

Nesting tree sparrows at Tyttenhanger and Coursers Farms - 2009 results

Ken Smith, Jim Terry & Peter Delaloye

Herts Bird Club

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Nest boxes for the benefit of tree sparrows have been in place at Tyttenhanger Farm and Coursers Farm since at least 1996 and have been monitored systematically since 1999. These tree sparrows are the only known breeding colonies in the whole of Hertfordshire and monitoring of their breeding performance and numbers are actions listed in the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.



This short report describes the results of the breeding season monitoring in 2009 and compares these figures with those from previous years.

Table 1 summarises the 2009 results for Coursers Farm and compares them with 2008. There were no successful nests at Tyttenhanger Farm this year although two clutches of cold tree sparrow eggs were found in the boxes at the end of the season on September 3rd. The boxes had been checked regularly through the peak of the nesting season so these two clutches were probably failed late season nesting

attempts. However, the birds had a bumper year at Coursers Farm with the highest numbers of nesting attempts and fledged young ever recorded by the project. The numbers of fledged young would have been even higher were it not for two late nests which were predated and one nest box failure which resulted in the loss of a clutch of eggs.

Table 1. Summary of the 2008 and 2009 results from Coursers Farm

	Coursers Farm 2008	Coursers Farm 2009
Number of available boxes	21	21
Number of boxes with any sign of tree sparrow nest building	11	14
Number of boxes in which tree sparrow eggs were laid	8	14
Number of tree sparrow nesting attempts	16	25
Total number of eggs laid	87	133
Mean clutch size	5.43	5.32
Total number of young fledged	65	79
Mean number fledged per nesting attempt	4.06	3.16
Number of simultaneous nesting attempts	7	12

Photographs show Ken Smith and Jim Terry checking the nest boxes at Coursers Farm

The numbers of nesting attempts, eggs laid and young fledged for the period 1999 to 2009 are shown in Table 2. It is clear that, since 2000 at least, the numbers have more or less been maintained but 2009 saw a welcome increase to the highest total ever recorded by the project. The overall number of young fledged was high in 2009 but the average number per nesting attempt was low because of the loss of nests at Coursers Farm and the unhatched eggs at Tyttenhanger Farm.



Table 2. A summary of tree sparrow numbers and breeding performance from 1999 to 2009.

Year	Tyttenhanger Farm			Coursers Farm			Overall				
	Number of nests	Eggs laid	Young fledged	Number of nests	Eggs laid	Young fledged	Number of nests	Eggs laid	Young fledged	Mean clutch size	Mean number fledged
1999	0	0	0	5	-	c 20	5	-	c 20	-	3.40
2000	0	0	0	22	-	c 40	22	-	c 40	-	1.80
2001	0	0	0	14	73	c 45	14	73	c 45	5.21	2.50
2002	0	0	0	22	-	c 70	22	-	c 70	-	3.18
2003	1	5	5	16	85	61	17	90	66	5.29	3.88
2004	7	39	26	11	66	29	18	105	55	5.83	3.06
2005	11	58	27	11	60	15	22	118	42	5.36	1.91
2006	2	13	4	11	66	47	13	79	51	6.08	3.92
2007	4	21	12	13	77	40	17	98	52	5.76	3.06
2008	0	0	0	16	87	65	16	87	65	5.44	4.06
2009	2	8	0	25	133	79	27	141	79	5.22	2.93

Winter maintenance and feeding

The Herts Bird Club plans to continue the programme of winter feeding for the birds over the 2009/10 winter. The existing nest boxes are in need of some maintenance which will be carried out over winter. In addition we hope to erect a few new boxes to attempt to increase the local numbers and distribution of the birds which, in time, will make them much less vulnerable than they are at present. With such high numbers of birds fledged in 2009, 2010 could be a good year for the birds to found a new sub-colony.

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