

Pied Flycatchers in the BOG area

Status

In the Bradford area this species cannot be said to be rare or an endangered breeder. It is however very difficult to find breeding away from woodland where there are no nest boxes. Indeed most people reading this article will probably have seen their last breeding BOG Pied Flycatcher in a wood with a nest box scheme, some will never have seen one anywhere away from these schemes.

Upper Wharfedale and the Washburn Valley are the strongholds for our Pied Flycatchers but, even here they rely almost entirely on nest boxes. It remains extremely difficult to find them in the Aire Valley with only a handful of records in the last 15 years. Nest box schemes at Low Wood, Riddlesden and Hawksworth Spring Wood, Baildon and one record of nest box breeding at Hirst Wood have helped to address this. The problems facing the Pied Flycatcher is the lack of suitable natural holes in our tidy woods. The few holes available are occupied by other birds before they return in late April.

Nest box schemes

I first decided to start a nest box scheme in 1990. I was a warden at Low Wood near Keighley and they had never recorded Pied Flycatcher. 21 were put up and nothing used them in the first year, but at least three pairs nested the following year. I maintained these boxes for four years, after this I neglected them. Soon after the Pied flycatchers stopped breeding.

Myself, Andy Jowett, Tony Gough and Martin Stone started a scheme in Hawksworth Spring Wood in the mid nineties and this attracted Pied Flycatchers in the first year. Again these boxes were not maintained and the birds disappeared. You can see the pattern emerging here, if you don't stay dedicated to your nest box scheme you lose your Pied Flycatchers.

Two years ago, I decided to start these schemes again but with a new strategy. I will make, in some cases supply and put the boxes up, but local people have to promise to maintain them. In the past my problem has been that the sites I chose were too far away from my home. 21 new boxes are now in Low Wood and these are maintained by the committee members every year. 12 boxes in the Lower Washburn Valley are maintained by local man John Smith. I currently have 18 in a wood half a mile away from my home in Shipley. I will remain dedicated to these boxes.

Thinking of starting?

Bear in mind what you have read in the last section, and feel that you can remain dedicated to a scheme. Ok, identify a local wood, preferably in the Aire Valley. Find out who owns it and ask for permission to start a scheme. I find that landowners are usually very keen if you approach them in the right way. Areas that look promising include Shipley Glen, Bull Copy Wood, Fell Wood, St Ives, Alder Carr Wood, Holden Beck and restarting a scheme at Hawksworth Spring Woods. Once you have done this, work out how many boxes you will need. It is important to put them up in close groups of three, the theory is, Blue and Great Tits will occupy two of the boxes and exclude birds of the same species from the third. This leaves it free for when the Pied Flycatchers return in late April.

I use 9mm marine plywood. Marine ply lasts for 15 years without external maintenance and is reasonably cheap. The size that I make them has proved very successful and is as follows: 150mm wide x 150mm long x 250mm deep. The hole needs to be 32mm diameter and preferably protected by a metal plate. They should be placed roughly 3 metres high and facing an easterly direction.

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