to make sure the female has flown off and isn't sitting watching you inspect the nest contents (be aware that females may sneak back into a hedge even when you are stood right next to it). An incubating female followed back to her nest should always be given 20 minutes to warm her eggs back to a safe temperature before the nest is visited.

From eight days of age onwards, chicks are also prone to "exploding" when disturbed or called off by a panicking parent. The explosion response begins when chicks are eight days old. Even though many Yellowhammer chicks naturally leave the nest soon after this, younger chicks may perish in cool, wet weather if their plumage is insufficiently developed. Explosions can be avoided by not visiting the nest when the parents are there and by accurately ageing the chicks (note that feather development is not always reliable for this) – be extremely careful when approaching nests containing older chicks.

David Buckingham

Nest finding in woodland and scrub

When I go out nesting nowadays I am always disappointed at how few nests I find compared to when I was a boy in the early 1930s. I haven't found a Willow Warbler nest in years, whereas I used to find 30 or 40 in a season. I only had to walk down a wide ride in woodland and there on the ground at the edge of the ride under bramble and wild rose suckers, or under sprawling honeysuckle, there would be several nests and likewise in long grass at the edge of hedges adjoining pasture. In some instances the same bush or tree which used to house a nest is still there – that's the hawthorn bush that had a Red-backed Shrike nest in it for several years, there is the hole in the oak tree where the Stock Dove always nested, and there is the patch of marsh where the Snipe always bred. And I could go on to note many more examples. So if the nesting habitat is still in place, why are no birds breeding? Is it lack of food supply or migration difficulties? It's certainly not a rise in predator numbers in this area. I'm no scientist, I just throw out the questions in search of an answer.

Not all is gloom, though. Inspection of the roots of a fallen tree often produces a nest, usually that of a Wren but sometimes also of Robin, Blackbird, Pied Wagtail or Spotted Flycatcher. Equally productive are clumps of honeysuckle, which can harbour Dunnock, Song Thrush, Chaffinch and Wren nests. Thick hedges of around two metres in height are good for Greenfinch and Bullfinch, with hawthorn their preferred choice. Goldfinches usually nest higher up, often in fruit trees but also in fully-grown laburnum and lilac – often the nest is in the uppermost branches and very difficult to spot.

Nightingale nests are always well camouflaged as the nest consists mainly of dead leaves. If the nest is in tall woodland, it will be right at the edge of the wood, frequently in bramble. If it is in tall scrubland, it will be towards the centre of the thicket in any dense cover and less easy to find. This species is doing well in Essex, almost up to its previous numbers, but I haven't found a nest lately. Long-tailed Tits are also going through a good patch. Their nests are often in blackthorn bushes but I've also found them in gorse, bramble, hawthorn and even bamboo!! Their nests are usually higher than many people realise, often 2-3 m high – I know of one five metres high in a cedar tree in Colchester Town park.

Max Meadows

Locating Twite nests

For this species, simple cold searching is completely ineffectual and time consuming, considering the large areas within which Twite can potentially breed. Therefore, nests are best located by following breeding birds from their feeding grounds back to their nest site. Generally, birds with a nest will fly in from feeding sites and land within five to ten metres of the nest site, where they stop and stand tall on vegetation. Here they utter a distinctive 'chortle', with tail cocked and posture erect, then gradually edge closer and closer to the nest site in a series of short flights or hops. Once they are assured that they are not being followed or observed, they drop quickly into the nest itself. If the female is incubating and it is the male you are following, locating the nest is fairly simple – one can simply walk over to the area where the nest is likely to be and flush the female from the nest. Females tend to sit very tight on the nest, so they only flush at the last possible moment. As long as the searcher is paying close attention, locating the nest is then relatively easy.

When faced with a landscape like this, looking for the nests of such an unobvious species as Twite can be a real headache. Here Andre gives some top tips on locating nests. Photo: Chris Wernham

Once the eggs have hatched, nest location becomes more difficult. Adults fly in from feeding grounds with food for the chicks and are very wary around the nest. When they eventually drop into the nest, they do so very quickly and are soon out and flying off again. Locating the nest at this time requires patience. One must follow the adults back to the general nest area and then expect to sit out several visits, trying to pinpoint the nest location. Time between feeding visits tends to be 20-30 minutes and normally both birds will return to the nest at the same time, with one standing guard while the other provisions the chicks. It is also important to be aware that after feeding chicks the parent may move silently under the vegetation, away from the nest, before emerging at a different location and flying off.

It is also important to be absolutely sure that one knows, within a few feet, where the nest is before actively searching for it. The vegetation that the nests are placed in, particularly bracken and heather, is very dense and difficult to search. If one has not narrowed the nest area down to less than a few feet, then locating the nest is exceptionally difficult and one also runs the risk of trampling the nest during the search effort. The adults also become much more wary once the area has been actively searched. However, if the search proves fruitless, it is advisable to move back to a safe distance and observe the nest area again. If the pair have been watching the activities of the nest searcher (and they often circle overhead, alarm calling and acting very nervously during an active search), then as soon as the observer has retreated they return to the area to check that their nest is okay. This then provides another opportunity to discern the exact location of the nest site.

While trying to locate a Twite nest, it is best to maintain an observation distance of at least 30 metres from the suspected nest site, and stay low to the ground, to avoid disturbing the birds.

Andre Raine

Tribute to Andy Madden - nest-recorder and ringer

Andy Madden, who died suddenly (aged 49) after a brief illness on 7 March 2005, was a dedicated nest-recorder and ringer in Merseyside Ringing Group.

Nest finding was the main focus of Andy's ringing year, mainly in and around the Welsh village of Pandy, where he visited almost every week and arranged to take two weeks of holiday each year to coincide with the peak of the season. He had built a great relationship with the people of Pandy and had free access anywhere in the village and surrounding farms. The quality of this relationship was especially demonstrated during the foot-and-mouth outbreak of 2001, when Andy was allowed to continue with all of his work. It was touching that the people of Pandy travelled to Merseyside *en masse* to attend Andy's funeral.

In his early years of nest recording, Andy completed his Nest Record Cards in the field and carried them round in his back pocket until one time when he was bending in front of a Dipper's nest and noticed out of the corner of his eye something floating away down the stream – his treasured NRCs! He did manage to retrieve them, however, and to ring the Dipper pulli.

He hosted a number of fellow-ringers wishing to learn his nest-finding skills. One recalls his gentle technique, sitting in the distance and having a smoke, giving a few hints whilst allowing the novice to find a nest whose location, in all likelihood, Andy already knew. Another trainee recalls a visit on 28 April 2002 when she found the latest nest of the resident Grey Wagtails, in a flooded cave on a pillar surrounded by deep and near-freezing water. Not to be deterred, Andy remembered that one of the locals owned a canoe, which was duly borrowed along with a plank of wood as a paddle. Needless to say, it was the trainee's role to stand in the canoe whilst Andy held the other end of an attached rope, but between them they accomplished the task: another brood of GREWAs was ringed, and its nest contents duly recorded. Andy maintained that all trainees have to do perilous stunts like that, just because he had to when he was one!

Lest these aquatic tales give the wrong impression, Andy got special pleasure from the flycatchers, nurturing colonies of PIEFL and SPOFL, and from his ability to find warbler nests, especially Garden Warblers. He was very consistent in his nest-finding: in the last four years he completed a total of 738 cards (183, 187, 196 and 172 in each year, and from a wide range of species - 53 to 57 species per year). Merseyside Ringing Group, and the Nest Records Scheme, have lost a great field ornithologist.

Prof. David Norman
Chairman of Merseyside RG

Lapwings and cropping regimes

Farming practices are changing and farmland birds are having to adapt their breeding behaviour accordingly. Two nest recorders report their observations of Lapwings breeding on farmland.

For the past twenty-seven years I have lived in a small village in the Ribble Valley in Lancashire, a lovely area with a good variety of birds, overshadowed by the bulk of Pendle Hill on whose summit Dotterel drop in each spring as they migrate further north. When I first came here, many fields had their breeding Lapwings (or 'Tewits' as we know them around here), but as summer haymaking moved to spring silage production, these fields became deserted. Then a number of years ago one local farmer began growing maize. Starting with one small field, he now has four large ones producing this crop. The maize is harvested for cattle fodder in late autumn after which the fields are left fallow for the winter. In early spring the bare earth attracts flocks of Lapwing and Curlew returning from their wintering grounds. The Curlew disperse to breed in the surrounding fields and most of the Lapwing move to the upland farms, but a few stay, attracted by the bare soil and emerging weeds.

Changing cropping regimes, over-grazing and loss of the agricultural mosaic are all impacting negatively on Lapwing breeding success. Photo: Hugh Insley

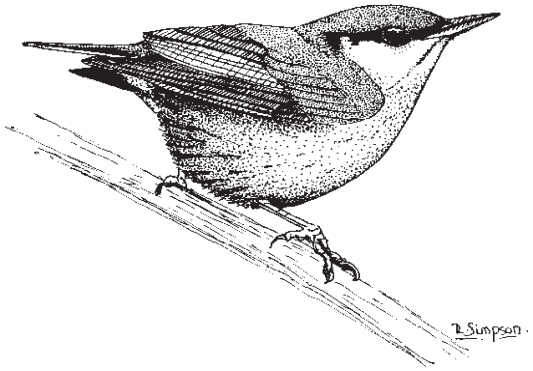
I start nest recording in early April, but by the last week of the month the nests tend to be destroyed during farming operations. By the end of the first week in May the seed is sown and the cultivations cease. The Lapwing, which throughout these operations have continued with their lovely aerial display, now settle down to lay a second clutch. These nests, hatch at the end of May or early June. I was particularly interested in one field which was ploughed for the first time in 2004. This field had never held any Lapwings to my knowledge, so I paid little attention to it until I noticed a couple of birds displaying in late May. After careful observation I was able to locate two nests on 28 May, one with three and the other with four eggs. Both hatched successfully on 14 June. By the time the chicks leave the nest the maize is growing rapidly, providing not only useful cover for the chicks but a useful source of insect food. I was able to watch their progress for a number of weeks. Oystercatchers too have been successful in these fields, having previously had problems with predation when nesting on their traditional beckside shingle beds.

Roger Dewhurst

This spring I have been following the fortunes of a number of Lapwing nests on stubble and spring barley up here on the Solway. Since Foot and Mouth, a number of farmers who lost their animals seem to have restocked at lower levels and are growing more spring barley and more maize under polythene to be harvested as fodder. As a result there are many more stubbles at the end of March/early April and these are attracting quite large numbers of breeding Lapwing and a few Oystercatchers. Unfortunately, ploughing and cultivation actually cause a high incidence of nest losses but the birds do re-lay.

On the grass areas that I watched, nest predation was high and chick survival was rather poor. Lapwing nests here seem to have a much higher survival rate on bare earth, notwithstanding the cultivation of the field where first clutch losses are high, and the chicks seem to thrive, so I assume that invertebrate food is abundant. We are making great efforts to persuade farmers to create wet meadows, which we need for Snipe and Redshank to breed on. If Lapwing really do so well on spring maize, then shouldn't we also be making an effort to get this message over to farmers and indeed help them to help Lapwing survive the cultivation period?

Frank Mawby



Drawing: R Simpson

Nest Record milestones passed in 2004

A number of milestones were reached for many species in 2004 including the following:

4000th	Nuthatch - Gordon Vaughan (GAV)
3000th	Peregrine - Geoff Horne (GXH)
1000th	Twite - Nick Wilkinson RSPB Twite Project (TWPR)
900th	Golden Plover - Pete Wilson (PEWI)
800th	Puffin - National Trust Farne Islands (NTF)
700th	Kingfisher - Kevin Briggs (KBR)
500th	Manx Shearwater - Clyde RG (CRG)
400th	Grasshopper Warbler - Chris Benson (CHBE)
200th	Hawfinch - Jerry Lewis (JMSL)

Nest Record Scheme totals 1939-2004 (as of 31/03/05)

Species	Code	2003	2004	TOTAL
Red-throated Diver	**RETDI**	**5**	**9**	**2371**
Black-throated Diver	BLTDI	3	4	224
Little Grebe	LITGR	34	50	2559
Great-crested Grebe	GRCGR	50	62	3874
Red-necked Grebe	RENGR			1
Slavonian Grebe	SLAGR		7	196
Black-necked Grebe	BLNGR			30
Fulmar	FULMA	82	136	6807
Manx Shearwater	MANSH	40	63	556
Leach's Petrel	LEAPE			7
Storm Petrel	STOPE			92
Gannet	GANNE			33
Cormorant	CORMO	96	45	2183
Shag	SHAG.	470	504	13901
Bittern	BITTE			39
Night Heron	NIGHE			3
Little Egret	LITEG		8	34
Grey Heron	**GREHE**	**221**	**269**	**7761**
Spoonbill	SPOON			2
Mute Swan	**MUTSW**	**114**	**138**	**6265**
Whooper Swan	WHOSW		1	20
Bar-headed Goose	BAHGO			5
Greylag Goose	GREGO	26	35	779
Snow Goose	SNOGO			8
Barnacle Goose	BARGO	4	4	67
Canada Goose	CANGO	105	158	4264
Egyptian Goose	EGYGO	2	6	105
Shelduck	SHELD	3	12	333
Ruddy Shelduck	RUDSH			2
Mandarin	MANDA	25	39	514
Wigeon	WIGEO			185
Gadwall	GADWA	9	11	178
Teal	TEAL.	1	1	231
Mallard	MALLA	123	106	9092
Pintail	PINTA			23
Garganey	GARGA		1	10
Shoveler	SHOVE	1	8	197
Red-crested Pochard	RECPO			1
Pochard	POCHA	9	9	198
Tufted Duck	TUFDU	11	21	1301
Scaup	SCAUP			1
Eider	EIDER	394	373	8908
Common Scoter	COMSC			43
Goldeneye	GOLDE	4	7	229
Red-breasted Merganser	REBME	1	4	285
Goosander	GOOSA	18	19	348
Ruddy Duck	RUDDU	2	8	170
Honey Buzzard	HONBU	11	11	95
Red Kite	REDKI	28	42	169
Marsh Harrier	MARHA	7	2	89
Hen Harrier	**HENHA**	**34**	**78**	**1793**
Pallid Harrier	PALHA			1
Montagu's Harrier	MONHA	1	1	55
Goshawk	GOSHA	64	70	984
Sparrowhawk	**SPARR**	**51**	**44**	**5436**
Common Buzzard	**BUZZA**	**234**	**236**	**6318**
Golden Eagle	GOLEA	20	24	590
Osprey	OSPRE	2	1	78
Kestrel	**KESTR**	**195**	**255**	**7931**
Merlin	**MERLI**	**92**	**99**	**3653**

Species	Code	2003	2004	TOTAL
Hobby	**HOBBY**	**33**	**31**	**897**
Peregrine	**PEREG**	**130**	**132**	**3083**
Red Grouse	REDGR	2	5	850
Ptarmigan	PTARM			131
Black Grouse	BLAGR	1		80
Capercaillie	CAPER	3	3	91
Red-legged Partridge	RELPA	4	2	470
Chukar	CHUKA			1
Grey Partridge	GREPA	5	5	861
Quail	QUAIL			16
Pheasant	PHEAS	23	18	2220
Golden Pheasant	GOLPH			6
Lady Amherst's Pheasant	LAAPH			1
Water Rail	WATRA		1	101
Corncrake	CORNC			31
Moorhen	**MOORH**	**277**	**280**	**23292**
Coot	COOT.	466	502	18638
Oystercatcher	**OYSTE**	**331**	**442**	**16801**
Black-winged Stilt	BLWST			2
Avocet	AVOCE	66	41	804
Stone Curlew	STOCU			435
Little Ringed Plover	LIRPL	84	86	2421
Ringed Plover	**RINPL**	**222**	**233**	**10166**
Kentish Plover	KENPL			19
Dotterel	DOTTE		1	257
Golden Plover	**GOLPL**	**4**	**4**	**902**
Lapwing	**LAPWI**	**335**	**425**	**26468**
Temminck's Stint	TEMST			1
Purple Sandpiper	PURSA			4
Dunlin	DUNLI		1	562
Ruff	RUFF.			4
Common Snipe	**SNIPE**	**15**	**39**	**1815**
Woodcock	WOODC	2	2	656
Black-tailed Godwit	BLTGO		2	38
Whimbrel	WHIMB			60
Curlew	**CURLE**	**25**	**13**	**3015**
Redshank	**REDSH**	**96**	**235**	**3235**
Greenshank	GRESH	7	8	179
Wood Sandpiper	WOOSA			2
Common Sandpiper	**COMSA**	**16**	**16**	**1560**
Red-necked Phalarope	RENPH			167
Arctic Skua	ARCSK			368
Great Skua	GRESK	2	9	417
Little Gull	LITGU			3
Black-headed Gull	BLHGU	150	32	9881
Mediterranean Gull	MEDGU			18
Common Gull	COMGU	66	127	5456
Lesser Black-backed Gull	LBBGU	5	47	4652
Herring Gull	HERGU	51	62	7299
Great Black-backed Gull	GBBGU	5	7	3472
Kittiwake	KITTI	566	555	15890
Lesser Crested Tern	LECTE			5
Sandwich Tern	SANTE	1		1814
Roseate Tern	ROSTE	78	75	1077
Common Tern	COMTE	251	197	7429
Arctic Tern	ARCTE	341	311	10938
Little Tern	LITTE	210	55	6363
Guillemot	GUILL	1		1112
Razorbill	RAZOR	51	16	1379
Black Guillemot	BLAGU	37	34	1625

Species	Code	2003	2004	TOTAL
Puffin	PUFFI	1	50	804
Rock Dove	ROCDO	7	55	573
Feral Pigeon	FERPI	45	28	2341
Stock Dove	**STODO**	**538**	**544**	**10075**
Wood Pigeon	WOODP	498	540	28515
Collared Dove+	**COLDO**	**134**	**190**	**5226**
Turtle Dove+	**TURDO**	**8**	**7**	**2045**
Ring-necked Parakeet	RINPA			49
Cuckoo	CUCKO	5	11	2177
Snowy Owl	SNOOW			2
Barn Owl	BAROW	718	944	8251
Little Owl+	**LITOW**	**69**	**80**	**2273**
Tawny Owl	**TAWOW**	**360**	**376**	**10838**
Long-eared Owl+	**LOEOW**	**9**	**15**	**767**
Short-eared Owl+	**SHEOW**	**4**	**4**	**401**
Nightjar	**NIJAR**	**73**	**46**	**1797**
Swift	SWIFT	141	194	2363
Kingfisher	**KINGF**	**17**	**13**	**701**
Hoopoe	HOOPO			1
Wryneck	WRYNE			23
Green Woodpecker+	**GREWO**	**15**	**17**	**455**
Gt Spotted Woodpecker+	**GRSWO**	**110**	**112**	**1655**
Lr Spotted Woodpecker+	**LESWO**	**5**	**4**	**217**
Woodlark	WOODL	55	35	1593
Skylark+	**SKYLA**	**56**	**56**	**8230**
Sand Martin+	**SANMA**	**127**	**300**	**2770**
Swallow	**SWALL**	**1734**	**2096**	**61908**
House Martin	HOUMA	162	196	10054
Tree Pipit+	**TREPI**	**38**	**33**	**1917**
Meadow Pipit	**MEAPI**	**123**	**119**	**9816**
Rock Pipit+	**ROCPI**	**21**	**11**	**857**
Yellow Wagtail+	**YELWA**	**9**	**7**	**1053**
Grey Wagtail+	**GREWA**	**124**	**103**	**6208**
Pied Wagtail	**PIEWA**	**199**	**192**	**10313**
Dipper	**DIPPE**	**193**	**154**	**10329**
Wren	**WREN.**	**214**	**229**	**16307**
Dunnock	**DUNNO**	**273**	**254**	**31053**
Robin	**ROBIN**	**344**	**324**	**21892**
Nightingale	**NIGAL**	**10**	**1**	**483**
Bluethroat	*BLUTH*			*1*
Black Redstart	BLARE	3		176
Redstart+	**REDST**	**91**	**107**	**6798**
Whinchat+	**WHINC**	**13**	**17**	**2451**
Stonechat+	**STOCH**	**65**	**218**	**3826**
Wheatear+	**WHEAT**	**36**	**34**	**3949**
Ring Ouzel+	**RINOU**	**5**	**14**	**1783**
Blackbird	**BLABI**	**1242**	**1270**	**133900**
Fieldfare	FIELD			7
Song Thrush	**SONTH**	**545**	**491**	**75562**
Redwing	REDWI			120
Mistle Thrush+	**MISTH**	**70**	**61**	**8191**
Cetti's Warbler	CETWA			30
Grasshopper Warbler+	**GRAWA**	**8**	**8**	**404**
Savi's Warbler	SAVWA			4
Sedge Warbler+	**SEDWA**	**39**	**56**	**4954**
Marsh Warbler	MARWA			168
Reed Warbler	**REEWA**	**388**	**622**	**16525**

Species	Code	2003	2004	TOTAL
Dartford Warbler	DARWA	4	3	499
Lesser Whitethroat+	**LESWH**	**19**	**10**	**924**
Whitethroat+	**WHITE**	**70**	**112**	**6384**
Garden Warbler+	**GARWA**	**41**	**32**	**2201**
Blackcap+	**BLACA**	**69**	**91**	**3788**
Wood Warbler+	**WOOWA**	**29**	**45**	**2586**
Chiffchaff+	**CHIFF**	**137**	**142**	**3549**
Willow Warbler+	**WILWA**	**147**	**145**	**13285**
Goldcrest+	**GOLDC**	**19**	**19**	**870**
Firecrest	FIREC			9
Spotted Flycatcher	**SPOFL**	**194**	**155**	**11444**
Pied Flycatcher	PIEFL	812	924	42367
Bearded Tit	BEATI	12	20	325
Long-tailed Tit+	**LOTTI**	**123**	**147**	**6211**
Marsh Tit+	**MARTI**	**26**	**42**	**1563**
Willow Tit+	**WILTI**	**6**	**2**	**490**
Crested Tit	CRETI	7	3	448
Coal Tit	COATI	82	85	5664
Blue Tit	**BLUTI**	**3944**	**4301**	**106656**
Great Tit	**GRETI**	**2978**	**3304**	**70281**
Nuthatch	**NUTHA**	**163**	**129**	**4019**
Treecreeper+	**TREEC**	**37**	**28**	**2614**
Short-toed Treecreeper	SHTTR			1
Golden Oriole	GOLOR			41
Red-backed Shrike	REBSH			256
Jay+	**JAY**	**8**	**18**	**1601**
Magpie+	**MAGPI**	**87**	**84**	**8136**
Chough	CHOUG	45	29	885
Jackdaw	**JACKD**	**252**	**259**	**8136**
Rook+	**ROOK.**	**110**	**52**	**14781**
Carrion Crow+	**CROW.**	**112**	**101**	**7904**
Hooded Crow	HOOCR	1	3	1144
Raven	**RAVEN**	**209**	**178**	**4352**
Starling	**STARL**	**230**	**276**	**16871**
House Sparrow	**HOUSP**	**306**	**458**	**14096**
Tree Sparrow	**TRESP**	**1373**	**1492**	**22682**
Scarlet Rosefinch	SCARO			1
Chaffinch	**CHAFF**	**310**	**328**	**23632**
Brambling	BRAMB			2
Serin	SERIN			1
Greenfinch	**GREFI**	**252**	**213**	**14875**
Goldfinch+	**GOLDF**	**57**	**68**	**3431**
Siskin	SISKI	1		87
Linnet	**LINNE**	**298**	**262**	**28620**
Twite+	**TWITE**	**107**	**178**	**1157**
Redpoll+	**REDPO**	**7**	**4**	**1356**
Parrot Crossbill	PARCR			4
Common/Scottish Crossbill	CROSS			154
Bullfinch+	**BULLF**	**44**	**48**	**5931**
Hawfinch	HAWFI		7	205
Snow Bunting	SNOBU			202
Yellowhammer+	**YELHA**	**149**	**111**	**7926**
Cirl Bunting	CIRBU			255
Reed Bunting+	**REEBU**	**55**	**67**	**8115**
Corn Bunting+	**CORBU**	**3**	**16**	**984**
NUMBER OF CARDS		28,433	31,264	1,320,359

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

Problem children

Sometimes finding the nest is the easy bit and knowing what to enter on the nest record is the challenge...

Swallow-in-a-basket

Back in June 2003, I was invited by a former work colleague to ring a brood of Swallows that had hatched in a typical nest on a beam in her garage. Five young were duly ringed and returned to the nest uneventfully. However, a few days later, my friend's brother phoned to say that the nest had become detached and he had found the chicks flapping around on the garage floor. Enterprisingly, he had gathered them up, placed them in a small basket and suspended this from the garage roof (see photo). Not only did this brood fledge successfully, but so too did three chicks from a second brood produced in August.

The basket was left in situ over the following winter and in early June I was invited to ring a brood of five youngsters that had been reared in it once again. In July, a second brood of four duly fledged and, yes, the phone rang again in early September—would I like to go and ring a third brood of four that had, no prizes for guessing, been reared in the basket! I shall scrutinize the next edition of the 'BTO Nestbox Guide' with much interest!

Simon Cox

Basket-nesting Swallows. Photo: Jean Jacobs

Foster Swallow

I have a Swallow pulli ringing project in my home area and keep nest records as I go around various stables. The following situation presented a puzzle when it came to entering the nest records!

On 22 July I recorded two eggs in a nest in a stable and a female sitting on five eggs in another stable used to store hay and horse rugs draped over elements of jumps. Checking how many eggs involved climbing over and shifting these things. On 5 August there were four eggs in the first stable with no adult seen but the other nest was damaged with lining hanging down and no adults about. I wrote a note to the stable owners saying that this nest had been predated.

On 19 August I returned and found adults feeding chicks in the four egg nest. They were ready to ring but I was surprised when I took four chicks from the nest, to find one very much bigger than the others (wing length 86 mm, compared with 54, 59 and 54 mm). Fortunately the stable owners arrived while I was there and so I got the explanation. When they read my note about the predated nest, they shifted the things in the rug/hay store and found one fit, two poorly and two dead chicks. They put the three live chicks in the nest with four eggs. When they next checked the nest they found that the two poorly chicks had died and saw the eggs were hatching. So the four chick pair had fed the extra chick since before their eggs hatched and raised it along with their little ones. A much more interesting story than if I had been asked what to do about the live chicks, because I would have put them in a plastic pot at their nest site for their own parents to rear.

Ruth Croger

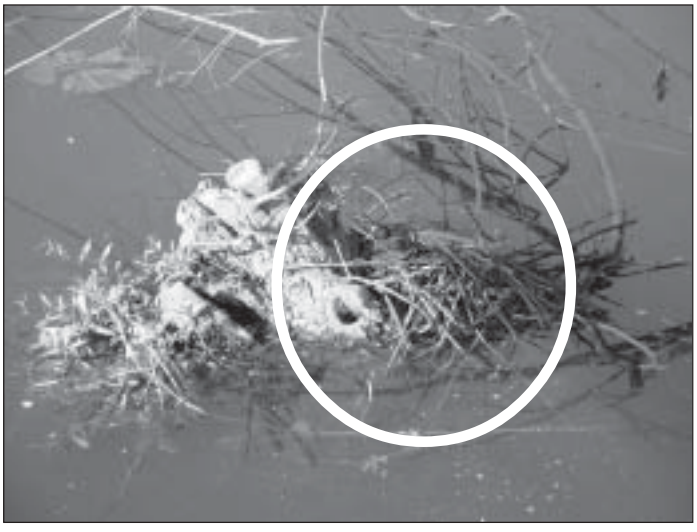
A more typical Swallow nest: Photo: George Higginbotham

Follow that Coot

Sometimes even recording the location of a nest can prove problematic. In an email to the Nest Records Unit in June 2004, Paul Roper at Rye Meads gave some details of a Coot nest that he had located:

"(The nest) is on a log on the River Lea and I first saw it floating down the river in Herts, but when I went back to take a photo it was in Essex. It had travelled at least 3 km (probably more). If it keeps going they will hatch somewhere on the Thames and probably fledge in north Kent! What grid reference should I put on the NRC?"

Unfortunately, we don't know the final outcome – possibly the only case where a nesting attempt hasn't been followed to completion because the nest recorder couldn't keep up with it!



Mobile Coot nest on the River Lea. Photo: Paul Roper

2004 weather report

David Glue summarises some effects of weather conditions on breeding success in 2004 across the country as reported by nest recorders and the general public.

Early nesting attempts include Muscovy and Ring-necked Parakeet

As daily temperatures in January were 1.2°C above average, news of a number of early nesting attempts was perhaps unsurprising. As is generally the case, reports of early Collared Dove, Woodpigeon and Blackbird clutches dominated, while those by Robin (Berks), Mistle Thrush (Merseyside) and Tawny Owl (Herts) in suburban settings were not too unexpected. However, it was most unusual to hear of Muscovy (Devon) and Ring-necked Parakeet (Bucks) egg-laying and of Barn Owl (Co Kerry) and Blue Tit (Kent) feeding young this early in the year. In early February a moist tropical south-westerly airstream swept record-breaking early spring migrants, notably hirundines, into the UK. Unseasonal temperatures prompted some Great Crested Grebe, Raven, Long-tailed Tit and doves to repair or build nests and start laying.

A winter chill in the first half of March appeared to have checked some nesting activity. Buzzard, Raven, Rook, Dipper and thrushes with nests decorated or lined were reported as deferring egg-laying short-term. Periodic downpours in mid- and late April led to flash-flooding in the Severn Complex and north-eastern parts, resulting in locally heavy losses of Black-headed Gull, duck, plovers and Reed Bunting nests. Rainstorms in the Ouse Washes washed away nests of more than 1,000 pairs of nesting waders, including Lapwing, Redshank, Snipe and Black-tailed Godwit. However, high temperatures in the final week of April, reaching 23°C on 24th in London, lead to a spate of nesting reports involving grebes, duck, tits, thrushes and finches.

Frost-free May-June benefits breeding passerines

High pressure built steadily over the UK during the first week of May, providing a settled month for the first time in three years - the driest since 1998, warmest and sunniest since 1991. Warm weather, moist soils and bright blue skies aided nesting residents and summer visitors alike, although disturbed weather in North Africa and the Mediterranean Basin disrupted the arrival of the latter to some extent. Daytime temperatures were 1-2°C above average across all regions, creating comfortable conditions for both nesting and nest recording. The mercury dipped to -4°C at Kinbrace (Sutherland) on 27th, but such events were apparently not severe enough to affect nesting passerines seriously.

Tits appeared to prosper, with a good uptake of nestboxes and modest-sized clutches reported from recorders across the country, while fewer accounts of Great Tit, Blue Tit, Long-tailed Tit and Pied Flycatcher nest predation were received relative to the previous year. Lush grass growth may well have benefited egg-laying Buzzard, Kestrel, Tawny Owl and Long-eared Owl by increasing rodent populations in some regions. Progressively drier conditions, especially in western parts (the West Country was effectively rain-free from 6-17th) reduced the availability of mud for hirundines building nests, but rain-bearing Atlantic fronts from the 28th relieved matters. A warm first-half to June, the 30°C mark topped on 7th, 8th and 14th, may have helped some Swallow, Dipper, Pied Wagtail and Spotted Flycatcher pairs to fledge first broods and quickly lay repeat clutches and reports from recorders involved in Barn Owl monitoring suggested that this species generally fared better than it had done in 2003.

However, all was not rosy for some later breeders. Winds veered north on 17 June, introducing sharp showers and a cooler theme. Temperatures dipped to -0.2°C at Shap (Cumbria) early on 20th, topping just 7.8°C at Loch Glascarnoch (Wester Ross) by day, with ground frost and temporary snow-lay in northern parts. Then, a record-breaking 'autumn' low swept across the UK on 7/8 July, with winds of 50 knots and damaging cool downpours. Initially, the showery regime helped some thrushes, Robin, Wren, chats, pipits and hirundines to rear successive broods. Later, however, strong winds up-rooted crown-heavy trees, leading to reported brood losses involving Grey Heron, Cormorant, Hobby and doves. One notable casualty was the first modern-day nesting attempt by Osprey in Wales, which collapsed in the exceptional summer storms. Swamped nests of ground-nesting divers, Avocet, Golden Plover, Merlin, and Nightjar were observed, torrential showers compounded by daily temperatures 0.7°C below average in July.

A poor year for east coast seabird colonies

Concerns mount for the future of the world famous North Sea seabird populations, with Orkney experiencing the "worst year in living memory", recorders in Shetland reporting a "terrible" season and those monitoring colonies on Bempton Cliffs (East Yorks) suggesting that it was the "worst season on record". Arctic Tern, Kittiwake, Arctic Skua, Great Skua and auks returned to colonies late and in reduced numbers, with widespread suspension of breeding and limited breeding success reported. These trends were only apparent for colonies breeding on the east coast, however, with west coast colonies seemingly unaffected. Debate revolved around climate change, and a northward shift of plankton and fish prey allied to warmer waters.

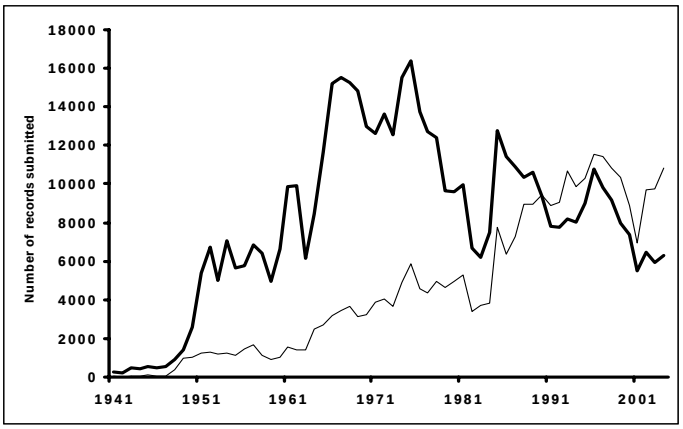
Many seabird species such as Puffin suffered during the 2004 breeding season. It is often difficult to explain such disasters, though the non-availability of Sandeels (a load of which this Puffin is carrying) is often highlighted as the main culprit. Photo: Colin Varndell

On the positive side, reports of healthy families of Great Tit, Pied Flycatcher and Nuthatch fledging in the third week of July were likely to be the product of successful repeat broods. Although conditions in August were warm, with day and night temperatures 1.3°C above average, slow-moving Atlantic depressions brought moisture-laden tropical intense deluges, with all regions enduring double the monthly rainfall. The wettest August since 1956 may have led to a reduction in repeat nesting operations among thrushes, warblers, Spotted Flycatcher, Nightjar and hirundines, but glorious Indian summer weather in early September is likely to have permitted a few later broods to fledge successfully.

Submission trends in 2004

Open-nesting species

As you can see from the now-familiar graph comparing the submission trends for open-nesting and cavity-nesting species, the good news is that the decline in the former seems to have stabilised over the last few years – the bad news is it's still at the level that it was in the 1950's and early 60's.



Submission trends for open-nesting (thick line) and cavity-nesting (thin line) passerines 1941 to present.

The table opposite compares submission totals for 20 open-nesting species in 2004 with the mean submission total across the preceding 10-year period (1994-2003). The take home message is that the numbers of records we're receiving even for common open nesting species such as Blackbird, Wren and Robin are falling as well, so the submission trends are not simply the result of declining numbers of warblers, finches and buntings in the UK.

This year's edition of *Nest Record News* contains a wealth of information about nest-finding written by those who practice the art. If these articles inspire you to look for, and help you to find, even a single nest of an open-nesting species this year, then please submit it to the Nest Record Scheme. As you can see from the species totals table on pages 10-11 of this issue of *Nest Record News*, the records received for many species of lark, pipit, warbler, finch and wagtail fall below the minimum monitoring target of 150 per annum, so every record received really will be incredibly valuable.

	No. records received in 2004	No. records received relative to1994-2003 mean
Blackbird	1270	-223
Song Thrush	491	-177
Linnet	262	-135
Chaffinch	328	-128
Skylark	56	-121
Wren	229	-90
Robin	324	-83
Mistle Thrush	61	-61
Dunnock	254	-60
Willow Warbler	145	-51
Woodlark*	35	-49
Whinchat	17	-45
Long-tailed Tit	147	-42
Bullfinch	48	-39
Pied Wagtail	192	-34
Grey Wagtail	103	-31
Ring Ouzel	14	-27
Garden Warbler	32	-27
Sedge Warbler	56	-25
Treecreeper	28	-25

* Schedule 1 species

MOST WANTED! Can you help?

The species listed below form part of the BTO's Integrated Population Monitoring (IPM) programme. We need your help if we are to reach our target of 150 records, to enable us to monitor these birds effectively. If you find these birds in suitable habitat this season, please have a go at locating and recording the nests.

In addition, if you are particularly adept at finding nests of these species, we would be pleased to hear about your techniques! Short articles would be particularly welcome (by email if at all possible). Your contribution will of course be acknowledged in any material produced for new recorders. Many thanks in advance.

Blackcap
Bullfinch
Carrion Crow
Chiffchaff
Collared Dove
Common Sandpiper
Common Snipe
Corn Bunting
Curlew
Garden Warbler
Goldfinch
Grey Wagtail
Jay
Lesser Whitethroat
Little Owl
Long-tailed Tit
Magpie
Marsh Tit
Mistle Thrush
Mute Swan
Nightjar
Redshank
Redstart
Reed Bunting
Ring Ouzel
Rook
Sedge Warbler
Skylark
Sparrowhawk
Stonechat
Tree Pipit
Treecreeper
Turtle Dove
Wheatear
Whinchat
Whitethroat
Willow Tit
Willow Warbler
Wood Warbler
Yellow Wagtail
Yellowhammer

Sparrowhawk chicks well on the way to fledging. Photo: Derek Belsey

News Round Up

Medals and conferences in 2004-05

One of the highlights of the 2004 Swanwick conference came with the presentation of the Tucker Medal, given for "outstanding service to the trust", to David Warden, one of our most prolific nest recorders. Since joining the BTO as a teenager in 1948, David has submitted over 14,000 nest record cards of 103 different species. Since the 1970's he has specialised in recording Reed Warbler nests, though not to the exclusion of all other species, and has completed almost 3,500 records for this species alone. Not content with supporting the NRS, David is also a ringer and participates in a number of other BTO surveys. Congratulations, David, on an extremely well deserved reward.

Swanwick 2004 also hosted the second annual Nest Recorders Meeting, which saw over 60 people attend. In fact, the response has been so positive that the meeting now warrants its own drinks trolley – truly a benchmark of success. As is now customary, the meeting kicked off with a series of short talks from nest recorders and ended with a lively discussion session.

Peter Robinson started proceedings with a talk about his own nest recording project and also about his experiences helping the BBC get the necessary shots for their "Bill Oddie Goes Wild" programme. Mark Fletcher followed this with an insight into finding nests on your local patch, showing us that even taking the dog for a walk could provide fantastic recording opportunities. Next, David Norman presented an account of his experiences of nest recording as part of a large team of people, in this case the Merseyside Ringing Group of which he is chairman. Finally, George Candelin gave a presentation summarising the research that he has been carrying out on the Swift population monitored by the Edward Grey Institute in Oxford. As usual, all talks were extremely informative and expertly presented, so thanks to all the speakers for their time and hard work.

Another Nest Recorders Meeting is planned for Swanwick Conference on the 3-4 December and, thanks to popular demand, an equivalent meeting has been scheduled for this year's Scottish Ringers' meeting at Kingussie on the 18-20 November. We're currently looking for nest recorders to give 5-10 minute presentations at either meeting, so if you'd like the opportunity to let other people know about your work or to initiate discussion about your findings, then please contact us at (nest.records@bto.org).

Malcolm Calvert presenting David Warden with his well-earned Tucker Medal. Photo: Derek Toomer

IPMR update

Forty-nine percent of the 31,000+ records submitted to the NRS in 2004 were sent in electronically via IPMR, an absolute increase of approximately 2,500 records relative to 2003. The proportion of recorders using IPMR to submit their nest records also rose from 33% to 39%.

Mark Cubitt has been working hard on the new version (v2.2) of IPMR, due to be released later this summer, which is currently being tested by a group of experienced users. Many of the enhancements in v2.2 have concerned the nest recording side of the program – some of the major changes include:

- An effort recording form has been included which is automatically incorporated in the nest records submission file when it is created. As we can generate the total number of records of each species directly from the submission files, the paper NRS Summary Sheet is now obsolete for people submitting by IPMR, so that's one less bit of paperwork to fill in. In addition to using the standard codes, the new style form also gives you the opportunity to record effort in terms of number of hours spent recording or number of visits made to the site.
- A quick 'Go to nest record number' function on the Nest Visits form that makes it easier to navigate between records.
- The nest outcome recording systemhas been revised, allowing the recorder to mark records as complete when they are ready for inclusion in the submission file.
- A control data file has been added to the NRS submission file to simplify the importing process for group secretaries.
- Some validation has been added to the Nest Visits form, allowing recorders to identify nests at which some aspect of breeding has been 'unusual', e.g. if incubation periods are shorter than predicted for the species or if chicks are fledging sooner than expected. This will both flag up attempts that are of particular interest and draw attention to any typing mistakes.

In addition, there are a number of general enhancements, such as the simplification of the installation system, and lots of improvements to the ringing side of things too. For a full list of changes in the new version, visit Mark's website at http://www.btoipmr.f9.co.uk/ipmrv2_2.html (this list will appear on the BTO web site when IPMR v2.2 is generally released).

Once again, a big thank you to everyone who has switched over to using IPMR – it has made an incredible difference to the task of handling and computerising the data here at The Nunnery so we can concentrate on raising the profile of the NRS and providing more support to nest recorders.

Thanks also to Mark Cubitt for the fantastic effort he's put in to developing the software, to Ian Spence for writing and revising the user guides and to all the testers who have provided feedback and comments during the development of the nest recording function in the new version, particularly – James Cracknell, Tom Kittle, Jan Legg, Jan Pritchard and Tony Wilkinson.

Reed Warbler nest. Photo: John Cranfield

Top recorders in 2004

National Trust, Farne Islands (NTF) 1,649 records ■ Brook, Cooke, Chedzoy & Caldwell (BCCC) 1,635 ■ Bob Danson (RD) 946 ■ Merseyside RG MRG 856 ■ David Warden (DWA) 688 ■ Birklands RG (BRG) 622 ■ Lancaster & District Birdwatching Society (LDBW) 550 ■ Kevin Briggs (KBR) 518 ■ Geoff Myers (GWM) 412 ■ Louch & Thompson (L/T) 368 ■ Ivan Proctor (IPR) 353 ■ Bob Swann (RLS) 350 ■ The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust Welney (WWTW) 349 ■ Peter Roe (PER) 340 ■ Neville Powell (NBP) 336 ■ Sorby-Breck RG (SOBG) 331 ■ Spence, Stratford & Brenchley (IMS) 316 ■ North West Norfolk RG (NWNR) 313 ■ John Lloyd (JVL) 301 ■ Paul Holness (PRH) 292 ■ Reginald Lanaway (RJL) 289 ■ Max Meadows (MOM) 287 ■ Peter Robinson (PJR) 271 ■ John Lawton Roberts (JALR) 265 ■ Gordano Valley RG (GVRG) 260 ■ Derek Gruar (DEG) 256 ■ Northumbria RG (NRG) 235 ■ Diane Bowes (DJB) 233 ■ Tees Ringing Group (TERG) 232 ■ Alan Old (ABO) 227 ■ Anne Goodall (AEG) 220 ■ Lewis & Roberts (JMSL) 217 ■ East Dales RG (EDRG) 212 ■ Stanford RG (STAR) 212 ■ Nigel Westwood (NJW) 210 ■ Souder RG (SDR) G208 ■ David Oliver (DWO) 207 ■ Bob Stevens (RS) 199 ■ Rye Meads RG (RMRG) 194 ■ John Callion (JCA) 190 ■ Rod Smith (ROS) 189 ■ John & Chas Holt (J&CH)185 ■ Fenwick, Fenwick, Grainger & Richardson (JR) 184 ■ Neil Winter (NEW)177 ■ Dave Hazard (DAVH) 167 ■ Isabel, Philip & David Hildred (IPDH) 167 ■ Applegarth Wildlife Sanctuary (AWLS) 158 ■ David Myers (DAM) 157 ■ Calf of Man Bird Observatory (COM) 152 ■ Peter Johnson (PEJJ) 152 ■ Bristol Naturalists' Society (BNS) 151 ■ Cook & Netherwood (MCMN) 150 ■ Edward Grey Institute (EGI) 147 ■ Peter Wilson (PEW) I146 ■ Euan Cameron (EDC) 143 ■ Peter Goodlad (PG) 143 ■ John Massie (JMA) 140 ■ Rye Bay RG (RBRG) 140 ■ Treswell Wood IPM Group (TWIG) 140 ■ Robert Smith (SMI) 139 ■ Jim Hodson (JMH) 138 ■ Garth Lowe (GAL) 134 ■ English Nature Devon Team (PIR) 128 ■ RSPB Twite Project (TWPR) 128 ■ Doug Trigg (DOTR) 127 ■ Ruth Croger (RUCR) 126 ■ Neil Brown (NGB) 122 ■ Ronald Turkington (RHT) 122 ■ Spurn BO (SPBO) 122 ■ Alan Ball (AGBA) 119 ■ Frank Mawby (FJM) 118 ■ Ted Cowley (EXC) 116 ■ Manx RG (MANX) 115 ■ Paul Robinson (PARO) 114 ■ Michael Russell (MDR) 113 ■ Rob Husbands (ROXH) 113 ■ Alan Lowe (ALA) 111 ■ Bob Coyle (ROCO) 108 ■ Derek Holman (DHOL) 106 ■ Julian Driver (JDR) 106 ■ Neil Croton (NCRO) 102 ■ Mike Rogers (MHR) 100 ■

Orford Ness pullus ringing course

The inaugural Orford Ness pullus ringing course, run by Steve Piotrowski and Dave Cormack, was held on 9-12 July 2004 and hosted eight participants. A typical day began with a mist netting session before breakfast, after which the group visited the gull colony and the pools where ducks congregate so that participants could ring the pulli. Visits to nests and wader pulli at known locations gave participants the chance to simultaneously gain experience of ringing and nest recording and also provided opportunities to search for other nests. Evening talks included an overview of the NRS given by the Nest Records Officer and presentations on nest location and marking techniques given by the course operators.

In all, 10 non-passerine and 12 passerine species were ringed, totalling 306 birds of which 233 were pulli. Lesser Black-backed Gull pulli accounted for 171 of those ringed, together with 17 Herring Gull pulli, 20 Shelduck pulli and broods of Reed Bunting, Meadow Pipit and Pied Wagtail.

A similar course is planned for 8-11 July this year and spaces are still available. If you'd like to take part, contact Dave Cormack (Dave.Cormack@nationaltrust.org.uk, Tel. 01394 450900) for more details.

The Orford Ness course included the ringing of such species as Ringed Plover (above) and Pochard (below). Photos: Steve Piotrowski

Interesting pullus ringing recoveries

If you're interested in what life has in store for your chicks after they leave the nest - and want to generate even more valuable data for the BTO – you can join the growing number of nest recorders who are training to ring their nestlings. As well as contributing to monitoring you can also get fascinating results. This year we've had several interesting recoveries of birds ringed in the nest, including a couple of Pied Flycatchers with totally different aims in life. One was ringed in Cumbria, one in Powys, and both were found 10 months later – the first 700 km to the east in Germany, the other 2,300 km to the south in Morocco.

A nestling Sedge Warbler ringed in Aberdeenshire was caught 44 days later by ringers in southern France, and two Swallows ringed in the nest were caught in Spain, on their way back from their first winter in Africa. In comparison to those distances, the 103 km in 139 days travelled by a Blue Tit from Lincolnshire looks insignificant – but no nestling Blue Tit recorded has ever travelled so far so quickly before. Another Blue Tit ringed as a pullus managed to survive for a respectable six years before it was found dead in February this year.

As a whole, pulli account for only about a fifth of all ringing records, but they are among the most valuable because their ages and place of origin are known precisely. If you are interested in training to ring, or you would like to find someone to ring your nestlings, please contact Mark Grantham (mark.grantham@bto.org) or myself (kate.risely@bto.org) in the Ringing Unit.

Kate Risely

Constant Nest Monitoring Plot Progress report 2004

In total, 16 nest recorders participated in the third pilot year of the Constant Nest Monitoring Plot (CNMP) project, between them covering a total of 45 populations of 14 different species at 33 plots:

Swallow – 10 plots, **Spotted Flycatcher** – 9 plots, **Coot –** 5 plots, **Moorhen –** 5 plots, **Tree Sparrow –** 3 plots, **Stock Dove** – 2 plots, **Collared Dove** – 1 plot, **Blackbird –** 2 plots, **Robin –** 2 plots, **Common Sandpiper** – 1 plot, **Nightjar –** 1 plot, **Woodlark** – 1 plot, **Song Thrush –** 1 plot, **Reed Warbler –** 1 plot.

This project represents a pioneering attempt to assess the frequency of repeat brooding across a variety of species at a national scale. Now that the majority of plots have been covered for at least two years, we can for the first time begin to look at annual differences in the mean number of broods attempted per pair.

So, what were the results? Well, the first interesting thing to note was that for the majority of species the mean number of attempts in 2004 seemed to be very similar to that in 2003, although we should note that as yet we really do not have much of an idea about the values for a 'normal' year or what the 'typical' variation in the number of breeding attempts is annually. Across all species, the majority of pairs attempted an average of between one and two broods each, although Stock Dove, Collared Dove, Blackbird and Tree Sparrow all managed at least three attempts per pair at some sites.

Of the species for which we have information from the greatest number of individual sites, the mean number of Swallow broods per pair seemed to have been fairly consistent with the previous year across the majority of sites, as was the case for Spotted Flycatcher. The preliminary trends for Moorhen and Coot appeared to be more variable, with the mean number of broods increasing substantially in some parts of the country but decreasing in others, and the same was true of Tree Sparrow. Interestingly, Stock Dove appeared to have a greater number of broods per pair at both CNMP sites where the species is monitored.

Many thanks to the following recorders for taking part in CNMP in 2004: **Alan Burgess, John Clarke, Ruth Croger, John Farnsworth, Peter Goodlad, Alan Hall, Sally Hall, Colin Hull, John Little, Jim Martin, Geoff Myers, Mike Russell, Jim Terry, Nigel Westwood, Neil Winter, Derek Yalden.** We're very sorry to hear that John Clarke has had to scale down his Spotted Flycatcher survey, which has been running since 2001, under doctor's orders. He has, however, been able to produce a fantastic book about his work which is sure to inspire all who read it – see the review on page 19 for more details. If you're interested in taking part in the CNMP scheme yourself, email us at nest.records@bto.org and we can send you a CNMP instruction sheet outlining the aims of the project and the methodology.

CES results for 2004

As the name implies, ringers at Constant Effort Sites (CES) standardise their catching efforts, visiting the area once every ten days between May and September and erecting the same number of nets in the same places for the same amount of time. This means that catches are directly comparable from one year to the next, allowing both changes in adult numbers and in productivity, measured as the ratio of adults to juveniles caught, to be monitored annually for 25 species inhabiting the scrub and reedbed habitats in which most sites are located. It is important to note that CES provides a different but complementary measure of productivity to the NRS. While the latter measures breeding performance per nesting attempt, the CES provides a combined measure over all attempts in a season, incorporating the effects of fledgling losses immediately after leaving the nest.

The CES results for 2004 were calculated from a sample of 105 sites nationally, the majority of which (81) were located in England. Numbers of adult Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Whitethroat, Blackcap, Willow Warbler and Reed Bunting all increased, relative to 2003. The five warbler species all had a relatively poor breeding year in 2003, so this increase in numbers might suggest that wintering conditions in Africa were favourable, resulting in reduced mortality. Interestingly, significantly fewer individuals of a number of resident species, including Dunnock, Blackbird, Song Thrush and Blue Tit, were caught in 2004 than had been in 2003.

The weather during spring and summer 2004 was incredibly varied. April and May were generally fine months, but good weather was interspersed by periods of heavy rain and flooding, particularly in the north and west of the country. Rain and gales were also prevalent in many parts of the country in late June, and early July and August was the wettest for nearly 40 years in England. Given these mixed conditions, it is fairly surprising that populations of many species monitored at CES sites seemed to fare pretty well when it came to fledging offspring.

The ratio of juvenile to adult birds in 2004 was significantly higher than in 2003 (which admittedly was a very poor year) for 11 species: Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Cetti's Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit and Great Tit. Resident insectivores in particular had a good breeding season compared to 2003, although Robin productivity was slightly below the long-term mean (as calculated over the period 1983-2002). Blackbirds started the season poorly with some failure of first broods but subsequent broods were more successful and overall productivity was 10% above the long-term mean. Song Thrush had an excellent breeding season with productivity 40% above the long-term mean.

Apparently hungry Song Thrush nestlings. CES results suggest that 2004 was a relatively productive year for this species. Photo: Simon Thurgood

Only Willow Warbler and Goldfinch showed a statistically significant decline in productivity between 2003 and 2004 and for both species breeding success was below the long-term mean. Willow Warbler shows a long-term decline in productivity although in 2002 and 2003 productivity was actually above average. Goldfinch shows quite large annual variation in breeding success and has shown a shallow increase over the last ten years.

As with all ongoing BTO projects, the success of the CES Scheme depends entirely on the dedication, enthusiasm and skill of its volunteers. We are grateful to all the ringers and helpers who participated in the scheme in 2004.

Dawn Balmer

Boxing clever – nest site designs on the Internet

Those of you who have examined the BTO Nestbox Guide, published last year, will have realised that it contains designs for far fewer species than did its forerunners, allowing us to focus in more detail on those that will be most frequently used. What about the other species? Is this a case for the non-passerine discrimination commission?

Well, those of you wishing to construct nest boxes or platforms for species at the more exotic end of the avian spectrum need panic no longer. The sections of text and diagrams that were not incorporated into the revised guide are now available in a .pdf document which can be downloaded from the Internet at www.bto.org/notices/nestbox_guide.htm. In addition, some thumbnail sketches have been added which give a more immediate idea of the dimensions of the box than did the old guide. The designs outlined include:

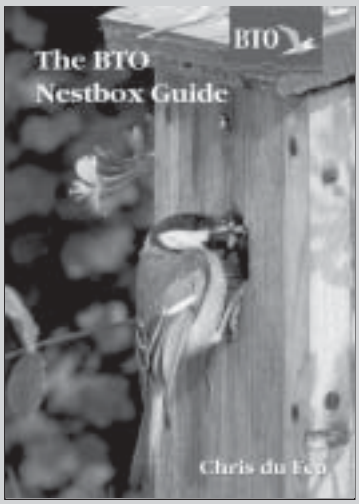
- Chimney boxes for Tawny Owl
- Tunnels for Kingfisher and Sand Martin
- Tern rafts
- Raptor platforms
- Artificial islands

Individual species notes about the preferred artificial nest sites of a range of divers and grebes, wildfowl, seabirds, raptors, waders, near passerines and less common passerines are also provided. The eventual aim is to build a nestbox area of the BTO website containing separate sections for each species.

All past editions of the BTO Nestbox Guide have relied on the generous contributions from BTO members who have given freely of their hard-won, first-hand knowledge. The proposed area on the web site will continue in this tradition. It will, most likely, be built one species at a time according to available information (and time). I hope the availability of information for the old guide is of use to you. I also hope its publications will serve as encouragement to continue in the tradition of nestbox innovation and I look forward to future contributions, which can be sent via the BTO Nest Records Officer at nest.records@bto.org.

Chris du Feu

The new BTO Nestbox Guide by Chris du Feu



Previous versions of Chris' nestbox guides have always been in great demand. Released during National Nest Box Week 2004, this all-new, 78 page, full colour version is for both beginners and the more experienced. It concentrates on the commoner nestbox species and provides advice on construction and siting.

Price £8.99 (incl. p&p).
Please make cheques payable to 'BTO Services', and send to BTO (Nestbox Guide), The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU.

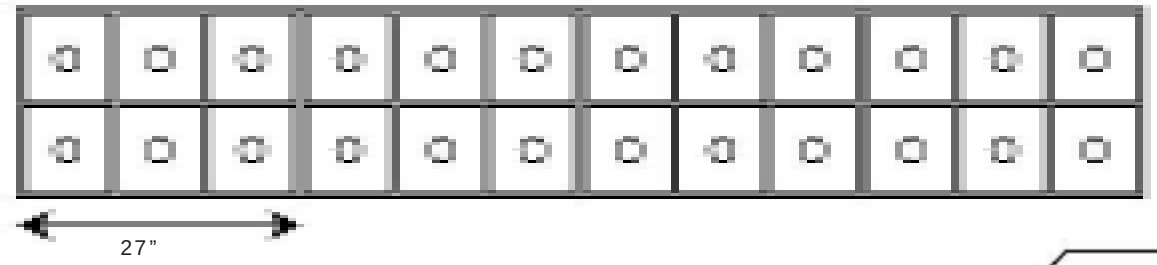
Dimensions for a 24 box Sparrow Terrace

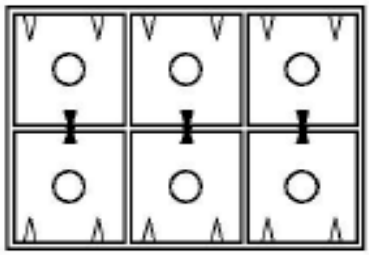
The House Sparrow Terrace at WWT Llanelli comprises four separate blocks, each containing six compartments. The four blocks were installed butting up to each other, giving an overall configuration of 24 boxes in two tiers. The outer frame of each block is ¾" thick. The front of each compartment is 7¾" across, and 6" in height, and fits flush when closed. Each compartment is 7¼" wide, 6 5/8" high and 8¼" deep and the hole diameter is about 1 9/16" (37-38mm). There is no back to the terrace, the four blocks butting up to the wooden side of the Flamingo House. The overall width of each of the four blocks is 27", including the thickness of the outer frame.

Each of the four blocks is supported by strut type supports, one at either end of the block, making eight supports in all for the 24-box terrace. The front of each compartment is hinged at the top (upper tier) or bottom (lower tier). Across the mid line between the upper and lower tiers, there is a simple catch to lock the fronts of each box in place.

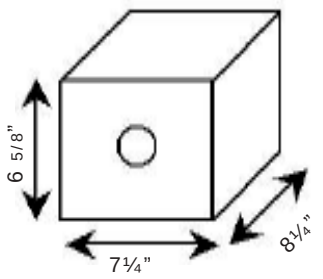
Incidentally, it took three years before there was substantial colonisation of the terrace. In the first two years, only two of the boxes were occupied.

Tony Jenkins





The diagrams here show:
- the completed terrace with 4 blocks, each of 6 compartments (above);
- the design of each individual block, showing the placement of hinges and securing catches (left);
- the dimensions of each individual compartment (right)



Reviews & Requests

Book Reviews

Reed Warblers: at Rostherne Mere
By Malcolm Calvert
English Nature, Shrewsbury
ISBN 1 85716 871 2.
144pp.
£10.00

Malcolm Calvert has been studying the Reed Warblers at Rostherne Mere near Knutsford from 1972 and has completed hundreds of Nest Record Cards and ringed thousands of birds since then. This must surely rank as one of the all-time classic volunteer long-term projects and the results in this book are fascinating. Malcolm has produced an extremely readable account of the bird, the place and his studies. It is absolutely full of information and nicely produced with many illustrations. This is not only a must-have book for Reed Warbler enthusiasts but also for anybody interested in British birds, full stop!

The Spotted What!?
By John Clarke
Plum Tree Publishing, Worcester
ISBN 0-9533646-2-3.
73pp.
£5.99

John Clarke has become known as the *The Flycatcher Man* near where he lives because he has managed to inveigle the populations of nine villages in and around Worcestershire to keep track of the Spotted Flycatchers nesting in their gardens! This is a superb little book that is not only full of information about Spotted Flycatchers but also recounts amusing tales of John's interactions with the people he came across as part of his study. The book contains a wealth of information about this little studied species and will provoke you to want to find out more. Written by a keen nest recorder, and presenting a comparison of John's data with those from the rest of the Nest Record Scheme, I heartily recommend this book as one you will find difficult to put down!

Humphrey Crick

The National Nest Reference Collection

Last year was another good year for building up our collection of the nests of British breeding birds. We now have some 900 nests and over 200 photographic images of nests, representing 125 species. Many thanks again to all those who have helped us by sending nests or allowing us to copy photographic slides or prints. Information on the nests held, although not yet the images, may be found on the Hunterian Museum web site using the online search facility at http://www.huntsearch.gla.ac.uk/.

In *Nest Record News* of April last year, the Editor mentioned that we lacked nests of Bearded Tit. Two readers kindly responded with nests from Humberside in the East and Leighton Moss in the West. We also obtained, from studies being conducted in the Hebrides, a small group of Twite nests, another species I was keen to have represented. An unexpected bonus was two Hawfinch nests, also from Scotland.

We continue, however, to enhance collections of nests already represented, in order to illustrate the range of within-species variation. We were, for example, able to benefit again from an RSPB study on the breeding of Yellow Wagtail and from a similar study by the Institute of Ecology and Hydrology, Banchory, on the Meadow Pipit. We are keen to give good homes to nests with associated breeding records coming from similar studies. So do bear us in mind.

What are my wishes for 2005? Well we still have no nests of Collared Dove, Nightingale, Grasshopper Warbler or Corn Bunting; they would be nice additions. Have a good nest recording season! For further information do get in touch with me at:

Division of Environmental and Evolutionary Biology
University of Glasgow G12 8QQ
Tel. 0141 330 4779
Email: M.Hansell@bio.gla.ac.uk

Mike Hansell

Request for Peregrine prey data

Raptor Biologists in New York City are investigating the extent to which Peregrines hunt at night. They would greatly appreciate receiving reports of direct observations of Peregrines in Europe capturing birds at night including date, time, weather conditions, prey captured (if known), and any other relevant details. Also, they would like to obtain lists of birds found as prey/remains at Peregrine nest sites or under prominent perches for species that migrate or display at night, such as Woodcock, Jack Snipe, Water Rail and Corncrake. Please contact:

Dr Robert DeCandido
1831 Fowler Avenue
Bronx, New York 10462-3708
USA
Email: rdcny@earthlink.net

Species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

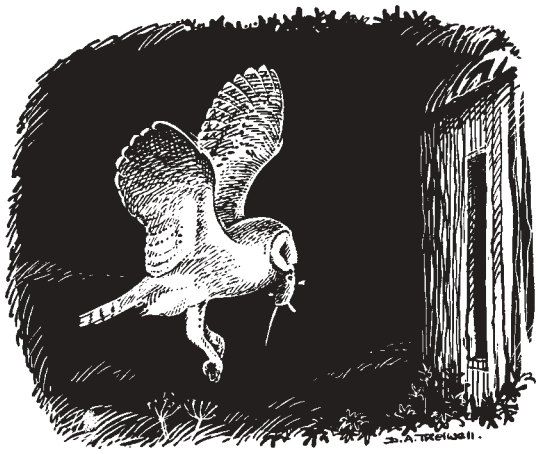
The species listed in italics in the tables on pages 8 and 9 are specially protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended by the Environmental Protection Act 1990.
You will require a licence to visit the nests of these species.

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

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

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

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



Useful email addresses:

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

Useful web addresses:

BTO website: http://www.bto.org/
NRS web pages: http://www.bto.org/survey/nest_records/index.htm
IPMR program and help guide downloads: http://www.bto.org/ringing/ringsoft/ipmr/ipmrdownloadsv2.htm
Wider Countryside Report: http://www.bto.org/birdtrends/
NRS Email Forum pages (need to sign up to Yahoo! Groups first): http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nrsforum/

Nest Record Scheme contacts

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

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

David Glue (BTO Research Biologist) - Provides advice based on a long involvement with the Scheme.

Mandy Andrews (Secretary) - Provides secretarial support to the Scheme. She is reponsible for sending out acknowledgements, replacement recording materials and also the NRS 'Starter Packs'.

The Nest Records Unit, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU
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Web site: www.bto.org
Registered Charity No. 216652
Birdwatching and Science in Partnership