

## *Adopt-a-Box Scheme*

We have now completed our check of the 151 nest boxes which we have at Foxglove and this special edition of Undergrowth is a report of what we have found.

Before we look at the results it might be worth looking at the way the scheme itself has performed. We launched our Adopt-a-Box scheme on 15 February as a result of a suggestion by Richard Francis. When we started the scheme we had 133 boxes but, due to the demand for special boxes, we increased this during the first few weeks. Also, Richard introduced some interesting new designs and we had a few new woodcrete boxes which we put up. By the time we had finished our number had risen to 150 – a nice round figure. We then stumbled, literally, on a box which had fallen off its tree during the winter gales and our final tally rose to 151.

As of today, (15 June) we have “sold” 125 of the 151 boxes on offer. Most of our boxes, 98 of the 125, have been sponsored for a single year but some people have generously sponsored boxes for two or even five years.

With 128 standard boxes and 23 special boxes on offer our potential earnings are £348 per year. However, because people have sponsored some boxes for longer than a year we have actually raised £452 to help us with our conservation work on the Reserve.

It says a lot for you, our sponsors, that we have been able to raise so much and we would like to thank everyone who has made this such a successful scheme by sponsoring boxes for themselves, their families and their friends.

## *The Results*

Firstly, we should say that this has been a poor year for nestboxes. The early fine weather in the Spring tempted many birds to start nesting but, as this was only a brief period and was followed by some really poor weather, many of the early nests seem to have failed. This isn't just a problem at Foxglove. Those of you who have

been following Bill Oddie and Kate Humble on the Springwatch programme will have heard a similar tale from Devon. On the Garrison Training Area we have some 500 boxes and the returns for this year would confirm that this has been a very poor season.

So, how well have we done? Here are a few figures:

Box Type	Successful	Unsuccessful	Total
Round Hole	42	50	92
Square Hole	7	15	22
Oval Hole	4	2	6
Open Front	0	8	8
Owl*	1	8	9
Kestrel*	0	1	1
Dipper*	1	0	1
Wagtail*	0	5	5
Swallow*	1	3	4
Goosander*	1	1	1
Treecreeper*	0	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>151</b>

Note. Boxes marked with an asterisk (\*) are our “special” boxes – all others are our “standard” boxes.

From this table we can see that, of our 151 boxes, 57 (37.7%) contained chicks, although, sadly, not all of the chicks survived. We were particularly disappointed with the results from our special boxes. Of the 23 on the reserve only 4 (17.4%) had any success and of those three were occupied by species other than those for which the box was designed.

Which brings us to the species which used our boxes. The first thing we should say is that some birds do not stick to the rules – we have had Wrens in a Swallow and a Dipper box, our Goosander box was taken over by a Tawny Owl and one round hole box contained a Wood Mouse nest!

As we would expect, given that the majority of our boxes are suitable for Tits, it was the Tit tribe which made up the greatest number of occupants as we can see from the table below:

Species	Boxes	Chicks
Great Tit	35	167
Blue Tit	15	51
Coal Tit	2	7
Wren	2	Unknown
Tawny Owl	2	2
Wood Mouse (!)	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>228</b>

Note. We did not count the number of Wren chicks because it is too easy to damage the nest in the process.

The size of the successful broods was also quite small this year with a maximum of 7, although we did find one Blue Tit box which contained 1 chick and no less than 9 eggs which had failed to hatch. Our brood size looked like this:

Brood Size	Number
1	6
2	0
3	6
4	3
5	8
6	16
7	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>

Note. The difference of 10 in the total figure from that of our used boxes (57) is made up by boxes which contained only unhatched eggs, dead chicks, etc.

Our boxes are made of two different materials - wood and woodcrete. If we look at the success rate by each of these we will see:

Material	Successful	Unsuccessful	Total
Wood	29	63	92
Woodcrete	28	31	59
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>151</b>

Here we can see that 47.5% of our woodcrete boxes were successful but only 31.5% of our wooden boxes raised any young. This is an interesting result because we have generally found that people prefer to sponsor wooden boxes to those made of woodcrete.

Although we had a great number of boxes which failed to produce chicks, not all of them were unused. Many contained nesting materials, some had almost complete nests and some contained, rather sadly, dead chicks. The final tally was as follows:

Use	Total
Completely empty	73
Abandoned nests or materials	21
Dead chicks	4
Unhatched eggs	3

We also had one very bad case of squirrel predation. We checked one box on a Sunday and found a number of Great Tit chicks which were, at the time, too small to ring. We returned on the following Wednesday to find that the box had been raided by a grey squirrel which had destroyed the nest and the chicks. Below are two photographs which show the box before and after the squirrel had done his work.



Before



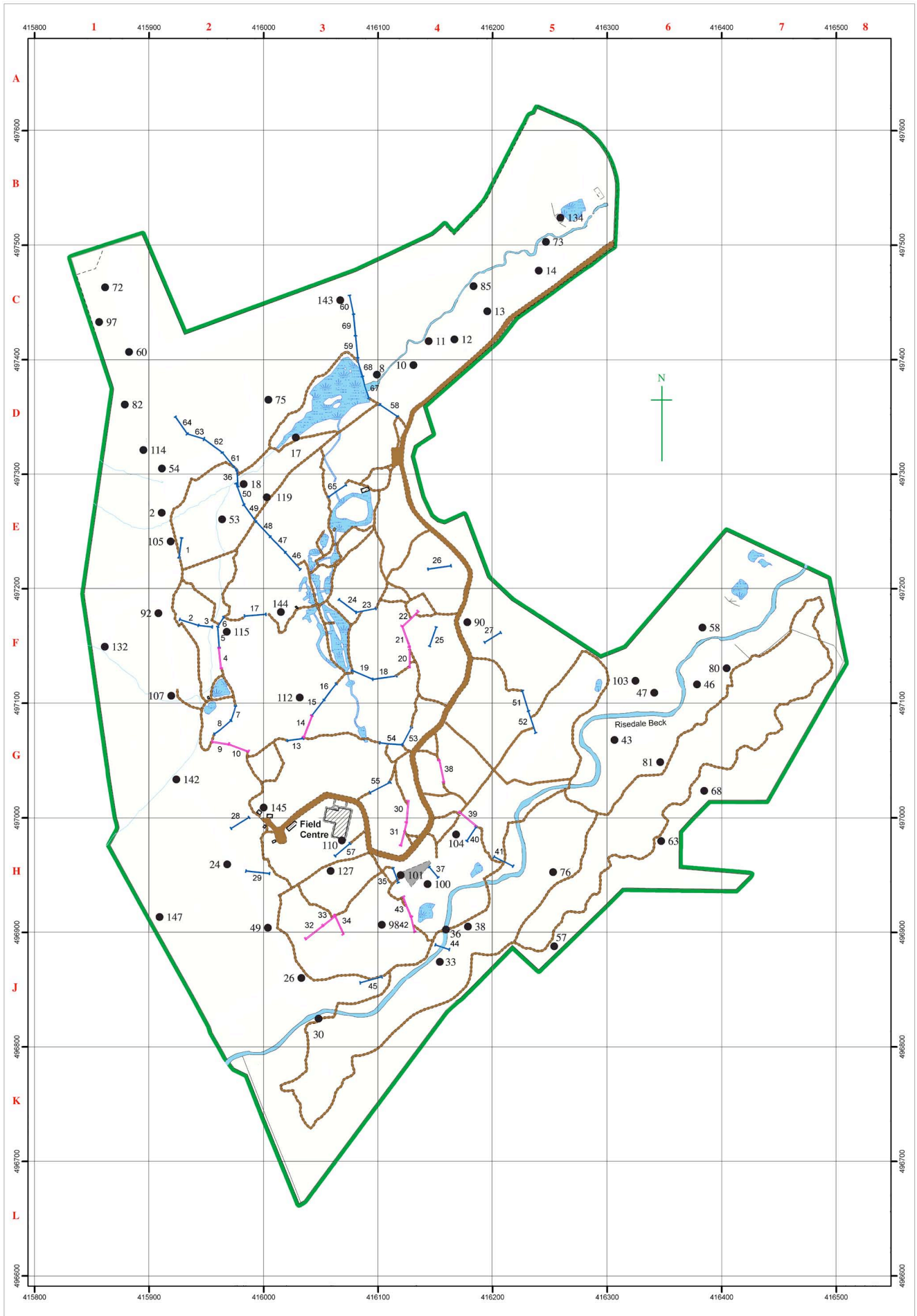
After

Luckily, damage like this is fairly rare but we have about five other boxes which have suffered similar damage over the years and which we will replace during the summer.

### *Successful Box Locations*

Our 151 boxes are spread out right across the Reserve with the exception of the central scrapes area where there are few trees and disturbance from people is at its greatest. Having said that, there seems to be no discernable pattern about where our successful boxes have occurred. Well-used areas like the woodland walk have been successful while little-used areas like the western end of Risedale Beck have not. We may need to wait a number of years before we can draw any real conclusions about the best locations. The map on the next page shows our successful box locations:

# Foxglove Covert Nestbox Map



## Successful Sponsors

Now we need to look at the success of our sponsors. In all 87 people have sponsored boxes or had boxes sponsored on their behalf. The people range from the very young to the very old and from individuals to school classes, wildlife groups and whole families. To give an idea of the spread of sponsorship here is a count of the number of boxes sponsored by people:

Number of Boxes	People
1	67
2	10
3	3
4	6
5	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>

But what might also be interesting is to look at the number of chicks which people have sponsored. At this point we must apologise to those who had Wrens in their boxes as we didn't count the chicks for fear of damaging the nest. Also, there were a number of boxes which contained chicks but which were unsponsored. We have added these to the table below

No of Chicks	People	Total
0	53	0
1	4	4
2	0	0
3	1	3
4	1	4
5	7	35
6	10	60
7	7	49
8	0	0
9	2	18
10	2	20
Un-sponsored		35
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>288</b>

This shows that 60.9% of our sponsors ended up with no chicks in their boxes. It also shows that we had two people who managed to achieve the good total of

10 chicks each. They were Dr. Lorna Sloan and Miss Christine Whitehead – our thanks and congratulations to them.

Another thing we can see from this table is that 35 chicks (12.2%) were in unsponsored boxes. Do we need to remind you that these boxes are still available at very competitive rates?

## The Future of the Scheme

We hope, of course, to run the scheme again next year. In January we will write to everyone who has sponsored a box for a single year and offer them the chance to renew their sponsorship for 2006 and beyond. We will also offer sponsors the opportunity to “discard” boxes which they no longer wish to sponsor and to sponsor new ones if they so wish. We will hold each sponsored box for a month to give people enough time to respond. At the end of the month any boxes which have not been renewed will be “repossessed” and become available to everyone else.

Once we have sufficient data we will start to look at the way that individual boxes have performed. Although we may not be able to build up a true picture for a number of years there may be things which we can do fairly quickly to improve our success rate. For example, this year only one of our open fronted boxes contained anything at all - some nesting materials. If this is repeated next year we may well try to find more suitable locations for them or replace them with a more successful type.

However, at the moment it is unlikely that we will increase the number of our boxes beyond 151. As a site we are probably well above the optimum box density, but, if the site expands . . .

## And Finally

Can I just repeat what I have already said: from the Reserve's point of view this has been a fantastically successful scheme and we are grateful to all our sponsors who have contributed so much to that success.



Undergrowth is published four times a year. Articles for inclusion in future issues should be sent to the editor, Sam Hackett, at : sam.hackett@btinternet.com tel: 01748 850966 or Tony Crease at tonycrease@aol.com tel: 01677 427 925.

Any opinions included are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foxglove Covert Management Group or the policy of the Ministry of Defence.