

Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers in 2025

Woodpecker Network Breeding Season Report

Website: www.woodpecker-network.org.uk

BlueSky: [@LesserSpotNet@bsky.social](https://bsky.app/LesserSpotNet)

Thanks to the brilliant support of our network of volunteers, 2025 has been a remarkable year for the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (LSW) studies.

We kicked off in February using passive acoustic monitoring (sound recording) to detect LSW calls and drumming at sites through Sussex, Hampshire and Somerset. This was amazingly successful, detecting them at known sites but also at many sites where they had not been recorded before (more on page 2).

In the breeding season volunteers monitored 24 nests – the most in any year since we started the project in 2015. The average number of chicks fledged per nest was the highest ever. Six young fledged from a nest in the Quantocks and five from nests in East Sussex and Wyre Forest (more on p3). So, 2025 is all very positive.

Very special – thank you - pin badges



This lovely pin badge is the result of a brilliant initiative by Gus Robin from the Quantocks. The Badges were designed and produced specially for Gus by UK Birding Pins. As a special thank you, we awarded badges to those who found LSWs nests for us in 2025 or contributed to the overall project in other

ways. We have some available for nest finders in 2026. All good for the profile of the LSW. They look good too!

*In the photo taken in the Teign valley in Devon, **Gus Robin**, LSW coordinator in the Southwest, presents badges to **Stuart Keenor** (left) LSW coordinator in Wales and nest finder **Ed Horncastle** (right). They each found and monitored a nest this year, hence the smiles.*

In March we organised our first LSW workshop, in Brockenhurst in the New Forest, attended by staff from conservation bodies and LesserSpotNet volunteers. It was a great opportunity to meet and catch up with everybody. Understanding the drivers and arresting the decline of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker is nationally a high conservation priority.

Contact us, email info@woodpecker-network.org.uk



LSW at a nest in the New Forest (Steve Laycock)



Gus presents pin badges to Stuart and Ed



Above: Workshop participants (Toby Fountain)

Acoustic monitoring

This year we deployed Wildlife Acoustics Song Meters (Mini and Micro 2s) at 66 potential LSW sites in Hampshire, Sussex, Somerset and Wiltshire. This follows our successful trials in the New Forest in 2024 (see our 2024 report) and was done in collaboration with the National Trust, Quantocks ANOB, Forestry England, Hampshire Ornithological Society and other individuals.

Amazingly LSWs were detected at 40 of the sites, many with no recent records of the species. Lesser Spots are clearly more widespread than the birding records suggest but we are still sure that they have declined especially in range.

Elsewhere, the Kent Ornithological Society organised a county survey of LSWs this year using a combination of field visits to regular sites and acoustic monitoring at some others. The full results will be appearing in the Kent Bird Report in due course but the acoustic monitoring proved to be a very effective way to supplement the records from the birders.

We have written up the results of the acoustic work for a paper which will be published in the December 2025 edition of **British Birds**. We expect this to generate wider interest in acoustic monitoring for LSWs (and other challenging species) which should generate more records and help highlight areas where the birds are under recorded.

To analyse the masses of data the sound recorders collected Ken worked with Simon Gillings at the BTO to develop an AI system on the BTO Acoustic Pipeline to pinpoint LSW drums and calls on the recordings. Ken, with help from Mark Mallalieu, provided Simon with large numbers of clips of known LSW calls and drums which are used to 'train' the AI system. So far, we have been working with a development version of this application but the final version should be available as a woodpecker module on the BTO Acoustic Pipeline for anyone to use next year.

The plan is to do more acoustic monitoring of LSWs in 2026 to consolidate our results. In Sussex and Hampshire, with support from their Ornithological Societies, Ken is working out sampling strategies to cover a random selection of monads containing wet broadleaved woodland which should allow us to estimate the county totals.

We are expecting more acoustic monitoring for LSWs in Somerset and Kent with new projects starting in Devon, Herefordshire and Wales. If you would like to help, please get in touch with Gus, Ken or Stuart, by email to info@woodpecker-network.org.uk.

Nationally plans are being developed by the RSPB and BTO for a survey of LSWs in England and Wales using bioacoustics, probably in 2027 or 2028.



The Wildlife Acoustics Mini and Micro Song Meters and (below) Ken attaching a Mini to a tree where it was left recording for up to five days



Nest A in the Wyre Forest: above, female incubating 7 eggs on 2nd May & below, 5 young on 18th May, all fledged successfully, thanks to Craig Reed for finding



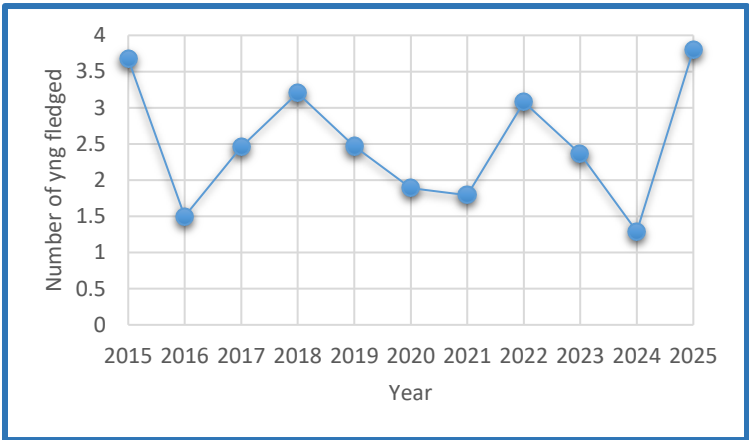
Nest monitoring and breeding success

2025 has been a record breeding season for Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers. Thanks to the efforts of all the LSW volunteers, we have the details from 24 active nests – the highest total we have monitored since we started Woodpecker Network in 2015. This is obviously a small fraction of the national total (last estimated as 2000 territories) but is still a good sample. Our previous highest total was 23 nests reported in 2019.

Undoubtedly the stars of LSW nest finding this year are Rob Clements (6 nests) and Simon Currie (3 nests) in the New Forest, Craig Reed (3 nests) in Wyre Forest and Mat Shore’s team, a nest for the 9th year in the same Norfolk site.

Like many other woodland breeding birds, the LSWs have been very successful this spring. None of the 24 nests were known to have failed and at least 64 young fledged from the 17 nests where we were able to check the nest contents with our video nest inspection cameras. The average of 3.8 young fledged per nest is the highest productivity we have seen in the last 11 years. It pretty much matches the levels of productivity reported when the LSW was still doing well in the UK in the 1960s and 70s. To put 2024 into context we have plotted the crude nest success from 2015 to 2025 in the graph. 2015 was a good year too but the sample size of nests monitored was much lower then.

Average numbers of young fledged per nest 2015 to 2025.



We are pleased that nests were found and monitored this year in the Wyre Forest (Worcestershire, Shropshire) and Blean Woods in Kent. In the Wyre Forest the Natural England team funded Craig Reed to carry out a LSW survey during which he found the impressive total of four possible nests, two of which were monitored with our nest camera (see photos). In the Blean woods in Kent, Heather Mathieson, Jonathan Singlewood-Dodds and Paul Cox found two nests both of which were checked out with our nest camera (see photos). These are both areas with known LSW populations where few or no nests had been reported to us since we started in 2015. We hope these nests provide stimulus to find more in 2026.



Wyre Forest, nest B, 6 young, just hatched on 2 May and below 4 young, 3males and one female, almost ready to fledge on 18 May, found by Craig Reed, photos by Ken & Linda Smith



The Table below summarizes numbers of nests monitored in 2025 and the total of nests reported in each county from 2015 onwards. It is amazing that we have now monitored a total of 172 nests

County	Nests in 2025	Nests from 2015 - 2025
Cheshire		2
Derbyshire		2
Devon	3	10
Essex		1
Greater London		1
Greater Manchester		1
Gloucestershire		2
Hampshire	11	66
Herefordshire		6
Hertfordshire		2
Kent	2	11
Lincolnshire		2
Norfolk	1	14
Nottinghamshire		6
Shropshire	1	2
Somerset	1	14
Suffolk	1	3
Surrey		7
Sussex	3	15
West Glamorgan		1
Wiltshire		2
Worcestershire	1	2
Total	24	172

Woodpecker Network recognized - We were honored that the Woodpecker Network was awarded the BTO Marsh Award for Local Ornithology last year (see photo). We put the cash prize towards a high-end thermal imager.

Thermal imagers were used again this year to help search for nests. Stu Keenor scored a first for the project when he located an active nest in Devon using his own thermal imager. They clearly have great potential for finding nests, but we are still to work out how to get the best from them.

Research: As part of their species recovery programme Natural England have taken the initiative to prioritize some key research needs on Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers. This year they funded an RSPB project to measure the habitats in known LSW sites across Hampshire (including the New Forest) compared with control sites. The project will pick up in the New Year once the leaves are off the trees when the team will assess the dead wood at the survey sites. The full results should be available in late 2026.

What foods do Lesser Spots bring for their young?

A few carefully selected photographers have taken high quality images of LSWs feeding their young at the nest in the hope that we could get an idea of the prey being brought in and the visit rates. Huge thanks to Steve Laycock, Matt Livesay and Keith Silverstone who have obtained a very good series of images for us. We are now assessing them.

With support from Natural England, we have asked an experienced entomologist to see which prey items could be identified. We can distinguish caterpillars from winged insects and aphids/bark lice but it will be difficult to get anywhere near species level identifications. This is still useful particularly in making year to year comparisons.

Lesser spots in Wales!! A message from Stuart Keenor.

The title says it all really, I'm Lesser Spot coordinator for Wales, and I've taken up the envious task of trying to find their current status. I've found a few territories local to me in south Wales this year, but Wales is a big place with lots of lowland valleys, mature woodland and of course wet woodland with alder, birch, oak, all with a plentiful supply of dead wood. My aim with the help of anyone who has time and patience is to try and locate any pockets of Lesser Spots gone unnoticed over the years. I have six sound recorders and a thermal imager. Anyone in Wales or Welsh marches based who has the time please contact me on 07720654039 or stuart_keenor@hotmail.co.uk, I'm sure we will be surprised.

Thank you to all Lesser Spot Net volunteers

2025 has been a remarkable year for the project and for the woodpeckers. Nests were found and reported by:

Rob Clements, Tara Dempsey, Simon Currie, Holly Kembrey, Steven Lavington, Craig Reed, Mat Shore, Keith Silverstone, Gus Robin, Stuart Keenor, Ed Horncastle, Malcolm Burgess, Matt Kirk, Steve Fry, Martin Allison, Heather Mathieson, Jonathan Singlewood-Dodds and Paul Cox.

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Gus, (2nd left) Linda and Ken at the BTO Awards event in 2024 hosted by the Society of Wildlife Artists.



Male LSW feeding a chick New Forest (Steve Laycock)



All smiles, Heather Mathieson & Jonathon Dodds on 25th May after Ken's nest camera revealed 3 young, 2m, 1f, (below) in the nest they found in the Blean.



Thank you to everybody who made it possible Many people were involved and helped us in many ways.

Words by Ken and Linda Smith – November 2025
Get in touch - info@woodpecker-network.org.uk