

## Lesser Spotted Woodpecker nest recording in 2016

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### 2016 results

Thank you for all your efforts in 2016. We received reports of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker nesting activity at ten sites this year but, in contrast to 2015, as far as we can tell only three of these nests fledged any young. Nests or birds excavating cavities were reported from Devon, Hampshire (2), Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Staffordshire and Surrey. The details and outcomes of all the nests are summarised in the Table at the end of this note.

Two factors contributed to the low numbers of successful nests. Firstly, at four sites birds were seen excavating and displaying at a nest hole but when checked with the video camera there was either an incomplete cavity (1) or a full cavity lined with woodchips but no eggs (3). It is difficult to be sure whether these indicate failures or whether the birds have simply used another site. Given the polyandrous mating system of this species it is possible that these were sites at which the males failed to tempt a female to lay eggs in the nest. It seems significant that this was such a frequent occurrence in 2016 and was not seen at all in 2015.

The second factor was nest predation by Great Spotted Woodpeckers. At the nests in Hertfordshire and Herefordshire the young were predated just before they fledged by Great Spotted Woodpecker. In one case this was inferred from evidence after the event but in Herefordshire Nick Gates had set-up a 'Trailcam' to observe the events at the nest and only when reviewing the images from this did he realise that the young had been predated. Presumably the noisy young in the nests had attracted the Great Spotted Woodpeckers.

In marked contrast to 2015 when nesting success was high, the overall nesting success in 2016 was low being similar or lower than that found in the earlier RSPB studies (Charman *et al.* 2012). For those nests with known eggs or young there was 60% raw success (3/5) but if the empty cavities are assumed to be failures this falls to 37% (3/8). In general, both male and female adults were seen feeding young except for the Lincolnshire nest where only the male was seen to contribute to incubation or feeding the young. In spite of this three young successfully fledged from this nest.

2016 appears to have been a pretty poor breeding season all round. Even Great Spotted Woodpeckers suffered early season failures when the weather turned bad after a good start and many other woodland species seemed to struggle.

*Photos: Lesser Spot by Andrew Moon and LSW nest with eggs by Ashley Jackson*



All the nest sites in 2016 were in dead trees (8) or dead parts of live trees (2). Four of the nests were in areas used in 2015 and in Lincolnshire the birds actually re-used the same nest cavity. This seems to be very unusual and must depend on the old cavity still being in good condition in the following year. In my experience most used cavities get opened up over the autumn and winter, probably by Great Spots.

One of the factors responsible for the widespread increase of the Great Spotted Woodpecker is thought to be their exploitation of high quality artificial food provided in gardens. Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers do not normally use garden feeders but it is interesting that at two nests (Hertfordshire and Lincolnshire) the adults were observed taking fat from garden feeders over the course of their nesting attempt. Perhaps if this habit became more widespread the prospects for Lesser Spots would be brighter.

### ***Plans for 2017***

In 2017 we will have four nest camera systems available. The two new ones I purchased from Brian Creswell's 'Wildlife Windows' proved very effective this year sending high quality images to iphones or ipads via a wireless network, see photo (Linda Smith).



We are planning to offer the same flying squad nest inspection service next year, but, now I have moved to West Sussex, my focus is likely to be more towards southern England although I will be more than happy to make excursions further north! I hope those of you who found nests in 2015 or 2016 are able to 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.

The New Forest seems to still hold a good population of Lesser Spots and, over the last few years Rob Clements and Marcus Ward have made a big effort to find territories. They are planning to increase the coordinated effort to locate the birds in 2017 and now that I am based in West Sussex I am hoping to be able to help out.

### ***Acknowledgements***

Thank you to Paul Bellamy and Will Kirby of the RSPB who helped out with the nest checking. I particularly thank those who reported active nests: Pete Bickford, Ashley Banwell, Rob Clements, Alan Eardley, Nick Gates, Dave Holman, Ashley Jackson, Albert Knott, Nikki Redding, Heather Rowe, Andy Sims and Lewis Thomson. Of course there were inevitably many of you who searched in vain in 2016. **Please keep trying in 2017.**

### ***Reference***

Elisabeth C. Charman, Ken W. Smith, Ian A. Dillon, Steve Dodd, Derek J. Gruar, 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.

***Table summarising 2016 results follows on next page.***

## Summary of LSW nests reported in 2016

Site	Nest tree	Nest site	Found during	Number of eggs laid	Number of young fledged	Estimated fledge day	Habitat	Comments
New Forest (1)	BE/D	D	Cavity excavation	0	0	-	High forest	Full cavity excavated but no eggs when checked June 5
New Forest (2)	AH/A	?	Feeding young	?	?	?	High forest	Single report of feeding young May 24, no more info
Surrey	ALD/D	D	Cavity excavation	0	0	-	Wet alder wood, streamside	Full cavity excavated but no eggs when checked May 21
Staffordshire	ALD/D	D	Cavity excavation	0	0	-		Full cavity excavated but no eggs when checked May 19
Lincolnshire	HC/D	D	Cavity excavation	5-6	3	June 5	Hedgerow/ditch arable	Same cavity as 2015, male only feeding young
Hertfordshire	AH/D	D	Feeding young	?	0 (2)	~ June 13	Mature woodland	Ready to fledge June 11 but when checked later hole opened by GSW and feathers in cavity - predated
Norfolk	PO/D	D	Cavity excavation	5	3	June 15	Riverside poplar plantation	Successfully fledged
Devon	BE/D	D	Cavity excavation	?	?	~ May 22	Streamside woodland	Cavity checked June 15, young probably fledged okay.
Herefordshire	Apple/A	D	Cavity excavation	4	0 (2)	June 12	Orchard	Predated by GSW just before fledging – recorded on Trailcam.
Gloucestershire	BE/D	D	Cavity excavation	0	0		Mixed BE larch woodland	Pair excavating cavity, not complete when checked.

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