

FRIENDS OF CITY GARDENS

Nest box cleaning report November 2015

1. Results

1.1 All the nest boxes in City gardens were cleaned 19/20th November 2015. In total for the 2015 nesting season:

- 40 nest boxes were checked and cleaned in 14 gardens.
- 16 of the boxes had nests (40%) including four possibly partial and not completed - in comparison to 31% in the 2014 nesting season.
- The majority of nests were those of Great tits (66%) with the remainder Blue tits and one Wren nest. No nests had been built in sparrow boxes or open-type 'robin' boxes. Full results are given in Tables 1 and 2.
- In 2015 there were fewer dead fledglings than in 2014 - a single dead Great tit fledgling in a nest in Thomas More garden and another in Postman's Park. Two further nests had abandoned unhatched eggs - one in St Paul's and the other in St Giles terrace. The nest in St Paul's was in the same box next to the NE gate that also had abandoned eggs in 2014. This location is very busy in summer and disturbance may have been the cause for abandonment. This box should probably be moved to a new site next year.

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 and summer breeding bird survey, provides evidence to evaluate the success of the City's biodiversity strategy.

1.3 Thirteen nest boxes were replaced at existing sites. These were older style wooden boxes that had become rotten and in one case an Avianics box where the chain had broken. This box will be repaired and used elsewhere. All were replaced with Schwegler woodcrete boxes that are easier to install and clean and are more robust. There is also evidence to suggest that Great tits and Blue tits using woodcrete boxes have greater breeding success¹. The Schwegler boxes were a mixture of 26mm and 32mm apertures.

1.4 In 2015 new Schwegler boxes were installed in another four gardens two of which are or are about to be designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in the Biodiversity Action Plan 2015 - 2020.



1.5 Cleaning took 22 man-hours of gardener time spread over 2 days plus 22 hours of volunteer time to take notes and photographs.

¹ <http://www.conservationevidence.com/individual-study/1131>

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Table 1: Number of nest boxes and number of nests for 2015 season

	2015		2014		2013	
	No. boxes	No. nests	No. boxes	No. nests	No. boxes	No. nests
Barbican - Fann Street	2	1	4	1	3	1
Barbican - Speed	1	1	1	1	1	1
Barbican - St Giles	2	2	2	1		
Barbican - Thomas More	7	5	7	2	3	3
Barbican - Upper Podium Cromwell Tower	3	0	NA	NA	NA	NA
Bernard Morgan/Golden Lane	1	0	1	1	1	1
Bunhill Fields	6	2	5	1	5	1
Christchurch Greyfriars	NA	NA	13	1	13	0
Cleary Garden	2	1	2	1	2	2
Finsbury Circus	2	1	1	0	2	1
Postman's Park	3	1	3	1	3	2
St Botolph without Bishopsgate	1	<i>Not checked</i>	1	Not checked	1	Not checked
St Dunstan's in the East	6	0	3	1	3	0
St Mary Aldermanbury	1	1	1	Not checked	1	Not checked
St Paul's Cathedral	4	1	5	1	5	0
Total	41	16	49	12	43	12
Occupancy of checked boxes (excl. Christchurch Greyfriars)	40%		31%		41%	



Wren nest from a birch log box in Cleary Garden. The nest box was filled with a layer of leaves and the nest constructed out of moss so the hole was aligned to the hole on the nest box. The birch log box was damaged and replaced by a Schwegler woodcrete box

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Table 2: Species using boxes 2015

	Total nests	Great tit	Blue tit	Wren
Barbican - Fann Street	1	1		
Barbican - Speed House	1	1		
Barbican - St Giles	2	2		
Barbican - Thomas More	1 + 4 probably partial		1	
Bunhill Fields	2	1	1	
Cleary Garden	1			1
Finsbury	1	1		
Postman's Park	1		1	
St Mary Aldermanbury	1	1		
St Paul's Cathedral	1	1		
Total	16	8	3	1
Total definitely completed	12			
% of completed nests		66%	25%	8%

2. Observations and recommended actions

2.1 Observations

The occupancy level in 2015 was higher than last year, although some nests may have only been partial and might not have supported successful breeding. The lack of nests in St Dunstan's in the East was disappointing but may be explained by the extensive works that took place during the spring and early summer which resulted in considerable disturbance and may have deterred birds from nesting. The three new sparrow boxes on the Barbican Upper Podium were installed late in the spring and this may explain why there was no evidence of birds visiting them or building in them. They are in an area where sparrows have been observed but there is a lack of shrub cover in the immediate vicinity which may be another reason that they have not been used.

Thirteen nest boxes in Christchurch Greyfriars were installed in 2011. Since then only one of these boxes has had a nest - in 2014. As this nest had been abandoned with six dead chicks, possibly from overheating in the exposed position, it was decided to close the boxes in 2015 to prevent further nests being built. These boxes are high quality and should be removed and resited in another garden.



Great tit nest from box in Finsbury Circus garden showing conifer cones used in the construction.

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2.1 Replacement of old or damaged nest boxes

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

Site	Tree ID	No.	Box
St Paul's	268	1	SP1 wooden box replace next year
	128	1	SP5 consider reposition next year as 2 years of abandoned eggs
St Botolph's Bishopsgate	64	1	SB1 Box KPS to reposition lower down so it can be cleaned
Christchurch Greyfriars		6	6 X sparrow terrace reposition next year
		3	3 X tit box reposition next year
		4	4 X open 'robin' box reposition next year
Postman's Park	167	1	P2 - wooden box - replace next year
No of boxes to be replaced		2	
No. of boxes to be repaired		1	Box from St Mary's was removed to depot for repair to chain.
No. of boxes to be repositioned		14	All Christchurch nest boxes should be repositioned winter 2015 plus one box in St Botolph's.

2.2 New sites for nest boxes

Table 4: New sites where boxes were installed 2015

Location	No. boxes	Type
St Olave's Silver Street	1	Schwegler 26mm
St Mary Staining	1	Schwegler 26mm
St Anne and St Agnes - Noble Street	1	Schwegler 32mm
Portsoken garden	1	Schwegler 26mm

Recommended sites for new boxes 2016

Gardens where new nest boxes could be installed are:

- St Andrew's Holborn (2 boxes)
- St Michael's Cornhill (2 boxes)
- St Olave Hart Street (1 box)

Total number of new boxes required in 2016:

Replacements	2
New sites	5
Total	7

Some new sites could be installed with repositioned boxes from Christchurch Greyfriars; these boxes should be removed and repositioned during the winter 2015.

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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 installed 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 metres above the ground on trees with a clear flight path to the nest box. House sparrow and starling boxes should be higher and positioned under eaves if possible. Potential sites would need to be individually identified.

2.4 Volunteer involvement

National Nest Box Week (14 - 21st February 2016) although a little late for early nesting birds in the City, could be used as a focus for activities such as engaging City businesses in funding new boxes.

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.



Probable Blue tit nest showing lining of feathers with moss and grasses Barbican Thomas More garden