

## Bird boxes – 2014 season

We have had a very successful year with obviously plenty of food about at the crucial times.

Of the 40 concrete boxes all 4 but had been used which has given us a 90% occupancy rate

The 4 unused boxes were nos 8, 23, 33, and 36

The reason box 8 was not used was because it had been attacked by squirrels and the entrance hole had been gnawed away so that the squirrel could gain entry. This was one of the few remaining old type boxes that had not been modified. However this has now been repaired with an old salmon tin covering the enlarged hole and a new entrance drilled underneath. For some reason squirrels then leave these boxes alone. No 8 is now back in situ.

We can find no reason for the remaining 3 boxes not being used other than there may not have been enough blue tits / great tits to go round. In our small woodland we obviously had 36 breeding pairs plus there would have been pairs nesting in adjoining gardens. These 3 boxes have been used in previous years

In boxes 16 and 31 we have had nuthatches although probably only box 16 was successful. The characteristics of the nests are mud that in natural tree hole sites is used to reduce the size of the hole to stop entry by predators. On our boxes where the size of the entrance is correct the birds instinct is such that it will still bring mud to the nest and will then pack it under the front overhang on the outside of the box or around the top corners on the inside. The nest is about 1 ½ inches deep and made up of dead leaves and wood and bark. The nest is not intertwined as traditional nests and is confined and retained by the actual nest box.

Box 31 had the mud but very little nesting material (see photo) so we must presume that one of the birds was predated or something put the pair off and they went elsewhere.



As we had the mud but no nest it can be presumed that the nuthatch will make the site secure with mud before starting to build the nest



We can only speculate about the success of our 36 inhabited boxes and we have no way of knowing the actual no. of fledglings.

Unfortunately we do know that box 21 was not successful as in a beautifully formed tiny cup inside the box were 11 blue tit eggs (see photo).

Obviously something must have happened to one of the parent birds to cause the abandonment of the nest by the remaining bird.



We have 5 other wooden boxes 2 of which are for woodpeckers and they were badly damaged by squirrels and have been taken down for repair. The 3 remaining boxes are for Kestrels and Tawny Owls but they all appear to be inhabited by our friends the squirrels.. If a Tawny Owl was to take up residence it would see off the squirrel but at present we do not think that there are any Tawny Owls in the woodland unless someone can tell us differently. Now is the time of year when they are most noisy and you could hear 2 birds calling to each other. The first call would be a sharp 'kee wick' and the second a softer 'hoo hoo' – hence 'twit twoo'. Please let us know if you hear any.

Peter Maiden