

Friends of The Emm Brook (FOTEB) : Use of Nest Boxes, 2016 (Year 10)

The nest boxes along two sections of the Emm ('Riverside Walk' and 'Emmbrook Walk') were taken down, checked and cleaned in January 2017, and the results with comments are shown in the table.

As in previous seasons most nest boxes (74 per cent) were used, mainly by tit species probably blue, coal and/or great tits. Again two of the four tree creeper boxes were used, but probably only one by the intended species; the other by tits. Both owl boxes, one in each section of the river, were also used again, probably by tawny owls.

Eight tits' nests contained one or more skeletons and/or more than one egg, a higher proportion than in the previous two years. 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 more likely cause. Seven of the eight boxes with skeletons were in the Emmbrook Walk section of the river. When numerous eggs and/or skeletons are present in an occasional nest, it is likely that something happened to one or both of the parent birds. As skeletons were found in many of the nests in one stretch of the river, but not to those in the other stretch (nor in Holt Copse where similar nest boxes are monitored) it suggests a common cause such as a predator, possibly a sparrow hawk.

Nest Box Type	Used	Not used	Comments
Small hole boxes	15	2	8 boxes with skeletons (or 2 or more eggs), 7 of which were in the Emmbrook Walk section.
Open fronted	0	2	One box under a bridge in Emmbrook Walk not found this time.
Tree-creeper	2	2	One box (with 1 egg) probably used by tree creepers, but the other one more likely to have been used by other species, possibly tits.
Wren	1	1	Nest domed and typical of those of wrens.
Owl	2	0	Both used probably by tawny owls. The nest contents similar, a grey (revolting-looking!) mixture, probably of droppings and old food. Broken bits of white eggshell in one nest. (The front of the one in EW cracked; repair next time.)
Total	20	7	Nearly 74 per cent of the boxes used.

Mike Saynor, Malcolm Dunmore and Charles Stickler, FOTEB

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