

Nesting wagtails

I have often wondered why we have been unable to attract Pied Wagtails to nest with us. There are plentiful ledges and suitable spots in the pumphouse and I have put up suitable boxes, all to no avail. Why was this, when every farm around us has a pair of Pied Wagtails, even Runwayskiln! We have a stream, plentiful nest sites, a roof with loads of basking flies and nice lawns to run around on.

Well this year we obviously did something right – we purchased a pair of stepladders with a handy tool tray at the top. This apparently was exactly the right size for a wagtail nest. Before we went away on holiday to Scotland we could see that a pair of wagtails was prospecting. First of all I think they had their eye on the underside of the car, but then turned their attentions to the log pile and then to the pumphouse, but we had not found a nest. When we came back from holiday we carefully inspected every possible ledge and soon found the nest on the stepladder. It was very inconvenient - not only did it stop us using the stepladder, it also stopped most activity at that end of the pumphouse – the female would slip silently off the nest and out through the broken window at the slightest disturbance and we were worried that too much time off the nest meant that the eggs would get cold. Even when the young birds hatched the adults were still very twitchy when we were around and would not feed the young while we were in the pumphouse.



We soon got used to their feeding routine. The male was particularly entertaining – he would arrive in the garden and perch on the electricity wire with a huge beakful of insects. He would then wait, sometimes for quite a while, until the coast was clear and fly down on to a fence near the unglazed window. He would then look around some more, and when absolutely sure there was nothing watching him he would pop through the window and fly to the nest. The trouble was, all this furtive behaviour was accompanied by much vigorous wagging of the tail, and also fanning of the tail showing the white edges, which made him extremely conspicuous!

Eventually the young fledged, which in this case meant they perched in various places in the pumphouse. It took several days for the parents to persuade them out into the big wide world. And now they have gone, and we really miss their antics – watching them catching flies with their aerobatic twists and turns, and enjoying their pattering forays across the lawn.

We are still sharing the pumphouse with birds though – two pairs of swallows. The first birds arrived back very early, then more arrived, but they have taken until June to seriously settle down and breed. For a long time we had five birds – very much a case of 4's company but 5's a crowd! As I write this (June 20th) I think they may actually at last be feeding young.

For more on Pied Wagtails see the article "February 2017 Pied Wagtails" on the Marloes Website - www.marloes.org.uk. And for more on Swallows see "September 2107 Our Swallows".

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