

Strange occurrences at Orlandon Kilns

Strange things have been happening in our garden over the last few weeks. First of all, we have had Willow Warblers nesting in the garden, which is in itself quite unusual and it is nesting in a very unlikely place. The nest is a dome on the surface of the soil/weeds in a large pot containing last year's tomato plants behind a mass of Red Campion and Californian Poppies. You would never know it was a nest if you hadn't seen the birds go in and out! The birds were very quick and unobtrusive when building the nest – we only noticed it happening because the view from our conservatory is in that direction. They were even more unobtrusive when incubating – we thought they had deserted. The young eventually hatched – there were regular feeding visits to the nest, though very quick and with a low approach.

Just around the corner of the wall, only about 8 feet away, was a Great Tit nest in a box. The young hatched about a week before the Willow Warblers and were very noisy.

I then noticed a Willow Warbler (WW) hanging around the Great Tit (GT) nest. It looked inside once or twice and eventually went in. Soon one WW was regularly entering the GT nest and feeding the young, though with very small food more suitable for its own young. And sometimes it would change its mind and fly down from the GT nest box to its own nest. The GTs seem quite laid back about the whole thing and did not chase the WW away. Was the WW being distracted by the loud begging of the GT chicks? The picture shows a WW at the GT nest with food.



Meanwhile the other WW seemed to be feeding the correct batch of young.

A few days later one WW was feeding the GT chicks very regularly – visits about every minute and no decision making – straight in. Sometimes it had to wait for an adult GT to come out of the nest and sometimes they met in the nest – but the GT showed no aggression. The other WW could be seen from time to time approaching very low and into the WW nest, but partly out of sight from us to difficult to judge the frequency. They seem to find food very easily.

By 1st June there was very little evidence of the Willow Warbler chicks being fed. About this time the Willow Warbler nest was predated – it certainly happened before 2nd June. The nest contents were flung everywhere so it was presumably a Magpie or Crow - I think a Weasel would have been much neater.

On 6th June the Great Tits fledged – at least 6 fat chicks. One Willow Warbler was feeding them right up to the last minute and even tried to feed an empty box – you could almost see it looking puzzled! Whether it will continue feeding the chicks outside the box is anybody's guess and now both the Great Tits and Willow Warblers have vanished from the garden.