

## **Spotted Flycatcher Project– Bredon Hill Villages – 2009**

(Ninth year of local community-based survey of Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*)

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### **Background**

The survey was not as thorough this year but again focussed on parts of 5 villages. In addition pairs were reported in five others where house-owners helped with the monitoring. As always the survey relied heavily on the support of local people who reported sightings of Spotted Flycatcher in their area. Reports of nests in other villages were followed up but a few people monitored their own nests.

This year the rolling total for the project reached 355 Spotted Flycatcher nests of which 344 have been monitored.

2009 may have been the final year of the study – efforts will be made to collect data for 2010 – the tenth year – but circumstances may prevent it.

In 2009 a request was issued for information about Spotted Flycatcher in other areas in Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Gloucestershire. A considerable amount of data has been sent in and this will be the subject of a separate report.

### **Methodology**

As usual the survey relied heavily on observations by the local community, backed up by co-ordinators and/or JC walking selected areas searching for Spotted Flycatchers. Reported sightings were investigated thoroughly. Once a pair was located the nest was found and monitored. Nest failures were followed by intensive searches to assess if and where the birds were making a further breeding attempt. Successful breeders' territories were monitored to check for second broods.

### **Results**

The general impression of observers was that numbers of pairs crashed this year. In some villages numbers have fallen so dramatically that it would seem likely that the Spotted Flycatcher will disappear altogether. In two of the five study villages only one pair was located. Single pairs were found in three of the five other villages. In the five main villages only 12 pairs were found – the previous lowest was 23.

Frustratingly, observers felt that flying insects were more common and numerous – had more pairs arrived food would have been abundant.

A number of observers kept a careful watch to see when the birds first arrived in their gardens and the earliest sighting in the study area was 20<sup>th</sup> May. However, some birds must have arrived earlier as at least five pairs laid their first egg in May – the

earliest was 23<sup>rd</sup>. This early start should have given the birds more chance of producing second broods but a combination of first nest failures and periods of bad weather meant that only four pairs attempted it with two failing.

## **Statistics**

20 pairs were located and monitored for at least part of the season.

27 nests were located and monitored.

9 nests failed – (5 definitely predated) including 2 at nest stage, 5 at egg stage and 2 at young stage - 33.33% failure rate. Excluding the failures at nest stage – as per BTO data – the failure rate was 28%.

2 pairs made second breeding attempts after failing. Possibly 4 pairs failed to breed. 4 pairs attempted second broods and 2 succeeded.

A minimum of 48 young were fledged but as continuous monitoring of all pairs was not possible the figure may be higher. It represents an average breeding success rate of 2.4 young per pair – the third lowest in nine years.

Of the 27 nests, 2 were in old Blackbird nests, 2 in small nest boxes and 11 in coconut shells.

## **Conclusions**

Although nest-failure rates were comparatively low the breeding success (or productivity – ie number of young fledged per pair) was extremely low. This may be in part due to the weather conditions at critical times – affecting clutch size and chick survival.

Even allowing for the fact that the survey in 2009 may not have been as thorough as in other years, the apparent population crash in the five main villages is not explained. Over the nine years of the study two villages have suffered massive declines whilst one or two have seen much smaller changes.

## **Observations**

First reported sighting – not from here but of a pair in a garden in Herefordshire 11/4/09.

20/5/09 – First sighting in the study area.

Several reports of pairs ‘messaging about’ – ie appearing to start a nest then stopping for a few days or even building a new one.

Several sightings of single birds followed up with the bird disappearing after a day or two.

One nest reported to have been predated by Grey Squirrel.

### **Acknowledgements**

This study could not be carried out without the cooperation of many local people – some of whom help to monitor their pairs of flycatchers whilst others (estimated at over 100) provide freedom of access to their gardens. Several individuals carry out local searches to locate birds, contact the householder and me – and continue to provide observations on progress.

Once again, thanks are due to other observers who sent in information from outside the study area.