

Nest box cleaning report

January 2012

All the nest boxes in the City gardens were cleaned between 11 - 13 January. The occupancy, type of nest and condition of the boxes was recorded. Recommendations for replacement and additional boxes are set out below together with suggestions for increasing opportunities for school children in the City to learn about birds.

Observations

- It was a worthwhile exercise - some boxes had not been cleaned for some time and had multiple nests.
- Six boxes of the 46 boxes were not replaced as they were rotten or had enlarged entrance holes.
- 55% of the boxes had been used (excluding those in Christchurch Greyfriars, which were installed after the spring 2011 nesting period.)

Table 1: Nest boxes in City Gardens

Type of boxes cleaned	Number	Nest		Empty	
		No	%	No	%
Tit	37	18	49	19	51
Robin	2	0	0	2	100
Sparrow	6	0	0	6	100
Open	2	0	0	2	100
Total	46	18	39	29	63
Total (excluding Christchurch Greyfriars)	33	18	55	15	45

- The most common nest were those of blue tits (61%), although there were also great tit nests (28%) and possibly one coal tit and one wren nest. None of the open robin type boxes had been used.
- There were 2 multiple nests - probably in boxes that had not been cleaned for some time.



Table 2: Types of nest

Type of nest	Number	%
Blue tit	11	61
Great tit	5	28
Coal tit	1	6
Wren	1	6
Total	18	100

Table 3: Number of boxes in poor condition and not replaced

Garden	Number	Comment
Speed house	1	One tit box in poor condition not replaced
Thomas More	1	One tit box enlarged entrance hole replaced with birch log tit box
Bunhill	3	One enlarged hole and 2 old rotten tit boxes
St Dunstan's in the East	1	Tit box on ground could not be replaced as it needs a new hook
Total	6	

- The cleaning took 24 man-hours spread over 3 days plus 12 hours of a volunteer to take notes and photographs. The cleaning took longer than expected because most of the boxes had to be removed from the tree to be cleaned and were difficult to re-install. Many of the boxes were extremely difficult to open and were not easy to clean.
- In all cases the old nest material was removed and the boxes disinfected and dried with paper towel before being reinstated.

Recommendations

Nest boxes

1. Install more boxes

The high levels of occupancy suggest there should be more nest boxes in gardens where they have already been installed and more gardens should have nest boxes. It is suggested that a further 55 boxes are installed - as shown in Table 4. This could be done over 2 years, given the time constraints on gardeners. As birds were already checking out boxes (mid January) new boxes should be ready for installation before Christmas 2012 and 2013.

2. Install boxes that are easier to clean

To reduce cleaning time, boxes that can be cleaned without removing from the tree and can be opened easily by undoing a clip should be installed in future. The Avianex-type box made of woodcrete were much the easiest and most robust of the existing boxes. They are also relatively lightweight and so less at risk of pulling off the fixings from the tree.

2. Sponsorship of new boxes

It is suggested that potential sponsors are approached - perhaps hotel companies in the City where for a relatively small outlay they could achieve very positive publicity. For example, £300 could fund the purchase of 20 to 25 new boxes.

3. Encouraging owners of private gardens to install boxes

Some thought should be given as to how to encourage owners of private gardens in the City to install nest boxes and to maintain them. The **Barbican**

estate office - should be approached to replace old boxes and install new ones in the Thomas More and Speed House gardens.

4. Boxes for different species

Most of the existing boxes are tit boxes and it is suggested that the majority of new boxes should be tit boxes - but boxes for robins and sparrows should be installed in some of the gardens - as shown in Table 4. It is also suggested that sites for nest boxes/nest platforms for other birds such as swifts and sparrow hawks should be investigated - perhaps in conjunction with the City Planning Department.

Table 4: Suggested locations for nest boxes

Garden	Type of box	Number
Bunhill	tit	5 (3 were not replaced)
	robin	2
Thomas More	tit	5
	robin	2
	Sparrow terrace	2
Speed	tit	3 (one was not replaced)
	robin	2
	Sparrow terrace	2
Christchurch Greyfriars (garden to west of tower)*	tit	5
Portsoken Street*	tit	2
West Smithfield*	tit	3
	robin	2
Whittington Garden*	tit	2
St Andrew's Holborn*	tit	3
	robin	2
St Brides*	tit	2
Church Entry*	tit	1
	sparrow	1
St Mary Staining*	tit	1
Barber Surgeon's*	tit	3
	robin	2
	sparrow	1
St Magnus the Martyr*	tit	1
	sparrow	1
Total new		55 (36 tit; 12 robin; 7 sparrow)
Total cost (estimated at £12-15 per box)		£ 660 - £825

* No boxes currently

5. Opportunity to involve volunteers

Whilst we were cleaning the boxes in Bunhill, children from the Lyceum School were given an impromptu talk on birds and nesting. They were really interested and the gardeners involved did a great job. It would be good to formalise and extend this outreach to children - perhaps doing a session in Fann Street - or involving these children in bird counts.

National Nest Box Week is 14 - 21 February. It would be good to do some activity with children to raise awareness during that week.