

Blue Tits in my Nest Box

By David Gains



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Sample

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Introduction

The Blue Tit (formerly *Parus caeruleus*, but now *Cyanistes caeruleus*) is the most common tits species in Britain and Ireland, resident all year round and occurring almost everywhere apart from most mountainous and treeless habitats, such as north-west Scotland.

They are chiefly a broadleaved woodland species, preferring oak woods for their diversity and abundance of insect life, which becomes particularly important when they are feeding young. However, they have adapted well to living with humankind and are now one of the commonest visitors to our gardens, especially to bird feeders containing peanuts or sunflower hearts. Here their inquisitive nature and acrobatic antics of hanging upside down, sometimes with only one foot, both amaze and entertain us. Added to this, the yellow underparts, striking bright blue cap and mischievous looking black eye mask across its white face have made this attractive bird one of our best-loved (Plate 1).

They nest in holes in trees and walls, though they choose weird sites sometimes, such as cistern overflow pipes and letterboxes. Further, Blue Tits will frequently occupy nest boxes and so there is then always the chance we may glimpse a fledgling.

Recent advances in electronics have brought affordable, miniature digital cameras to the consumer marketplace and some of these have found their way into nest boxes. Now, we can watch their day-to-day nesting activities from the comfort of our own homes.

In 2005, a nest box complete with wireless digital camera (see Appendix), was erected in the position of an existing nest box that had proved to be successful in past years.

Although a pair of Blue Tits stayed in the nest, they did not attempt to build a nest, so I had to wait until the following breeding season.



Plate 1. The attractive Blue Tit is one of our best-loved garden birds.

Egg-laying

On the morning of Tuesday 25th April, two eggs were visible in the nest (Plate 10), though it is unlikely that both had been laid that day, one was probably from the day before but had been hidden by nest material.

As is normal for Blue Tits, she laid a single egg each day, shortly after dawn, for the next 8 days or so. Each egg was white and speckled with reddish spots and about 12 millimetres ($\frac{1}{2}$ ") long.



Plate 10. The first two eggs, though it is unlikely they were both laid on the same day.

Each morning she left the nest box before 6AM and the eggs were usually visible. Later in the morning, before midday, she would return to the nest and cover them with nest material. This was most likely to camouflage them, so that they were less visible to predators, such as Grey Squirrels and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, but if that was the case why did she not cover them sooner? Another possible explanation is that she was keeping direct sunlight off them, because from midday sunshine passed through the hole and onto the eggs for a short time, to prevent them becoming warm and losing too much water content through evaporation.

Whilst the nest was unattended, the two Blue Tits would be in and around the garden, and the male would occasionally offer her a morsel of food which she would take, though she was often feeding herself on the sunflower hearts and seed heads.

Sample



Plate 11. 26th April—3 eggs

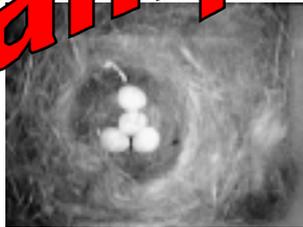


Plate 12. 27th April—4 eggs



Plate 13. 28th April—5 eggs



Plate 14. 29th April—6 eggs



Plate 15. 1st May—8 eggs



Plate 16. 2nd May—9 eggs

Plates 11-16. Each morning, shortly after dawn, the female laid another egg. The eggs were left uncovered until just before midday when she would cover them with nest material.