

Strange occurrences at Orlandon Kilns

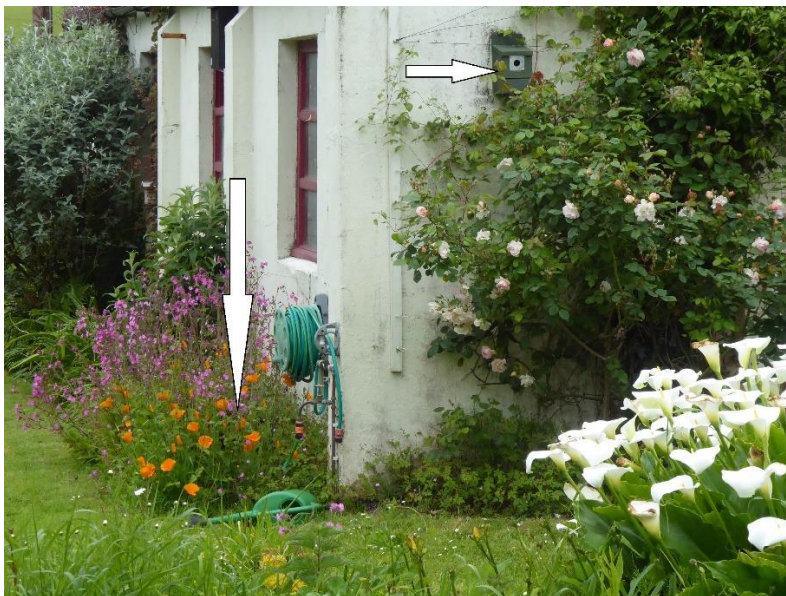
Monday 23rd May: Strange things have been happening in our garden over the last few weeks. First of all, we have a Willow Warbler nesting in the garden, which is in itself unusual and it is nesting in a very unlikely place. The nest is on the surface of the soil/weeds in a large pot containing last year's tomato plants behind a mass of Red Campion and Californian Poppies. See picture below for the nest - the left arrow points to the nest, the right arrow is the nest opening. 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.



A few days ago it appeared that young had hatched – there were regular visits to the nest, though very quick and with a low approach.

Just around the corner of the wall, only about 8 feet away, is a Great Tit nest in a box. The young hatched at least a week ago and are being fed by both adults. They are very noisy.

See the picture below for the location of the two nests.



Two days ago I noticed a Willow Warbler hanging around the Great Tit nest. It looked inside once or twice and eventually went in. By yesterday evening one Willow Warbler was regularly entering the Great Tit 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 nest box to its own nest. The Great

Tits seem quite laid back about the whole thing and did not chase the Willow Warbler away. Meanwhile the other Willow Warbler seemed to be feeding the correct batch of young.

We have only seen this behaviour when the Great Tits are actively feeding – is the Willow Warbler being distracted by the begging of the Great Tit chicks?

The last picture shows a Willow Warbler at the Great Tit nest with food.



We will continue to watch and see how it all develops!

PS Inside the building (an ex-army pumphouse) there are 2 maybe 3 pairs of Swallows, a pair of Wrens and a pair of House Sparrows, so it's all quite busy around there at the moment!

Update: 26th May. possibly both Willow Warblers feeding Great Tit young – hardly any visits to WW nest. One bird arrives on the roof between the two nests and seem to be deciding which one to go to – I feel that if he can hear the GT chicks he goes there, if not he drops down to his own nest. Sometimes he fails to feed the GT chicks and takes the food down to the WW chicks.

28th May: Willow Warblers no longer feeding Great Tits but feeding their own young which miraculously have survived. Young Great Tits are now pretty big. (And the Wren nest in the pipe in the pumphouse has been completely destroyed, difficult to imagine by what)

30th May: Great Tits not fledged yet (Swiss Chalet Blue Tits fledged this morning and Pine Tree Blue Tits a few days ago) and both WWs feeding their own young.

Spoke too soon – this evening one bird (I am sure it is the male – he often comes down from the electricity wire which is where he sings from) is feeding the GT chicks very regularly – visits about every minute and no decision making – straight in. Sometimes he has to wait for an adult GT to come out of the nest and sometimes they meet in the nest – but the GT shows no aggression. The other WW can 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.

31st May – as above. The GT chicks are now visible at the nest entrance.

1st June – as above, very little evidence of the WW chicks being fed

2nd June – as above, interestingly both Willow Warblers are still around – we saw them both at the same time. Only one feeding GT chicks as far as we can tell, but maybe both of them as visits to the nest box seem impossibly frequent for just one bird. But we have never seen both birds near the box at the same time.

Checked the WW nest later in the day – it had been predated, very messily with nest lining everywhere. Magpie? (I think Weasels would have been much neater). On 31st May it was still OK – maybe predated on 1st June as we saw little feeding at the WW nest after that date.

Friday 3rd June – one WW still feeding GT chicks.

Sunday 5th June – GTs and one WW **STILL** feeding GT chicks – they must be enormous by now!

Monday 6th June 12:45 – the Great Tits have been fledging over the last hour or so – at least 6 chicks. The Willow Warbler has been feeding them right up to the last minute and has just 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.