**Holt Copse Conservation Volunteers (HCCV) :**

**Use of Nest Boxes, 2016 (Year 11)**

The nest boxes in Holt Copse were taken down, checked and cleaned in January 2017. The results with comments are shown in the table and more information about the nest boxes can be found on the HCCV website ([www.hccv.org.uk](http://www.hccv.org.uk) ).

Again a high proportion of the boxes (over 74 per cent) were occupied, mainly by tit species - blue, coal or great tits (and one of those not used by birds contained an active colony of wild bees). As usual tit species not only used the boxes with small, circular holes designed for them, but used many of the boxes intended to attract other species. The nuthatches that occupied a nest box with a circular entrance through a short ‘spout’ partially blocked the hole with a mixture of mud and gravel bound together by the birds’ saliva that sets hard. They do this to protect the eggs and chicks from predators.

Unusually both owl boxes were apparently used, although there were more dropping in one box than the other.

A single tit nest contained more than two unhatched eggs and/or skeletons, compared with three last year (and 6 the previous year), a reflection probably of a benign spring and early summer. Occasional eggs will be infertile but when many eggs or skeletons are found in nests, an external cause such as bad weather (e.g. long periods of wet or cold) is a probable cause. When numerous eggs and/or skeletons are present in an occasional nest, however, it is more likely that something happened to one or both parent birds (as happened this year in many of the nest boxes along one but not the other section of the river Emm). As tits lay up to 12 or more eggs (and great tits sometimes have two broods a year), 2016 was probably another highly successful breeding season for them.

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| **Nest Box Type** | **Used** | **Not used** | **Comments** |
| **Small hole boxes** | 21 | 4 | 1 nest with more than 2 eggs or skeletons.  1 box (the type with a ‘spout’) was used by nuthatches. |
| **Open fronted** | 1 | 0 |  |
| **Tree creeper** | 2 | 3 |  |
| **Wren** | 0 | 0 | Still to be installed. |
| **Nuthatch** | 3 | 3 | But all used by tit species!  Bees in one of the ‘Not used’ ones. |
| **Owl** | 2 | 0 | More nest material in one box than the other. |
| **Total** | **29** | **10** | **Over 74 per cent of the boxes were used, although not always by the intended species.** |

**Mike Saynor, HCCV Joint Co-ordinator April 2017**