

Spotted Flycatcher Churchyard Nestbox Scheme

Waveney Bird Club (WBC) is championing a community-based project that will attempt to reverse a worrying trend that shows a drastic decline in Spotted Flycatcher populations. The project will be run under a partnership arrangement with the diocese of Ipswich and St Edmundsbury. The idea is to supply open-fronted nest boxes and fix these in churchyards in the Waveney Valley and northeast Suffolk.



The project will draw attention to the plight of this much-loved bird, get people involved and provide nesting sites that would allow easy monitoring. Subsequently, WBC will monitor the nest sites and the data collected will make a valuable contribution to the national database at British Trust for Ornithology. The success of the project could then be evaluated and further contribute to scientific studies on breeding success as well as determining the requirements of Spotted Flycatchers locally.

Monitoring work by WBC members this summer resulted in a number of Spotted Flycatcher territories being located, most of them within the vicinity of churchyards. In consequence, meetings have been held with representatives of the diocese with a view to installing nest boxes. An article highlighting the project has been published in The Church's own East Anglican Times. Marion Welham, Church Buildings and Tourism Officer for the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, said: "*Not only are churchyards important places for archaeology and history, they provide essential food, water, shelter and breeding places for an*



abundance of wildlife to flourish. Taken together, Suffolk churchyards add up to an important acreage of land that has been largely untouched by chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Churches and communities are privileged to be guardians of their natural and historic heritage and are increasingly managing their churchyards sensitively, often with the help of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Churchyards are traditionally known as God's Acre, an ancient Saxon phrase that doesn't literally mean acre but God's Field. They are beautiful and meaningful places and

often within walking distance of communities so they can be a focus for learning. With their stonework and boundary walls, ivy and veteran trees, churchyards make ideal nesting sites for the flycatcher and the Diocese is delighted to be part of a project that will help it." The Rt Revd Nigel Stock, Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, added: "I am delighted that the Church of England in Suffolk is able to be part of this important community project. Working together with conservation bodies and HM Prison and Young Offenders Institution Hollesley Bay, I hope we can give this little summer visitor a helping hand."

This enthusiastic response has encouraged the club to order one hundred boxes and these have been fixed in churchyards to celebrate National Nest Box Day on 14th February 2011. A total of 130 nest boxes have been made by the citizens of Hollesley Bay Prison, one for each member of the club. Pat Carter, project support officer at Hollesley Bay, said prisoners had been carrying out the work alongside making barn owl boxes for the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project. "Producing the boxes gives the prisoners a feeling of self-worth because they are creating something which will help enhance the natural world," she said. "This acts as part of a resettlement programme for offenders, working in the community on various projects. Prisoners work throughout the local area in charity shops, local churchyards and on prison based projects as part of their preparation for release at the end of their sentence."