

New England Wood: nestbox report 2019

Introduction

During the nesting season of 2019 there were 34 nestboxes in New England Wood, all suitable for use by tits and nuthatches. A reasonable proportion of these were used, and great tits and blue tits nested successfully. This report details the use of the nestboxes by the different species.

How many nestboxes were used and by which species?

At the beginning of the 2019 nesting season, only four wooden nestboxes were in reasonable repair, all with small entrance holes making them suitable for use by tits and nuthatches. In recent years many of the old wooden boxes have rotted and fallen from the trees or been damaged by squirrels or woodpeckers. In addition to the wooden boxes, there were 30 woodcrete boxes available for use, all with small entrance holes. All 34 boxes were checked and cleaned out before the beginning of the nesting season. Of the 34 nestboxes present in the wood, 26 were positioned during the 2019 nesting season so as to allow safe and easy inspection without the use of a ladder. Of these 26 nestboxes (all woodcrete boxes except two), 14 were used by great tits, five were used by blue tits, and three were used by unidentified tits (most probably great tits or blue tits). No boxes were used by marsh tits and four boxes were not used at all.



Photographs illustrating the variety of nest-building materials used by great tits and blue tits in New England Wood: sheep wool and plastic twine strands (left;) and badger hair (right).

How many nesting attempts were successful?

The 26 accessible nestboxes were inspected regularly throughout April, May and June. The first eggs were laid on 2 April, slightly earlier than observed in the previous year. By 27 April some great tits and blue tits were sitting on clutches of up to 10 eggs. Sixteen nests successfully fledged at least some young at the end of May. Six nests were not successful for the following reasons: one entire brood of young were found dead soon after hatching; one entire brood of young were found dead just before they would have been ready to fledge; one very late brood of only two young were found still in the nest in June but were subsequently found dead; one clutch of six eggs was abandoned; in one nest eggs were never laid; and one box was not inspected after the beginning of the season because a nest partly constructed by tits was taken over by nesting wood mice.

What are the plans for the 2020 nesting season?

All of the 34 available nestboxes have already been checked and cleaned in readiness for the 2020 nesting season, and some have been repositioned to make them more easily accessible, so that 28 boxes can now be inspected without the use of a ladder. Regular inspections of as many boxes as possible will be made throughout the nesting season.

Report compiled by: Helen Crabtree, March 2020