

Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers in 2022

Woodpecker Network Breeding Season Report *

Another interesting and successful year for Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers. Thanks to the efforts of all our volunteers and collaborators we were able to collect breeding data from 19 nests. These were relatively successful with an average of just over 3.0 young fledged per nest which was the second best season since we started the monitoring in 2015 (8 years in total).

The nests monitored in 2022 were from eight counties with most in Hampshire (New Forest) and Sussex. The grand total of nests monitored since 2015 now stands at 114 from 21 counties (Table 1). This distribution reflects the breeding range of the species but is also heavily influenced by the location of the volunteers who are now focusing on the species.

2022 will be remembered for the record high temperatures through the summer but it was already a comparatively warm spring long before this. The average central England temperatures were already high through March, April and May. LSW started laying eggs early and the mean (average) First Egg Date in 2022 was 25th April with the very first eggs on 19th April and the latest clutch started on 5th May.

This is one of the earliest seasons we have encountered since we started the initiative in 2015.

Table 1. A summary of the LSW nest locations.

County	Nests in 2022	Nests from 2015-2022
Cheshire		2
Derbyshire		2
Devon	1	5
Greater London		1
Greater Manchester		1
Gloucestershire		2
Hampshire	7	42
Herefordshire		4
Hertfordshire		2
Kent	2	7
Lincolnshire		2
Norfolk	2	11
Nottinghamshire	1	6
Shropshire		1
Somerset	1	5
Suffolk		1
Surrey		6
Sussex	4	10
West Glamorgan		1
Wiltshire	1	2
Worcestershire		1
Total	19	114

**Woodpecker network* encourages study of Lesser Spotted, Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers and is forum to share techniques, results and good practice. The network is co-ordinated by Ken and Linda Smith and Mat Shore



Male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker at a nest in the New Forest in June; photograph by Richard Jacobs

In 2022, with Covid-19 restrictions lifted, observers were able to locate birds and nests early in the season while the birds were still incubating.

Six nests were found at the egg stage with a mean clutch of 5.2 eggs.

This pretty much matches the long term average.



LSW nest cavity with clutch of six eggs in the New Forest on 10 May 2022 Photo Ken & Linda Smith

We know of only one definite nest failure (it failed at the point of hatching) all the other nests fledged at least one young. Three nests (two in Kent, one in the New Forest) had five fledglings.

Overall, 3.1 young fledged per nest. A good result.



Three LSW young, two males and one female, in a nest cavity in an Ash tree in West Sussex. Photo: Ken and Linda Smith

LesserSpot Network Volunteers - Notes on Nests

Being able to monitor pairs from early in the season provided some extra insights. Mat Shore monitors four sites on the Norfolk/Suffolk border. At two sites the nests were found and pairs successfully raised young. At the other two single birds (at one a ♂, at the other a ♀) were calling and drumming from February onwards but there was no evidence of pairs or nests. On 25th April at one site the male drummed continuously for 42 minutes to no avail. This has been observed before elsewhere and is perhaps one of the impacts of a declining population with some birds not managing to form pairs. In West Sussex a similar series of events with a male drumming very strongly, even excavating a cavity but no sign whatsoever of a female or any breeding attempt.

In Nottinghamshire in early spring Jack Baddams and Indy Kiemel-Green found two females and a male involved in intense displays. This was filmed by BBC and featured on *Springwatch*. Later in the season, a nest was found in the area and both adults in attendance. But sadly, the nest failed at the time the eggs were hatching. In the New Forest, volunteers Janette Ecob and Phil Read surveyed a 2Km² patch and kept a detailed diary.

'It was with great optimism that we commenced our survey in February. Our hopes were raised on 27th February when we heard a short burst of calling in a suitable area. However, despite many hours searching over the whole of the two squares over the next few weeks, nothing at all was heard or seen until the magical day of April 11th. We heard a Lesser Spot calling close to where we had heard one in February. We decided to sit quietly in a nearby clearing and didn't have to wait long before a male appeared and started drumming. A female then called nearby. The male landed on a dead beech tree directly in front of us and started excavating a hole. At one point he was rudely disturbed by a Great Spotted Woodpecker which he bravely fought off, despite the size difference. Just when we thought it couldn't get any better, both birds appeared and started mating! The most dramatic 40 minutes of the whole survey.'

Phil and Janette continued to observe the nest and take notes; as did Geoff Dicker, who found it independently. The adults were very attentive, collecting caterpillars from a nearby Oak, with a feeding rate of 13 visits per hour (every 5 minutes) at one point. The four young fledged successfully on 24 May; a male at 0950, another male at 10:52 and the female at 11:49. Phil noted: *'Throughout this time the visits by the adults became more and more erratic with one gap of over 90 minutes. The fourth youngster, a male, still hadn't left the nest at 13:30. But after 5 hours staring at a small nest hole, we were hungry and blurry eyed and left him to it'*. No birds were seen the next day. The timing of the nest helped with its success, it was early and coincided with the seasonal peak of caterpillar abundance. Detailed notes help to determine what affects breeding outcomes.

Holiday success: two nests were found by observers away on holiday, one in Somerset and one in the New Forest, local volunteers were able to follow up and monitor the nests through to fledging.

In Hampshire LesserSpotNet were co organisers of a county survey of breeding LSWs. Through most of the county only low numbers were found but in the New Forest birds were found in most 1km squares with any broadleaved woodland. It is absolutely clear that the New Forest is now the prime site of LSWs in England and Wales. The full results of the survey will be published in the 2022 Hampshire Bird Report later this year. The high numbers of nests found in the Forest reflect the good numbers there but also the skills and hard work of a team of volunteers who are now focussing on the species.

Is Ash Die-back is helping Woodpeckers?



Ash dieback is devastating woods in the southern England but may be benefitting woodpeckers. At National Trust Slindon Estate in West Sussex, this mature multi-stemmed dead Ash is covered with excavations by woodpeckers. Removal of a section of bark revealed 'galleries' formed by the larvae of Large Ash Bark Beetle *Hylesinus crenatus*.

When all the elm trees died in 1960's and 70's both Lesser Spots

and Great Spots benefitted – will we be seeing something similar with Ash die-back? Intriguing.

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