

Holt Copse Conservation Volunteers (HCCV) : Use of Nest Boxes, 2017 (Year 12)

The nest boxes in Holt Copse were taken down, checked and cleaned in January 2018. One box was re-located and 4 new ones installed, including a spherical one intended for wrens. 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).

Again a high proportion of the boxes (73 per cent) were occupied, mainly by tit species. One box contained an old nest with 2 eggs and two mice and the colony of bees found in a box last season still contained an active colony. As usual tit species not only used the boxes with small, circular holes designed for them, but used many of those intended for other species. Contritely the nuthatches that last year occupied a nest box with a circular entrance through a short 'spout' (intended for tits) did so again in 2017! In both years the birds partially blocked the hole with a mixture of mud and gravel bound together by the birds' saliva to protect the eggs and chicks from predators.

Both owl boxes were used for the second year, although again there were more droppings in one box than the other. None of the 5 tree creeper boxes were used, not even by tits.

Seven tits' nests contained two or more unhatched eggs and/or skeletons, compared with one last year (and 3 the previous year). 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 as this year, it is more likely that something happened to one or both parent birds. As tits lay up to 12 or more eggs (and great tits sometimes have two broods a year), last year should probably still be considered a successful breeding season.

Nest Box Type	Used	Not used	Comments
Small hole boxes	22	4	7 boxes with 2 or more eggs (13 in one) and/or skeletons. One used by nuthatches. 2 mice in one box with a nest and 2 eggs.
Open fronted		1	
Tree creeper		5	These boxes (no backs) can be difficult to attach snugly, but all appeared to fit well to the trunks.
Wren			One re-installed after 'renovation'.
Nuthatch	5	1	But used by tits.
Owl	2		Half an egg in the box with many droppings.
Total	29	11	Over 73 per cent of the boxes were used, although not always by the intended species.