

FRIENDS OF CITY GARDENS

Nest box cleaning report November 2014

1. Results

1.1 All the nest boxes in City gardens were cleaned 20/21 November 2014. In total for the 2014 nesting season:

- 47 nest boxes were checked and cleaned in 12 gardens.
- 12 of the boxes had been occupied (26%) in comparison to 29% in the 2013 nesting season.
- The majority of nests were those of blue tits (58%) with the remainder great tits. No nests had been built in sparrow or open-type 'robin' boxes. Full results are given in Tables 1 and 2.
- In 2014 there were fewer dead fledglings and unhatched eggs than in 2013. This probably reflects the better summer weather and greater abundance of insects with which to feed young. There were only two significant instances of mortality - six fledged dead Great tit chicks were found in Christchurch Greyfriars - this may have been the result of overheating and in St Paul's a clutch of seven abandoned Blue tit eggs were discovered.

1.2 Annual nest box cleaning is important not only for maintaining the health of birds but also, together with the annual spring bird count, it provides evidence to evaluate the success of the City's biodiversity strategy.

1.3 Cleaning took 20 man-hours of gardener time spread over 2 days plus 20 hours of volunteer time to take notes and photographs.

Table 1: No of nest boxes and number of nests for 2014 season

	2014		2013		2012	
	No. boxes	No. nests	No. boxes	No. nests	No. boxes	No. nests
Barbican - Fann Street	4	1	3	1	5	0
Barbican - Speed	1	1	1	1	1	1
Barbican - St Giles	2	1				
Barbican - Thomas More	7	2	3	3	3	3
Bernard Morgan	1	1	1	1	1	0
Bunhill Fields	5	1	5	1	5	2
Byward Street	0	0	0	0	1	0
Christchurch Greyfriars	13	1	13	0	13	0
Cleary Garden	2	1	2	2	2	1
Finsbury Circus	1	0	2	1	2	2
Postman's Park	3	1	3	2	3	1
St Botolph without Bishopsgate	1	Not checked	1	Not checked	2	1
St Dunstan's in the East	3	1	3	0	2	0
St Mary Aldermanbury	1	Not checked	1	Not checked	2	2
St Paul's Cathedral	5	1	5	0	6	1
Total	49	12	43	12	48	14
Occupancy of checked boxes	26%		29%		29%	

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Table 2: Species using boxes 2014

	Total nests	Great tit	Blue tit
Barbican - Fann Street	1		1
Barbican - Speed House	1	1	
Barbican - St Giles Terrace	1	1	
Barbican - Thomas More	2	1	1
Bernard Morgan House	1	1	
Bunhill Fields	1		1
Christchurch Greyfriars	1	1	
Cleary Garden	1		1
Postman's Park	1		1
St Dunstan's in the East	1		1
St Paul's Cathedral	1		1
Total	12	5	7
%		42	58

2. Observations and recommended actions

2.1 Replacement of old or damaged nest boxes

Table 3: The following nest boxes need to be replaced or repositioned

Site	Tree ID	Box
St Paul's	128	SP4 Removed Nov 2014 - should be replaced with new tit box
St Botolph without Bishopsgate	69	SB2 Removed 2012 - should be replaced with new tit box
	64	SB1 Box needs to be repositioned lower down so it can be cleaned
St Mary's Aldermanbury	123	MA1 removed 2012 - should be replaced with new tit box
	124	MA2 Box needs to be repositioned lower down so it can be cleaned
Bunhill Fields	107	BH2 box in poor condition - should be replaced
	26	BH5 box in poor condition - should be replaced
St Dunstan's in the East	280	D1 - box removed - hook needs repairing
Barbican - Thomas More	303	TM5 - box in poor condition - should be replaced
Barbican - Fann St	450	F1 - removed Nov 2014 - should be replaced
	448	F2 - removed Nov 2014 - should be replaced
No of boxes to be replaced	8	
No. of boxes to be repaired	1	<i>Box was removed to depot</i>
No. of boxes to be repositioned	2	

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2.2 More boxes in more gardens

There should be nesting boxes in all the SINC sites. Current and proposed SINC sites without nest boxes are:

- Roman Wall Noble Street (not looked after by City Gardens but adjoining planting around St Anne's and St Agnes Church and St Olave Silver Street could have nest boxes) (2 boxes)
- Portsoken Garden (1 box)
- Smithfield Rotunda (2 boxes)

Other gardens where nest boxes could be installed are:

- St Mary Staining (1 box)
- St Andrews Holborn (2 boxes)

In total it is suggested that another 16 boxes are purchased this year - 8 replacements and 8 for new sites.

2.3 Type of box and installation

Front opening woodcrete boxes are the easiest and quickest to clean. It is suggested that boxes with a variety of entry hole sizes are purchased to attract different species:

25 mm for blue, coal tits

28 mm for great tits, tree sparrows

32 mm for house sparrows

45 mm for starlings

Tit and tree sparrow boxes should be installed approximately 3 - 4 metres above the ground. This ensures that cleaning can be safely carried out by ladder. House sparrow and starling boxes should be higher and positioned under eaves if possible. Potential sites would need to be individually identified.

The sparrow terraces in Christchurch Greyfriars could be relocated to better sites.

2.4 Volunteer involvement

National Nest Box Week (16-22 February 2015) although a little late for early nesting birds in the City, could be used as a focus for activities such as making nest boxes. Homemade nest boxes might not be as durable as the woodcrete ones but would be considerably cheaper.

2.5 Interpretation boards

Consideration should be given to placing interpretation boards in some City gardens showing the type of birds that nest and feed. In Bunhill a whiteboard could be placed in the window of the hut and daily sightings written up.