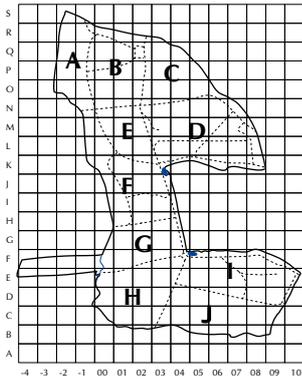


TWITTER



Treswell Wood - Information To Tell Every Recorder

May 2011 Treswell Wood IPM Group
(Integrated Population Monitoring)

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Project leaders:

CBC Pat Quinn-Catling

Nest Records Chris du Feu

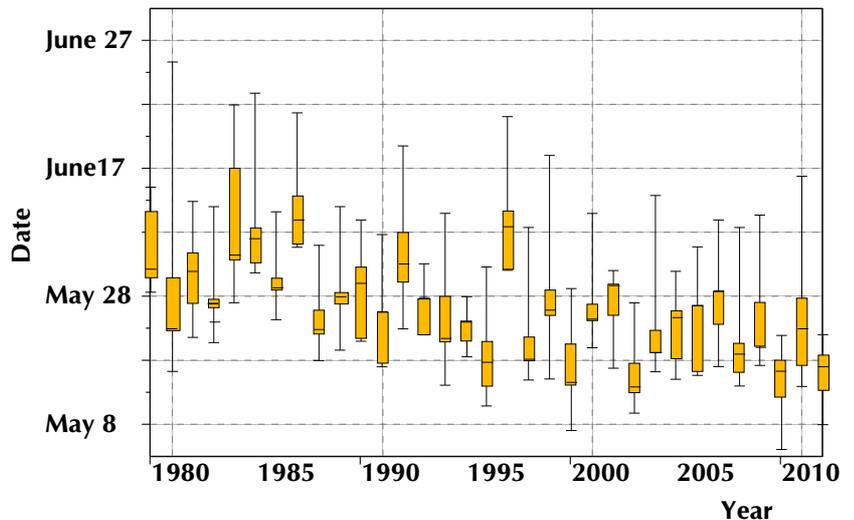
Ringing John Clark & John McMeeking

2011/2
Number 82

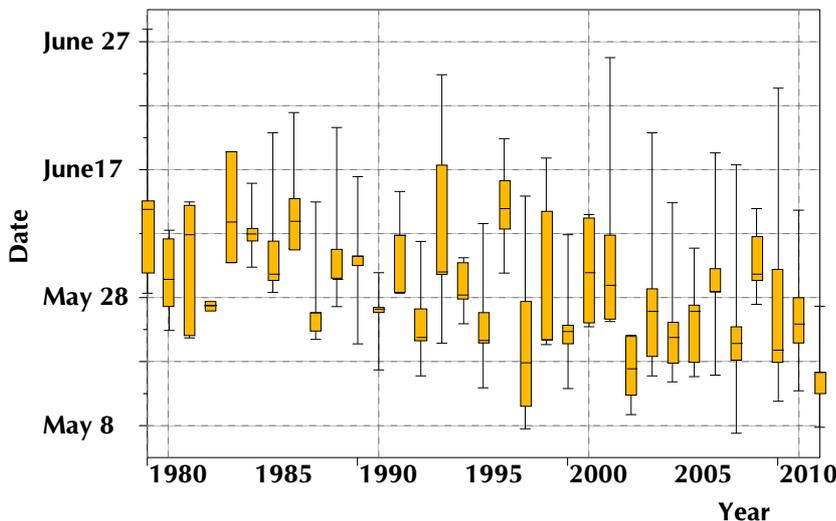
It has certainly been an unusual spring - the driest for a century following a very cold, but not prolonged, winter. We might expect this unusual weather pattern would bring with it an unusual tit nesting season - and this expectation has been fulfilled. All other things being equal, we might expect the relatively small number of surviving tits to have abundant resources. This would lead to large clutches and high nesting success. But it has not been so. The season began early and has proved to be very compact indeed. Clutches have been small; hatching success low followed by relatively high nestling mortality. Predation has been very low with no attacks by weasels. One nest was destroyed by a grey squirrel - sadly one of our two Tawny Owl nests. Wood mice may have been responsible for egg removal in one or two nests. Great Spotted Woodpeckers have attacked a few nests - no more than usual but they have had a disproportionate effect on Wrens and the relatively small number of Blue Tit nests. Why have things been like this? We suspect that the problem has been one of mismatch between the timing of nesting and the timing of the caterpillar crop on which the nestlings depend. We did note that the oaks came into leaf at an appropriate time. However, most of the trees are ash. The ash seemed to be very late in coming into leaf - it was not until broods were half grown that the ash leaves were open. The caterpillars which feed on these leaves were, therefore, not available for feeding the nestlings. We will not know until we have collated all the nest records, but it seems likely that mortality has been higher in the north-west sector of the wood where oak is least abundant and where the persistent strong and surprisingly chilling westerly winds in May hit hardest.

Normally we have measured the timing of the season by analysing the dates of the first eggs being laid in nests. Because of an administrative quirk in the way nest recording is done, the first egg dates are

Distribution of dates of ringing Blue Tit nestlings, 1979 - 2011



Distribution of dates of ringing Great Tit nestlings, 1979 - 2011



Interpreting these graphs.

These two ringing date graphs are known as 'box-and-whisker' plots.

The 'whisker' ends represent earliest and latest dates and the 'box' runs from lower to upper quartile. Finally, the median is represented by the line across the bar. (The median is the middle date and the quartiles can be thought of as the middle date of the early nests and of the late nests.)

In cases where the season was very short, it is possible that two of these dates may be the same - in which case one whisker, or the median, may coincide with the end of the box. Best to ignore these technicalities and use the plots to gain an overall view of the long-term changes.

not available for analysis until after the end of the season. However, the dates on which we ring nestlings are already computerised and available for analysis. Because of the earliness and shortness of the season, it is possible to report on the timing in this issue of Twitter rather than, as normal, waiting until the third issue of the year. The graphs tell the story. The 2011 season has been almost the earliest to begin, one of the shortest on record and the earliest to end. Indeed, the last tits to be ringed this year were earlier in the year than the first tits to be ringed in some other years.

By chance we have been encouraged to attempt to measure the caterpillar abundance and timing by 'frass' trapping this year. (Frass is a term used to describe caterpillar droppings.) The system is simple. We have trays - about A4 size - sited under some trees. Every five days the contents of these trays have been collected. The mass of (dried) droppings in each tray on each occasion will be measured and that will mirror the pattern of caterpillar abundance through the season. In addition, it will show the difference between caterpillar crops on oak and ash trees because we have set the trays in pairs - one of each pair under an ash and the other under a nearby oak. We are very grateful to Ken Smith (current chairman of the BTO Ringing Committee) for showing us what to do and, more importantly, for offering to do the work of separating the frass from other debris in the trays and doing the weighing.

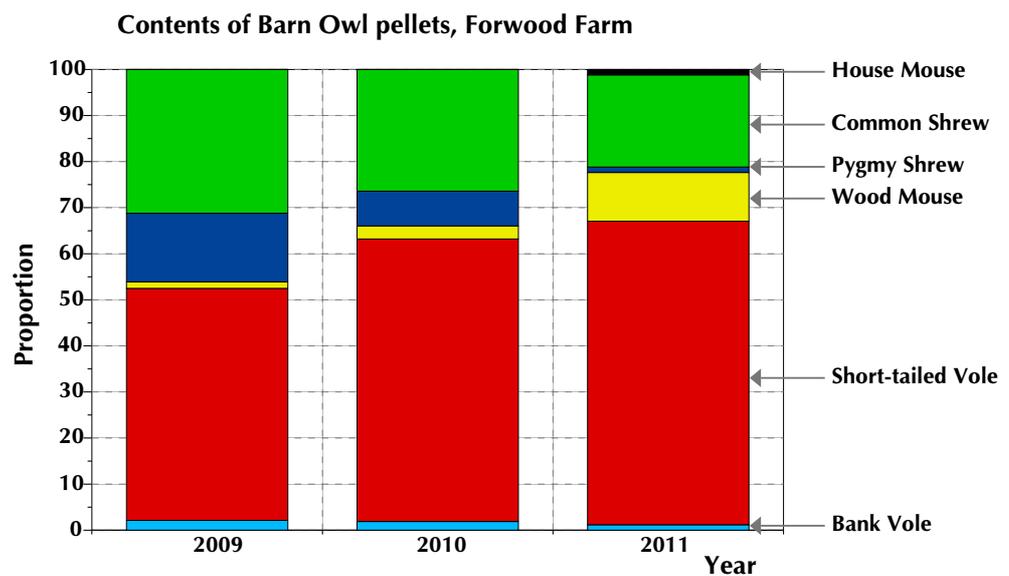
In an unusual season we might also expect some other differences. We have not been disappointed with three notable 'firsts'. We have provided an open-fronted Kestrel box on the wood edge for several years in line with best practice for the species. It has never been used. This year a pair of Kestrels has nested in an owl box in the centre of the wood. They have obviously not read the nestbox instruction guide - but it is the first time they have nested in our nestboxes and it has only taken them 24 years. Perhaps the bigger glades are providing better hunting for them. The second 'first' has been a successful Nuthatch nest. The species had attempted to nest in a nestbox in 1984 but did not reach the egg laying stage. In that year they selected an owl box and tried to reduce the entrance hole size from about 150 mm square to 30 mm diameter with mud. They abandoned the attempt after carrying a vast amount of mud to the box - the dried mud weighed 2 kg. It would have weighed much more when wet. Quite a feat for a bird weighing only 20 g. This year's nest has been, as with the Kestrel, in contravention of the rules of nestboxes. It was in an ordinary tit box sited at about 1.5 m above ground. The species has studiously avoided the special boxes provided - all at about 2.5 m and rather larger than the standard tit box. The last of the trio of 'firsts' is a recovery of a Stock Dove - not a long distance recovery but it is our first. Fuller details are given below.

There will soon be a paper in *Bird Study* analysing some of our long-term tit nesting data *Long term patterns in egg mortality during incubation and chick mortality during rearing in three species of tit in an English woodland*. (Charles Deeming and Chris du Feu.) This examines similarities and differences between Blue, Great and Coal Tit nesting success. The expected long-term trend to earlier nesting is described and also a long-term trend to smaller clutches has been found (and the 2011 season is clearly much in line with this). Interestingly, failure patterns are different with Coal Tits suffering greatest losses during incubation, Great Tits suffering greatest losses during chick rearing and Blue Tits falling somewhere between the two.

Barn Owls at Forwood Farm

In 1979 a Barn Owl nestbox was installed in a barn at Forwood Farm. There was no sign that it was being used by Barn Owls until 2008. They nested again in 2009, but did not breed in 2010 although they used the box for roosting. We have collected pellets each year to see what they are feeding on, just in case they might have dined on some of our ringed birds. The last batch of pellets were dissected by pupils at Queen Elizabeth's High School in Gainsborough and the contents identified. No bird rings were found. We now

have three years' worth of records of the small mammals they have fed on. Although three years is not long enough to be sure of long-term trends, there does seem to be a consistent change in relative abundance of various mammals. For instance, pygmy shrews have become fewer in number - and this is consistent with two successive hard winters. We are very grateful to David and Stephanie Bell for allowing us to record the Barn Owl nest, to



collect the pellets and for their enthusiasm and interest. QEHS is also grateful for the supply of biological material too. We look forward to the next year's collection of prey items.

CBC workers needed

We now have the 2010 CBC maps from the BTO and Steve Wain is computerising them. They will be completed soon and distributed as usual.

Our CBC team has been very dedicated over many years but, alas, we cannot halt the ageing of limbs and failing of hearing. We really do need some new observers to take over some of the areas of the wood. Previous experience of territory mapping is not essential but familiarity with bird song is. Training can be given in the techniques used. The work requires eight 2-hour visits to be made during the breeding season. The visits consist of a walk, always along the same path. Observations of birds' breeding activity (presence, song, carrying food etc.) are made on the day's visit map. At the end of the season, Pat Quinn-Catling collates all the map information, making one composite map of observations for each species. These composite maps are then analysed in a standard way at the BTO to give the territory maps and territory counts. The Breeding Bird Survey replaced the CBC some years ago as the system for monitoring national bird populations. However, because of the special circumstances in Treswell Wood (long-standing CBC records combined with systematic ringing and nestbox recording) the BTO has agreed to continue doing the professional analysis. From our point of view, we are seeing the value of the CBC as it provides an estimate of breeding populations which is independent of the ringing data - the importance of this independence was noted in the previous issue of Twitter.

It would be a pity if we could not continue this survey - so if you, or anyone you know, would be willing to take it on please do contact us.

Noteworthy Captures

Species	Age/sex	Ring	Date	Grid
Woodpigeon	4	FH22052	1/5/2011	N06

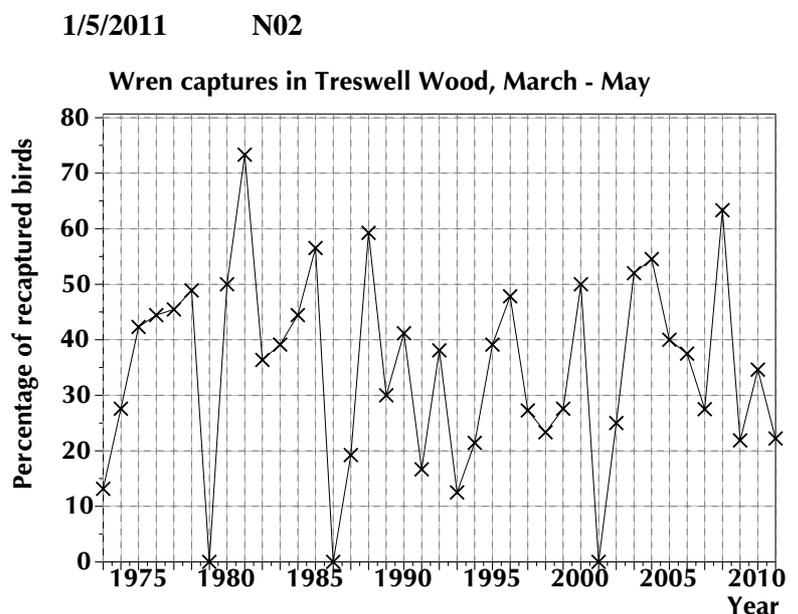
Strange how ringers seem to be only too willing to let someone else ring this species. They cannot be described as a species with charisma. This one, our first for nearly a year, had just started its annual moult. Wood Pigeons do tend to start moult much earlier than most species but this capture does mark the changing of the seasons.

Great Spotted Woodpecker	4M	CT84206	5/5/2011	Q02F
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What a difference between now and former times. When we first produced Twitter in 1995 we listed here all captures of non-passerines. In those days a Great Spotted Woodpecker capture was a relative rarity. In this ten-week interval we have captured seven of the species with capture histories stretching back nearly six years and some, like this, with many captures to its credit. This particular bird, ringed as a juvenile in 2005 and captured 17 more times, is one which has made more than its fair contribution to ornithology. We have recorded its state of moult in four separate years and, in one of those, we recorded moult on four different days. When it was three years old we noted its brown iris rather than the ruby-red colour that adults are supposed to have - so much for ageing birds by iris colour. And, at this latest capture, it has contributed its bill measurements to the very small national data set. What a hero.

Wren	6M	BYP703	1/5/2011	N02
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Wrens suffer badly in hard winters. We know that in the hard winter of 1978/79 our entire woodland Wren population was exterminated, to be replaced by a population of incomers which had survived better elsewhere. The graph shows the percentage of our adults trapped in the early breeding season, March - May, which were recaptures of birds ringed previously. There are no prizes for being able to identify past bad winters (although the last two seem to have had less bad effects). This bird has managed to survive two hard winters including the 2010/11 winter which was worse than that of 1978/79. It was ringed as a juvenile in 2007 and has been captured since then another six times, always near the main cross-roads. Not a great traveller - typical for the species.



Blackbird **6M** **CT84311** **15/5/2011** **D09**

The oldest of our Blackbirds captured in standard sites this interval - ringed just four years previously and always retrapped in the same grid square. Of note in the table of standard site captures is the lack of young birds. Of the 14 trapped, only one is in its first breeding season. All the retraps are older birds. Such a low proportion of young birds is surprising - normally we would expect over a third to be younger. Is this more evidence of the hard winter having a disproportionate effect on younger birds?

Blackcap **6M** **V475161** **9/5/2011** **D03**

Some Blackcaps are extremely site faithful, returning year after year to the same location within the wood. This one was ringed in 2007 in the north of the wood, as a first breeding season bird and caught again that year in the centre of the wood. We did not catch it in 2008 but have caught it each year since, and in these last years it has always been within about 50 metres of the same capture position, now in the south of the wood. So, it did take a couple of years to learn how Blackcaps should behave but now is functioning as it should .

Chiffchaff **6M** **BYP668** **17/4/2011** **D02**

Our oldest Chiffchaff of the year so far, ringed in 2007 as a breeding adult and recaptured in 2009 and 2010, its captures in the last three years always in the far south of the wood. It is also our second oldest Chiffchaff - a mere six weeks short of the record.

Chiffchaff **4F** **CXN211** **22/05/2011** **J03**

Not our oldest Chiffchaff for the spring but one of interest. It was ringed one year less a day before this, its first, recapture and also trapped within a few metres of its first capture position. A creature of habit in time and space.

Chiffchaff **5** **CXN459** **20/3/2011** **R-1**

The first Chiffchaff of the year, pleasingly caught the day after we heard the first one singing in the wood. This is our fourth earliest record, the earliest being on 12th March in 1995. Other early years were 1977 (19th March), 1990 (18th March) and 1997 (16th March).

Long-tailed Tit **3J** **CXN489** **15/5/2011** **F09**

The first juvenile of the year. Often we catch parties of this species, particularly when they are moving together in family groups, but this was alone. It seemed, at the time, to be a very late 'first juvenile' date. In fact, it is quite early - the fifth earliest we have recorded. Our perception at the time was coloured by the earliness of the nestbox season, making everything else seem late.

Marsh Tit **4F** **X649090** **1/5/2011** **E04 On nest**

A very welcome capture of a nesting bird. Our Marsh Tit population became extinct after the hard winter of 1978/79. The species is sedentary and numbers must have been much reduced locally. It was about 5 years before they managed to recolonise the wood. Happily, in spite of two consecutive hard winters, they have managed to survive in the wood and our population remains at its typical low level. The other two small tits have not fared so well. We have captured no Willow Tits since November 2009. Coal Tits did not nest in the boxes in 2010 and there was only one, unsuccessful, nesting attempt this year by them (see below).

Jay **6M** **DA51898** **9/5/2011** **C03**

This is the first Jay we have captured since early January. We have captured a total of 80 Jays - almost the same as the number of Stock Doves we have ringed. The recovery rate is remarkably different which is surprising as both species are large and subject to shooting pressure. We have eight recovery records; four shot, two rings in Tawny Owl nests and two reported just as found dead.

Goldfinch **4** **L731051** **5/5/2011** **Q02 feeder**

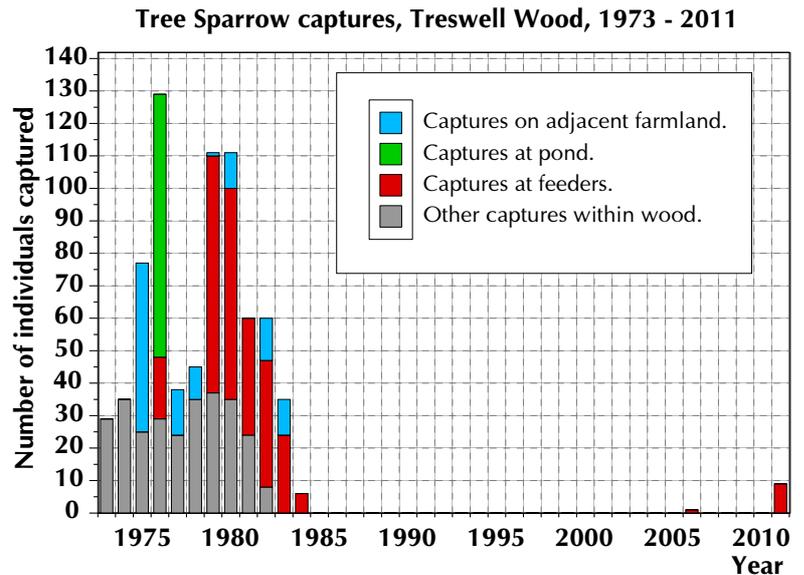
We noted in an earlier Twitter Andy Lowe's hint for sexing Goldfinches - count the number of tail feathers with white spots. This bird and another, L731085, were both birds with their outer tail feathers with two spots - the intermediate category which seems to be by far the most frequent in the wood. Their red head feathering seemed to be of the male type. However, on recapture, the very pronounced brood patches identified them as female. Be careful when sexing this species on plumage - some birds are very tricky and, often, when one character is indeterminate, so are many others too.

Yellowhammer **5M** **L731082** **24/4/2011** **Q02 Feeder**

Fortunately Yellowhammers are not the same colour as London buses otherwise we might have had difficulty in identifying this rarely-caught species. We had waited a long time for the next one, then they came together. Our previous capture of the species was in January 2003 when we caught a convoy of five. Today, this was one of a trio of birds trapped - all first breeding season birds, two males and one female.

Tree Sparrow **4F** **L731066** **1/5/2011** **Q02 Feeder**

The graph shows the history of captures of this species in the wood with the captures broken down to help explain the spikes in the distribution - at the pond during the 1976 drought, at feeders in some harder winters and in adjacent farmland when flocks gathered to feed on abundant supplies of seeds. In the 1970s and early 1980s they were regular breeders in the wood with up to about 30 pairs using the newly-installed nestboxes. The last year in which they used boxes was 1984 when we had just three successful broods. After that they vanished from the wood. The story moves on 20 years when one individual appeared at the feeder - but it was an isolated incident. Roll on another 5 years and two were seen at the feeding station early in April this year and one of these was caught a little later. Another eight were caught during the rest of that month. This bird, our first recaptured Tree Sparrow since the 1980s, was ringed on 10th April and retrapped three weeks later. We wondered whether any would nest in the nestboxes but there were no takers. We hope that there is now a strong enough local population for them to recolonise the wood - perhaps next year. We should know during the autumn as they are likely to build winter roosting nests in boxes prior to using them for nesting.



Controls and Recoveries

Species	Age/sex	Ring	Date	Grid
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Stock Dove	2	EL87446	15/5/2011	Crow Holt
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We have ringed a total of 88 Stock Doves, all but three of these being nestlings, since we installed nestboxes in 1979. The species is large and also subject to shooting. It should enjoy a relatively high recovery rate. It has not - this is the first ever to be reported to us. Other than being our first, it is not a very exciting history - being found dead a few hundred metres west of the wood about a fortnight after fledging. The cause of death of its headless corpse was not obvious but it was certainly not shooting. Like many smaller birds, life expectancy for fledgelings may not be long.

Coal Tit	4	L731048	20/4/2011	Q01 Dead in nestbox
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Sadly, the only Coal Tit which is known to have attempted nesting in our boxes this year. It had been ringed as a first breeding season bird only a fortnight earlier, presumably having recently arrived in the wood in search of a breeding territory. Like the other early nestbox death (X649360, below) the cause is unknown but certainly not predation.

Blue Tit	6F	X649360	13/4/2011	M-1 Dead in nestbox
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A would-be breeding female, ringed in 2009, found dead in a nestbox on a part-built nest. There was no sign of the cause of death and we assumed it would be the end of nesting in that box. Not so. A week later, the nest was completed by another bird. Did this one die as a result of competition for the nest site? Did it die and another bird, as yet without a territory, move in rapidly and take over the part-built nest? Would the second bird have nested if we had not removed the body?

Great Tit	4F	X497509	19/05/2011	E09 Dead in nestbox
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Ringed at Hillcrest Farm in January 2009, two weeks later it appeared in the south-east corner of the wood - the nearest part of the wood to the farm. It was not seen again until May 2011. Rearing young can be very demanding on parent birds - particularly in a year like this when food supply seems to be very low indeed. This bird was found dead in the nestbox - no signs of injuries by a predator. It might be just a lack of food.

Great Tit	5F	X497809	15/5/2011	D07
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Another escapee from Hillcrest Farm, Treswell. It was ringed there on 22/9/2010 as a juvenile and retrapped there a week later but not seen after that until this appearance in the wood.

Great Tit 5F X649930 21/5/2011 E01 Dead in nestbox

Another apparent victim of the bad food supply. We ringed it earlier in the year as part of the early spring influx. On ringing we noted it was a 'grey tit' - one with inadequate food supply during its first moult which resulted in very little yellow pigment in the feathers. One of life's losers?

Chaffinch 6M R353829 16/2/2011 Q02 Found dead

This Chaffinch was ringed nearly six years earlier in the spring of 2005. Thereafter we recaptured it later in that year and once in 2006. Since then no sign of it in spite of all the catching effort at the feeders where it had been ringed and where we found its recently dead body. This is like many Chaffinches over the years which have long gaps between appearances within the wood. We wonder what is the catchment area of our 'feeder-visiting' population and how big it is.

10 Week Summary 2011 Interval 2, Captures in Standard Sites

	New Birds			Recaptures			Total
	Adult	5	3	Adult	5	3	
Woodpigeon	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
Wren	1	8	.	.	.	.	9
Dunnock	1	3	.	.	2	.	6
Robin	1	2	.	2	2	.	7
Blackbird	2	1	.	11	.	.	14
Song Thrush	1	1	.	1	.	.	3
Blackcap	5	8	.	4	.	.	17
Chiffchaff	8	1	.	2	.	.	11
Long-tailed Tit	1	.	.	2	.	.	3
Coal Tit	.	.	.	1	.	.	1
Blue Tit	.	1	.	4	5	.	10
Great Tit	.	2	.	5	12	.	19
Nuthatch	.	.	.	1	.	.	1
Treecreeper	.	.	.	5	1	.	6
Jay	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
Chaffinch	.	2	.	.	.	.	2
Bullfinch	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
Totals	23	29	.	38	22	.	112

Treswell Wood Standard Site Totals in 10-week periods - Summary table**Recent years:**

Year	1	2	3	4	5	Total
2007	107	110	138	73	92	520
2008	125	130	151	86	100	592
2009	57	130	156	85	80	508
2010	94	100	144	119	143	600
2011	96	112				

Summary Data since standard site netting began in 1978:

Maximum	128	145	288	253	177	864
Minimum	57	33	94	68	59	364
Mean	90	108	162	133	125	619

BTO Atlas Treecreeper Appeal

The BTO Atlas project is in its last fieldwork season. Any further donations for sponsoring the Treecreeper species account will be welcome. Send the to Graham Appleton at the BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU and state clearly that the donation is specifically for the Treecreeper.

CES News and RAS News

These two newsletters for 2011 have been published by the BTO. If you want a copy of either, or both, email ces@bto.org or ras@bto.org and ask for a printed copy. Alternatively download them from www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/survey and select the CES or RAS pages.

The newsletters give details of how to join the CES and RAS forums.