

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker nest recording in 2015 and plans for 2016

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2015 results

Thank you for all your efforts this year. At the final count we managed to record ten Lesser Spotted Woodpecker nests in 2015 with nests in Derbyshire (2), East Sussex, Greater London, Hampshire, Herefordshire, Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, Shropshire and Surrey (details in the table below). I have now gone through all the observations and entered the data into IPMR ready to be submitted to the BTO. Although ten sounds a modest total it represents a great success. In recent years only one or two Lesser Spot nests have been reported annually to the Nest Record Scheme at the BTO, so ten is a big advance and means that we will be able to do some meaningful analyses with the data.

As I indicated in the August newsletter, it has been remarkable how successful the nests were this year. All ten nests were successful. At one nest in Surrey a Great Spotted Woodpecker had clearly opened out the cavity at a late stage but the young were so close to fledging when we last inspected with the video camera that I believe they made it. I've now analysed the data using the standard Mayfield method (calculate the number of days for which the nest was under observation and the final outcome to estimate the daily risk of failure) and it is clear that in 2015 our nests were significantly more successful than the nests in the RSPB studies of a few years ago (Charman *et al.* 2012). The RSPB data gives an overall nest success of 43% whereas we have 100% if we assume the Surrey nest was successful and 85% if we assume it failed. The sample sizes are small so even this effect is only just statistically significant and may not be maintained in future years.



It could be that 2015 was an especially good year for Lesser Spots. Because of the cold spring, the defoliating caterpillars which form an important part of the breeding season diet were relatively late this year. This is why many Blue and Great Tits had a hard time early in the nesting season. Lesser Spots nest a little later than the other woodland species so may have benefitted from the late arrival of the caterpillars. Our first egg dates were virtually identical to those found in the RSPB studies (mean April 30, range April 20 to May 11).

I also wonder whether the nesting habitat in which we found the birds (mainly away from big woodland blocks in fringing woodlands and adjacent to wetlands) may have reduced the attentions of Great Spots.

Half the nests were in dead and half in living trees but all were in dead substrates - either dead limbs or dead parts of the trunk. This is something to be aware of when searching for nests and potential nest sites.

Photograph of LSW with chick in the nest in Hertfordshire by Tom Speller.

Summary of LSW nests 2015

| Site | Nest tree | Nest site | Found during | Number of young fledged | Estimated fledge day | Habitat |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| New Forest | BI/D | D | Cavity excavation | 4 | May 24 | Damp forest |
| Surrey | ALD/D | D | Cavity excavation | 3 | May 30 | Wet alder wood, streamside |
| Derbyshire | SY/A | D | Cavity excavation | 4 | June 11 | Lakeside wood |
| Derbyshire | BE/D | D | Feeding young | 1+ | June 11 | Lakeside wood |
| Shropshire | PO/D | D | Cavity excavation | 2 | June 2 | Lakeside wood |
| Lincoln | HC/D | D | Cavity excavation | (6) | June 1 | Hedgerow/ditch arable |
| Hertfordshire | SY/A | D | Cavity excavation | 2+ | June 3 | Woodland edge, dry |
| N London | AH/A | D | Feeding young | 2+ | June 4 | Streamside public park |
| E Sussex | BI/A | D | Feeding young | 3 | June 11 | Streamside woodland |
| Herefordshire | Apple/A | D | Feeding young | 1+ | June 15 | Orchard |

AH = Ash, ALD = Alder, BE = Beech, BI = Birch, HC = Horse Chestnut, PO = Poplar, SY = Sycamore, . A = alive, D = dead

Plans for 2016

Buoyed by the good results this year, we are planning to keep the initiative running in 2016. I hope those of you who found nests in 2015 can check out the sites again next year. There is a good chance that the birds will nest in the same tree or nearby to their previous seasons nest so the first thing to check in March/April next year is whether the birds are around their old nest site.

I have managed to get funding for two additional nest inspection cameras for next year, 2016. So with my system and the RSPB one there will be a total of four available. The plan is to leave a camera system with anybody who has an active nest and is able to make regular nest checks. This way we can get better quality data from the nests we know about and it should reduce the pressure on me and my wife to travel to nests at short notice.

Acknowledgements

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Reference

Elisabeth C. Charman, Ken W. Smith, Ian A. Dillon, Steve Dodd, Derek J. Guar, Andrew Cristinacce, Phil V. Grice & Richard D. Gregory (2012): Drivers of low breeding success in the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* in England: testing hypotheses for the decline, *Bird Study* **59**, 255-265.