

# SDU Birds

## Autumn 2013

### Welcome Back!

Welcome to the second newsletter from the SDU Birds project. We are delighted to report that it has been a very busy first season, with many successful breeding attempts in our newly placed nest boxes. Our volunteers have been busy, collecting lots of valuable information as they kept a close eye on the birds during nest building, egg laying and chick feeding. Read more about what happened this season, along with our plans for the coming months – hope to see you in the woods! Jen

### Busy Building

Our volunteers began monitoring the boxes in April and started reporting signs of nest building very shortly after. Nests were recorded in **86%** of boxes. Birds built their nests with a variety of materials; twigs, moss, feathers and hair (horse & deer) and some even collected insulating material (glass wool) from the building sites around the university – very cozy! Once the nests were lined and ready for eggs, we watched them closely to record the date the first eggs were laid. This date is used across the world to compare the timing of breeding, to determine the effect factors, such as temperature, location etc. On average, female blue tits and great tits lay one egg per day, during the laying period, usually in the mornings. However recording eggs is not always easy, as hole nesting birds, like blue tits and great tits often “hide” their eggs under nest material to protect them from predators!



*A great tit nest with 3 eggs and lots of deer hair!*

### Eggs & Chicks



*Four Blue Tit chicks almost ready to leave the nest*

A grand total of **628 eggs** were found and reported in 72 nest boxes and in a small number of boxes the birds decided to raise two families! The majority of the eggs were laid by Great Tits (502 eggs in 58 boxes) with the remaining belonging to Blue Tits (116 eggs in 13 boxes) and Marsh Tits (10 eggs in 1 box). As you can see for every Blue Tit family that decided to set up home in our boxes, we had almost **five** Great Tit families! Great Tits began laying eggs first, with the first egg spotted on April 21<sup>st</sup>. Blue tits began shortly after on April 26<sup>th</sup>. All birds don't start to lay eggs at the same time, and we saw the first eggs appear in nests up until May 14<sup>th</sup> in both species. After the eggs were incubated (usually 12-14 days) we counted a total of **541 chicks** and estimated that 495 of these chicks survived the first 2-3 weeks and left the nest. Hopefully we will meet some of them again in the future!

### A Dedicated Team

Between the start of April and the end of July our five teams of volunteers made a total of **1,660** nest box checks. That means that each box was visited 16 times on average, over four months, or around once per week. Each team (consisting of one or two people) made 332 visits to individual nest boxes. That's a lot of eggs, chicks, data collection and quality time spent in the woods with the birds! From our volunteer survey, everyone seemed to have enjoyed their experiences, and are happy to sign up again next year!

## The Outdoor Classroom

In late May we were joined by a group of 25 five year olds from a local kindergarten. The children began their journey into the private life of birds on the grass, outside the university. Sitting in a big circle, we talked about birds, feathers and nests (in Danish!). Why do birds have feathers? Where do they live? What do they build their nests from? Together we went on an adventure into the woods, to collect material to build our own birds nest. In small groups we visited the nest boxes and the children were able to see and touch wild baby birds. It was fantastic to see the wonder on the children's face, and to share the wonders of nature with them. We are hoping to offer this type of activity to more groups next year and bring more children and adults out into the woods, closer to nature.



*Children and nature - a very important connection!*

## What's next?



*A Blue Tit chick fitted with a ring with a unique ID number*

During the summer we ringed almost all the chicks that were hatched in the nest boxes! A bird is "ringed" when a licensed ringer places a small metal ring on one of the birds' legs, with a unique identification number. This allows us to recognize each individual bird again in the future and therefore follow their progress. A total of 491 birds received rings this summer, 369 Great Tits, 87 Blue Tits and 8 Marsh Tits. During the winter we will try to find out how many of these chicks have survived and stayed in the area. To do this, we must catch the birds again to read the ring numbers. Using bird food we attract the birds and attempt to catch them. If you would like to join us, keep an eye on our Facebook page and blog for full details. We will also be organizing a "clean-up and repair day" where we will carry out essential maintenance to the boxes that need it, along with some other tasks in preparation for next year's breeding season.

## Mystery Solved

During the course of the project, we stumbled upon some other nest boxes in the woods. The boxes were very well made, interestingly designed and this one became fondly known as "The Bieber Box". I tried, without success to contact local schools and other groups to figure out where the mystery boxes came from. As a last attempt I decided to put an advert in the local paper (Fyens Stiftstidende). Shortly afterwards a teacher from Holluf Pile school contacted us, claiming the Bieber box was one of his! He told us about his own project with 50 nest boxes which his 6th class group were in charge of. It is very exciting to hear about similar projects and we look forward to possibly joining forces next year!



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