

## **Holt Copse Conservation Volunteers (HCCV) : Use of Nest Boxes, 2018 (Year 13)**

The nest boxes in Holt Copse were taken down, checked and cleaned in January 2019. This year with the help of a new contact keen on geocaching, Mike Smith, the precise location of each box was recorded when they were checked (using the 'DDM format' that stands for Degrees Decimal Minutes). With the correct 'app' and the full coordinates, people should now be able to get to within 1 - 2 m of every box and HCCV are very grateful to Mike for his help.

Unfortunately a number of the nest boxes were vandalised last year, the first time in 13 years that much damage has been done. Some boxes were smashed and others dislodged when some fronts got broken. These boxes were refurbished and re-hung in less conspicuous locations. Please report any vandalism seen to HCCV via their website - [www.hccv.org.uk](http://www.hccv.org.uk).

Again a high proportion of the boxes (over 71 per cent) were occupied, mainly by tit species. Three boxes contained two or more tit eggs and/or a skeleton, which suggest that the survival of the chicks last year was high. As usual tit species not only used the boxes with small, circular holes designed for them, but often used ones intended for other species. Only one of the 5 boxes designed for tree creepers was used and that was by a species of tit. One box contained a nuthatch nest, made of dead leaves and bits of bark, very different from those of tits' that are made mainly of moss, wool, dog hairs and man-made materials. One of the owl boxes contained large amounts of debris (dropping and old food etc. - most unpleasant!) from which young birds hopefully fledged successfully. The front of the second box was broken by vandals, but a small amount of nest material and a single egg was present, so presumably the birds (tawny owls) intended to use it.

It was not possible to take the front off a box intended for nuthatches that has been occupied by bees for the last few years, nor were any bees to be seen although it was a cold day. This box will be inspected again later in the year when it is warmer, to see if bees still occupy it.

A small observation or experiment was done last year - to see whether tits showed a colour preference when searching for material to incorporate into their nests. Short lengths of red or black wool were hung up in two nets about 0.5 m apart at the beginning of the season. Many bits of the red wool were found in three nearby tit nests, but no black wool was seen. This season it is intended to give the birds a wider choice of colours to see which they prefer.

I thank Alan Jefferies, Malcolm Dunmore, Mike Smith and Robin Ashton for their help climbing the ladder and checking, cleaning and plotting the locations of the nest boxes.

**Mike Saynor, HCCV Joint Coordinator**

**February 2019**

512 Words plus the table.

<b>Nest Box Type</b>	<b>Used</b>	<b>Not used</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Small hole boxes</b>	17	3	2 boxes with 2 or more eggs or a skeleton. A number of boxes missing, damaged or vandalised, but possible to refurbish some that were re-installed in less conspicuous positions.
<b>Open fronted</b>	0	1	This design of box is seldom used in Holt Copse.
<b>Tree creeper</b>	1	4	But used by tits not tree creepers.
<b>Wren</b>	0	0	Box not found.
<b>Nuthatch</b>	4	1 (+1)	3 boxes used by tits, 1 with 2 eggs and a skeleton, 1 used by nuthatches and one unused. Not possible to remove the front of the 6 <sup>th</sup> box occupied by bees for the last few years so will return when warmer to check for signs of activity.
<b>Owl</b>	2	0	One box damaged by vandals (front broken), but small amounts of nesting material and 1 egg present, so would have been used? The birds possibly used the other box instead, that contained much 'typical' owl material and an unhatched egg.
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>71 per cent of the boxes used, but not all by the intended species.</b> <b>A significant number of the boxes vandalised.</b>