

Issue No 8a. Adopt-a-Box Special Edition

The Newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

## *Adopt-a-Box Scheme*

We have now completed our check of the 156 nest boxes which we have at Foxglove and this special edition of Undergrowth is a report of what we have found in the 2006 season.

Last year our scheme had 151 nest boxes which has risen to 156 this year. The new boxes are a result of finding that what we thought were all bat boxes were, when we unpacked them, a mixture of some bat boxes and 2 bird boxes. We also “found” one box lying on the ground, acquired one which was already on the new extension to the Reserve and the fifth is from a batch of boxes made to a new design which were provided by MoD (see below).

Just for the record, our 156 boxes are made up of 133 standard boxes and 23 specials. Last year we sold out of special boxes and the same has occurred in 2006.



This year we embarked on a box replacement programme. Some of our boxes were very old and had suffered from the ravages of time and the weather. When we checked the boxes last year we made a note of any which were in a poor state and either replaced or repaired them. In all some 20 boxes were affected, all of them made of wood. These have now been replaced with woodcrete boxes.

Once again, the response from our sponsors has been excellent with the majority of people re-sponsoring their boxes from last year. As a result we have “sold” no less than 127 of the 156 available. This is a slight increase on last year when we sold 125 and we are delighted with the results. Our thanks to all our sponsors without whom the scheme could not run.

We would also like to offer our thanks to everyone who helped us to check the boxes and to ring the chicks. This involves a great deal of time and effort as, inevitably, the boxes which require re-checking are always about as far from the Centre as it is possible to be. This year was no exception and it took about 8 attempts before the whole job was completed.

## *The Results*

Once again 2006 has been a generally poor year for breeding success. The cold, wet weather we had in the earlier part of May seems to have been only partially offset by the beautiful warm weather we have had in late May and the earlier part of June. This was not dissimilar to 2005 when a late cold spell caught many birds by surprise.

To give an example of the difference between the two years, last year we completed the ringing of all the chicks in our boxes by 5 June but this year we ringed our last chicks on 23 June, which is 18 days later. Most affected by the bad weather were ground nesting birds, rather than those using nestboxes and this is reflected in the fact that our boxes have been used to a greater extent than they were last year, as we can see from the following table:

Box Type	Used	Unused	Total
Round Hole	53 (42)	46 (50)	99 (92)
Square Hole	5 (7)	15 (15)	20 (22)
Owl*	1 (1)	8 (8)	9 (9)
Open Fronted	1 (0)	7 (8)	8 (8)
Oval Hole	4 (4)	2 (2)	6 (6)
Wagtail*	1 (0)	4 (5)	5 (5)
Swallow*	0 (1)	4 (3)	4 (4)
Treecreeper*	0 (0)	2 (2)	2 (2)
Dipper*	0 (1)	1 (0)	1 (1)
Goosander*	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (1)
Kestrel*	1 (0)	0 (1)	1 (1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>67 (57)</b>	<b>99 (94)</b>	<b>156 (151)</b>

**Note.** Boxes marked with an asterisk (\*) are our “special” boxes – all others are our “standard” boxes. (2005 figures are shown in brackets)

This table shows us that, of our 156 boxes, 67 (42.9%) were used, which is an increase of 10 over last year. Most of this increase can be accounted for by a fairly large increase in the use of our round-hole boxes. We were again 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. This result was, again, very similar to last year.

Which brings us to the species which used our boxes. The first thing we should say is that some species still do not stick to the rules – we have had Stock Doves in our Goosander box, Jackdaws in a Kestrel box as well as wasps and a wood mouse in others.

This has been a disappointing year in terms of the number of species which have used our boxes. For at least the second year running we have had no Redstarts or Pied Flycatchers which used to be a feature of our success in the past. This is quite surprising because Foxglove has habitats which are suitable for both species and we have ringing evidence that both are present on the Reserve. Perhaps they prefer to use less well-frequented areas.

As we would expect, given that the majority of our boxes are suitable for Tits, it was, as last year, the Tits which made up the greatest number of occupants. One notable feature is the success we have had with Blue Tits and Coal Tits whose chick numbers are well up, as we can see from the table below:

Species	Boxes	Chicks
Great Tit	35 (35)	166 (167)
Blue Tit	15 (15)	79 (51)
Tree Wasps	8 (0)	- (-)
Coal Tit	3 (2)	18 (7)
Bumble Bee	2 (0)	- (-)
Jackdaw	1 (-)	2 (-)
Stock Dove	1 (0)	2 (-)
Tawny Owl	1 (2)	0 (2)
Wood Mouse	1 (1)	- (-)
<b>Total</b>	<b>67 (57)</b>	<b>267 (228)</b>
Less non-bird users	11 (10)	
Total used by birds	56 (47)	

The good news here is that we can see that the total number of chicks raised is up from 228 to 267 This is an increase of 17.1% over last year. What is amazing is that we have had exactly the same number of successful Great Tit and Blue Tit boxes as last year and that the difference in Great Tit chick numbers was just one. In a change from last year we seem to have had a considerable success in raising wasps! To find 8 boxes occupied by what look like Tree Wasps (we are not entirely sure of the identification) is somewhat surprising. Nevertheless, your editor, risking both life and limb in the cause of science captured the picture below:



## Year-on-Year Comparison 2005/06

Box	2005		2006	
	Species	No	Species	No
1	Empty		Empty	
2	Great Tit	0	Great Tit	7
3	Empty		Empty	
4	Empty		Empty	
5	Empty		Tree Wasp	
6	Empty		Blue Tit	6
7	Empty		Empty	
8	Tawny Owl	1	Stock Dove	2
9	Empty		Tree Wasp	
10	Blue Tit	4	Blue Tit	6
11	Great Tit	6	Empty	
12	Great Tit	6	Empty	
13	Blue Tit	3	Blue Tit	5
14	Blue Tit	0	Tree Wasp	
15	Empty		Great Tit	6
16	Empty		Tree Wasp	
17	Great Tit	5	Empty	
18	Great Tit	6	Great Tit	2
19	Empty		Blue Tit	4
20	Empty		Empty	
21	Empty		Empty	
22	Empty		Empty	
23	Empty		Empty	
24	Coal Tit	6	Blue Tit	6
25	Empty		Empty	
26	Great Tit	6	Empty	
27	Empty		Empty	
28	Empty		Empty	
29	Empty		Empty	
30	Blue Tit	0	Empty	
31	Empty		Great Tit	2
32	Empty		Great Tit	4
33	Great Tit	5	Empty	
34	Empty		Empty	
35	Empty		Empty	
36	Wren		Empty	
37	Empty		Empty	
38	Great Tit	7	Great Tit	6
39	Empty		Blue Tit	1
40	Empty		Blue Tit	7

Box	2005		2006	
	Species	No	Species	No
41	Empty		Empty	
42	Empty		Empty	
43	Coal Tit	1	Empty	
44	Empty		Great Tit	7
45	Empty		Tree Wasp	
46	Great Tit	7	Great Tit	6
47	Blue Tit	6	Bumble Bees	
48	Empty		Empty	
49	Great Tit	0	Great Tit	6
50	Empty		Empty	
51	Empty		Empty	
52	Empty		Great Tit	4
53	Great Tit	6	Empty	
54	Blue Tit	1	Blue Tit	5
55	Empty		Empty	
56	Empty		Empty	
57	Great Tit	7	Great Tit	1
58	Great Tit	6	Great Tit	3
59	Empty		Empty	
60	Great Tit	3	Great Tit	7
61	Empty		Empty	
62	Empty		Empty	
63	Blue Tit	6	Empty	
64	Empty		Empty	
65	Empty		Empty	
66	Empty		Empty	
67	Empty		Empty	
68	Great Tit	6	Blue Tit	5
69	Empty		Empty	
70	Empty		Empty	
71	Empty		Great Tit	5
72	Great Tit	7	Blue Tit	9
73	Great Tit	5	Empty	
74	Empty		Empty	
75	Blue Tit	3	Empty	
76	Great Tit	6	Empty	
77	Empty		Empty	
78	Empty		Empty	
79	Empty		Bumble Bees	
80	Great Tit	6	Empty	



Box	2005		2006	
	Species	No	Species	No
81	Great Tit	5	Great Tit	6
82	Great Tit	5	Great Tit	6
83	Empty		Jackdaw	2
84	Empty		Great Tit	5
85	Great Tit	6	Coal Tit	1
86	Empty		Empty	
87	Empty		Blue Tit	7
88	Empty		Great Tit	3
89	Empty		Empty	
90	Wood Mouse		Empty	
91	Empty		Empty	
92	Great Tit	6	Empty	
93	Empty		Tree Wasp	
94	Empty		Empty	
95	Empty		Empty	
96	Empty		Great Tit	3
97	Great Tit	4	Great Tit	4
98	Blue Tit	5	Blue Tit	3
99	Empty		Great Tit	5
100	Blue Tit	7	Empty	
101	Great Tit	6	Empty	
102	Empty		Empty	
103	Great Tit	7	Empty	
104	Great Tit	0	Wood Mouse	
105	Great Tit	4	Great Tit	1
106	Empty		Empty	
107	Great Tit	3	Empty	
108	Empty		Great Tit	6
109	Empty		Blue Tit	5
110	Blue Tit	3	Tree Wasp	
111	Empty		Empty	
112	Great Tit	1	Empty	
113	Empty		Empty	
114	Great Tit	3	Empty	
115	Blue Tit	1	Blue Tit	7
116	Empty		Empty	
117	Empty		Great Tit	6
118	Empty		Empty	
119	Blue Tit	0	Empty	
120	Empty		Empty	
121	Empty		Empty	
122	Empty		Great Tit	7
123	Empty		Empty	

Box	2005		2006	
	Species	No	Species	No
124	Empty		Great Tit	5
125	Empty		Great Tit	2
126	Empty		Empty	
127	Great Tit	6	Empty	
128	Empty		Tawny Owl	0
129	Empty		Great Tit	6
130	Empty		Empty	
131	Empty		Empty	
132	Great Tit	0	Empty	
133	Empty		Empty	
134	Wren		Wren	
135	Empty		Empty	
136	Empty		Empty	
137	Empty		Empty	
138	Empty		Empty	
139	Empty		Great Tit	4
140	Empty		Empty	
141	Empty		Empty	
142	Tawny Owl	1	Empty	
143	Great Tit	7	Empty	
144	Great Tit	5	Tree Wasp	
145	Blue Tit	7	Great Tit	7
146	Empty		Blue Tit	3
147	Blue Tit	5	Great Tit	3
148	Empty		Empty	
149	Empty		Coal Tit	8
150	Empty		Coal Tit	9
151	Empty		Great Tit	3
152			Empty	
153			Great Tit	7
154			Great Tit	5
155			Empty	
156			Great Tit	6

An overall comparison of our used and unused boxes over the two years shows that:

2005	2006	No of Boxes
Unused	Unused	59
Unused	Used	35
Used	Unused	30
Used	Used	32

Note. Includes boxes 152 - 156, not in use in 2005

## Brood Size

This year the size of our successful broods was also quite small although rather larger than last year. This would seem to indicate that breeding was better than last year when it actually took place. The largest brood we recorded was 9, recorded in 2 boxes, which compares favourably with the maximum brood size of 7 last year. Overall, our average brood size was almost identical to last year at 4.85.

Brood Size	Number
1	4 (6)
2	5 (0)
3	7 (6)
4	5 (3)
5	9 (8)
6	13 (16)
7	9 (8)
8	1 (0)
9	2 (0)
<b>Total</b>	<b>55 (47)</b>

**Note.** The difference between the boxes used by birds at 56 and the figure of 55 shown here is caused by an owl box which contained unhatched eggs.

## Box Materials

Our boxes are made of two different materials - wood and woodcrete. Our box replacement programme has increased the number of woodcrete boxes while our wooden boxes have decreased accordingly. As the cost of maintenance is much higher for wooden boxes it is likely that we will see this trend continuing as all our wooden boxes will eventually be replaced by woodcrete. If we look at the success rate by each of the materials we will see:

Material	Used	Unused	Total
Wood	26 (29)	42 (63)	68 (92)
Woodcrete	30 (28)	47 (31)	77 (59)
<b>Total</b>	<b>56 (57)</b>	<b>89 (94)</b>	<b>145 (151)</b>

**Note.** Excludes non-bird users

Last year our birds showed a very clear preference for woodcrete boxes but this year the position is much more even with 40.0% of our woodcrete boxes being successful against 38.2% of our wooden boxes.

## Unsuccessful Results

Although we had a great number of boxes which failed to produce chicks, not all of them were completely unused. Some contained evidence of nesting activity and some contained non-bird species. The final result looks like this:

Use	Total
Completely empty	72 (73)
Abandoned nests or materials	16 (21)
Non-bird species	11 (10)
Unhatched eggs	2 (3)
Dead chicks	0 (4)

## Sponsorship Results

Now we need to look at the success of our individual sponsors. In all, 84 people have sponsored our boxes or had boxes sponsored on their behalf this year. This is slightly fewer than last year when we had 87 sponsors but is a tribute to those who have renewed their sponsorship from last year.

Our sponsors are a diverse lot, ranging from the very young to the very old and from individuals to school classes, wildlife groups and whole families. They also seem to live in every corner of England but not, oddly, either in Scotland or Wales. A quick check shows that they live as far south as the Portsmouth. and North to Newcastle. Unfortunately our sponsors in Rome have returned to the UK which probably means that we can no longer claim to be an international sponsorship scheme.

Some people have sponsored more than one box as we can see from the table below:

Number of Boxes	People
1	61 (67)
2	11 (10)
3	6 (3)
4	4 (6)
5	2 (1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>84 (87)</b>

Our sponsors might be interested in the number of chicks which each of them has raised in their boxes. Last year we had two sponsors who raised 10 chicks each but this year we have done rather better with one person raising 15. Here are the full results:

No of Chicks	People	Total
0	49 (53)	0
1	3 (4)	3 (4)
2	3 (0)	6 (0)
3	1 (1)	3 (3)
4	3 (1)	12 (4)
5	5 (7)	25 (35)
6	7 (10)	42 (60)
7	3 (7)	21 (49)
8	1 (0)	8 (0)
9	9 (2)	36 (18)
10	3 (2)	30 (20)
15	1 (0)	15 (0)
Un-sponsored		66 (35)
<b>Total</b>	<b>84 (87)</b>	<b>267 (228)</b>

This shows that 60.9% of our sponsors ended up with no chicks in their boxes. Another thing we can see from this table is that 66 chicks, 25.1% of the total were in our remaining 34 un-sponsored boxes. This is a large increase on last year when only 12.1% of our total chicks were un-sponsored. In fact 9 of our un-sponsored boxes raised 5 or more chicks this year.

Last year Dr. Lorna Sloan and Miss Chistine Whitehead both achieved 10 chicks in their boxes. Although Lorna has kept up the good work and has, again, raised 10 chicks (together with Carol Darling, late of Rome and Alan Chappell from Kent), this year's winner is Christine who has pulled out all the stops and has raised 15 chicks from her four boxes as follows:

Box No	Species	Chicks
38	Great Tit	6
60	Great Tit	7
65	Empty	0
125	Great Tit	2

Well done, Christine – a great effort, you just need to sort out box 65 before next year!

If anyone would like to challenge Christine next year, there are a large number of un-sponsored but successful boxes available for a very small annual rent!

## The Future of the Scheme

Last year we rather jokingly suggested that the only way we would be likely to expand the number of boxes which we have on the Reserve was if the Reserve was to expand. Hardly was the ink dry on the page before the perimeter fence moved about 200 metres west! The new area has different habitats and is generally less suitable for bird boxes than the main part of the Reserve, but it might be possible to add one or two special boxes - perhaps for Little Owls and Kestrels. Watch this space!

We will, of course, run the scheme again next year and the format will be same as this year. In December we will write to everyone whose sponsorship is due for renewal on 1 January and offer them the opportunity to renew their box for 2007 and beyond. Anyone who wishes to change their boxes or sponsor additional ones will be able to do so at the same time.

In the meantime, if anyone has any suggestions on how we might improve the scheme, please let us know.

## And Finally

Your editor risks life and limb yet again to check a Kestrel box but, sadly, the birds (Jackdaws) had flown.



*Sam*