

Nest Box 2017

On the 8th of **March** 2017, Éabha and Dominika from room 1 spotted a blue tit in the nest box. The blue tit was checking out the box and deciding if she would nest there. We had hoped she would have chosen the other nest box, with the new webcam, but she chose the old nest box! Later that day, she was seen moving and removing the old nesting material. Usually a blue tit will clear out all the old nesting material before building a brand new nest.

On the 10th of March I spotted the blue tit in the nest box. I spotted her coming in and out again on the 15th. We were keeping a nest box diary.

For the next few weeks the blue tit was seen coming in and out, picking at the nest, fixing it with her wings and burrowing down into the nesting material. Unusually this year, she decided to use some of the old material for her new nest.

While we were off school for the Bank Holiday weekend, Mike was keeping watch. On Bank Holiday

Monday, the 17th of April, he saw that she had laid her first egg. She usually she lays an egg a day so we were very excited to see a new egg every morning for the next seven days. By the 24th there were 8 shiny, white eggs in the nest.

She began incubating the eggs on the 25th and it usually takes 9 or 10 days before they hatch.

Over the next week she sat on her eggs almost all the time. She only went outside to go to the toilet. The male bird was coming in and out bringing her food. We also saw her moving the eggs around to make sure all the eggs were warm.

On Sunday May the 7th Mike discovered that three eggs had hatched. I was sooooo excited on Monday to see that 7 eggs had now hatched and I couldn't stop watching the 7 tiny, blind, featherless chicks. One of the third class girls said they looked like jelly!

This began a very busy time for the parents. On the 8th the mother spent some time sitting on the chicks and the last egg, keeping them warm. But she and the dad were also in and out bringing food. Mrs Kileen spotted the mother bird eating a bit of shell. She

usually clears out all the old shells to keep the nest tidy but sometimes she eats some shell for nutrition.

On the 9th of May the last egg hatched. We were so delighted have 8 chicks all looking healthy.

Over the next ten days we watched the busy parents feeding the chicks and keeping the nest clean. The parents even took away the poo sacks (faecal sacks)!

By the 17th of May, when they were only 10 days old, they had feathers and their eyes were open. They looked so cute!

Some days when there was no wind we could hear the chicks cheeping when the parents came to give them food.

Sometimes, when they spread their wings, we could see the pin feathers. Pin feathers are like little go-gos which hold bunches of wings feathers together while the chick is still developing. By May 22nd we could see that all the pin feathers had broken and the chicks had beautiful smooth wings feathers.

Friday the 26th of May was a busy day in the nest box. The chicks, now all fully grown and the same size their parents, spent the day peeping out of the hole

in the nest box. We watched excitedly hoping to see them fledge. All day the parents tried to coax the chicks out. They stood on nearby braches and called them and they brought food to the hole in the nest box. By home time they still hadn't left. Ms Barrett waited another while but still didn't spot any fledging.

When we came in on Monday morning the nest was empty.

We were sad but we knew they had left safely and we were delighted to have had the chance to watch as our 8 healthy chicks grew up.

Thanks to Mike, our caretaker, for making the nest box, for setting up the camera and for telling us details about the blue tits. We are so lucky to be able to get to watch the secret life of blue tits.

By Emily Hopley, fifth class.

- *Incubating* means sitting on the eggs and keeping them warm
- *Fledging* means leaving the nest for the first time