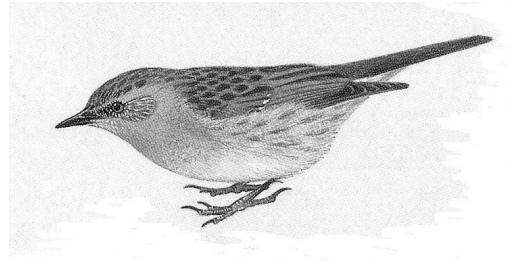


## The Dunnock

On February 10<sup>th</sup> our garden Dunnock started singing, having been silent for about 8 months. The Chaffinch also started singing on the same day – it was just as though someone had flicked a switch. Anyway, as I was looking for a subject for PP I thought – what about the Dunnock?



You may ask why such a dull-looking little brown bird deserves an article all of its own. Well, firstly have you ever seen a Dunnock nest? It is probably one of the easier nests to find – a substantial cup in a thick bush or hedge. It is not the nest, however, which is the star attraction, but the eggs. These are a fantastic shade of bright, deep turquoise blue and they nestle in the shady nest like jewels.

And that is not all. There is a very good chance that the eggs will have been fathered by more than one male bird. The Dunnock is just occasionally monogamous, but more usually is not. A threesome is the most common configuration – one female and two males, where one male is more dominant and does most of the singing and territorial defence. The second male creeps around trying not to be noticed, and sneakily grabs the attentions of the female when the first male is away feeding. And what benefits does the female get from this? Simple – two males to help feed her young.

If you keep a careful lookout in the garden you can see this going on – it is quite common in the Spring to see three Dunnocks together, chasing and wing flicking – and this is usually one female being courted by two males.

Apparently, in addition to polyandry, the Dunnock also indulges in polygyny (one male and 2 to 3 females) and polygynandry (2-3 males with 2-4 females)!

*Rosemary Royle*