

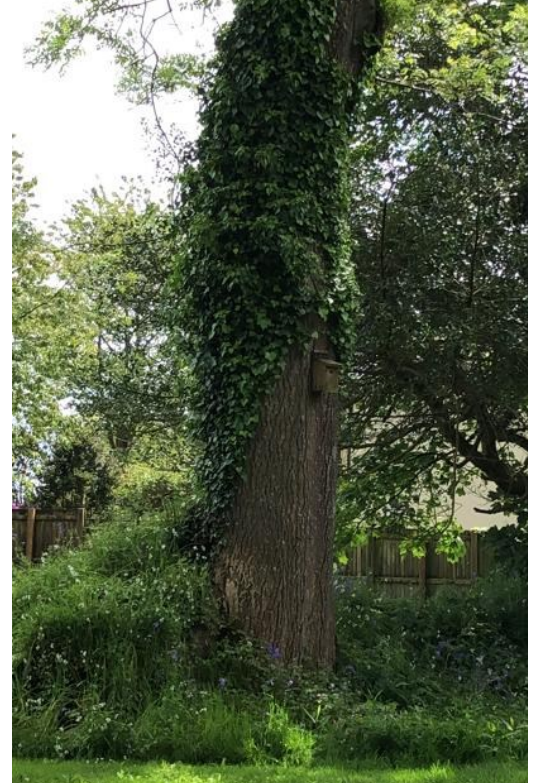
St Erme Churchyard Nest Box Report 2025 - Samantha Haley



Adult Blue Tit (Left)



Adult Great Tit (Right)



Box 3, St Erme Churchyard

Nest Box recording is carried out by registered nest recorders, of which there are approximately 670 in the UK. These nest recorders volunteer under the direction of the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology), collecting data which contributes towards the science of breeding birds and to do so, must follow a strict Code of Conduct to minimise disturbance to the birds as much as is physically possible.

Placing nest boxes, not only helps cavity nesting birds to find a safe place to rear their young, it can also provide roosting sites for birds overnight. Churchyards can be one of the most tranquil settings for these boxes to be placed, and birds can be enjoyed by people visiting loved ones graves.

Seven homemade nest boxes were placed around St Erme churchyard on 17th March 2024. These boxes were set to attract both Blue Tit and Great Tit. We put up 3 boxes with a 25mm entrance hole, which is suitable for Blue Tit and 4 boxes with a 28mm hole which are suitable for Great Tit, but can also be used by Blue Tit.

Typically, Blue Tit will lay between 8-10 eggs during April and May. Eggs are laid daily, and once the clutch has been completed, the eggs are incubated for around 14 days. The young will then leave the nest between 16-22 days later.

Great Tit generally lay slightly smaller clutches, with 6-9 eggs being most common. Again, these are normally laid during April and May. Like the Blue Tit, they also take around 14 days to hatch and fledge at approximately 19 days old.

The BTO receive around 3,500 - 4000 nest records of each of these species from volunteers on an annual basis. Birds that readily take to nesting in boxes can be easily monitored and this can vary hugely, from 1 box in someone's back garden, to huge nest box schemes in large areas of woodland and forests.

This year - 2025, has had the driest spring on record for 100 years. I found that birds generally appeared to be nesting slightly earlier than usual, though Blue Tits have to synchronise their hatching times with when there is food availability and their primary sources are Winter Moth caterpillars which they collect off Oak trees.

Boxes 6 and 7 were used in the churchyard this year, both by Blue Tits. Some other nests were started and then not completed and this can be for a number of reasons.

Interestingly, the boxes used this year were different to the ones used last year.

The birds in Box 6 started their nest building on 6th April and their first lay date was 22nd April. They laid a total of 7 eggs and 5 chicks successfully fledged around the beginning of June.

Box 7 was a little later to get started and the birds started laying their eggs on 2nd May. Unfortunately, I did not manage to get a full clutch count from this box but 6 chicks hatched and 5 managed to fledge around 9th June.

Hopefully the good weather following fledging will have helped these chicks and with any luck, numbers may have increased for breeding in 2026.

As well as monitoring birds nesting in boxes in the churchyard, Michael also brought to my attention a Long-tailed Tit's nest which had been built in the Berberis. I also monitored this nest which had been completed externally by 9th March. These birds laid a total of 8 eggs, 7 of which hatched. By May 5th, these birds were 90% grown and were due to fledge in the next week. However, when this nest was checked on May 9th, unfortunately it had been predated (obvious by the new hole in the top of the nest) and this is likely to have been by another bird.

This however, does not necessarily mean that they were all taken by a predator as they were at the stage where some may have been able to escape unscathed and I can only hope that this was the case.

Another nice sight in the churchyard was the presence of a Firecrest which I had not recorded here before. These birds are, what is known as a 'Schedule 1 bird' which means a permit is required to monitor any nesting activity, but I think they may have been nesting a little further away.

Once all my information has been collected, it is submitted to a national online database, where it can be used for things, such as looking at breeding trends, clutch sizes, success rates to fledging etc.

Generally speaking, Blue Tits are single brooded birds, meaning they only attempt nesting once per year, however, Great Tits will occasionally have a second brood and therefore, nest boxes need to be checked by volunteers later in the season, once the first broods have fledged. Both species may also re-lay a clutch of eggs, if the nest is to fail during this stage.

I'd like to express my thanks to Michael Edwards again for helping make this scheme in the local churchyard possible, and hope the information contained is of interest and helps secure the future of the boxes in this area.



Box 6 - 5/5/25



28/5/25



Box 7 - 5/5/25



28/5/25