ADOPT-a-BOX FINAL REPORT 2026

Dear Sponsor,

We would first like to thank you for your support of this project; without you there would not be the help to feed the birds and to support the work being carried out on the Island. Your sponsorship is greatly appreciated.

The weather this year was particularly cold at the beginning of May when most pairs were incubating eggs and very small young. This took its toll and in two boxes the young died just after hatching.

Box 13 was attacked by a woodpecker early on, but the pair persisted. In spite of the damage to the box, the parents managed to raise two young. Two nests were lost when the young were very small, because of the cold.

Outcome of the Nest Boxes.

This year, again, there were 28 boxes, a couple had been replaced over winter and all were cleaned out and disinfected. This included a new Owl box (No26). For which we thank Graham Webb for making the boxes and to the HDC Rangers for installing the Owl box.

Blue Tits eggs, Box 2

Blue Tit sitting, Box 7

Blue Tit sitting, Box 6

We were surprised with box 13 that the Blue Tits managed to raise a family as the box has been attacked by a woodpecker and the hole significantly enlarged, but in spite of this the parents managed to fledge two young. In all 39 young were fledged for the boxes on the Island, of which 8 were Great Tits and the rest Blue Tits.

A lot of the success or failure of nests is dependent on the weather. For birds that depend on insects for the food for their young, timing is all important. Often, those that start early are hit by cold weather or even frosts. The main food of the Bue Tits and Great Tits are caterpillars, so if they are late hatching or the leaves on the trees have not grown sufficiently to sustain them early nesting can be disastrous; but equally if there is a prolonged cold spell later as this year those that waited can be badly hit.

Box No.	Species	Eggs	Young	Ringed	Fledged
Box 1	Blue Tit	7 eggs	7 young	6 ringed	6 fledged
Box 2	Blue Tit	7 eggs	5 young	4 ringed	Possibly 1 fledged
Box 4	Blue Tit	Adult Sitting	9 young	6 ringed	5 fledged
Box 5	Blue Tit	6 eggs	5 young		Cold killed young
Box 6	Blue Tit	8 eggs	7 young	6 ringed	6 fledged
Box 7	Blue Tit	2 eggs	1 young		Cold killed young
Box 12	Blue Tit	7 eggs	7 young	5 ringed	5 fledged
Box 13	Blue Tit	6 eggs	2 young	2 ringed	2 fledged
Box 22	Blue Tit	6 eggs	6 young	5 ringed	5 fledged
Box 23	Blue Tit	7eggs	6 young	3 ringed	Possibly 1 fledged
Box 25	Great Tit	Sitting	4 young	4 ringed	4 fledged
Box 28	Great Tit	sitting	6 young	4 ringed	4 fledged

But this year those that started early were more successful than the later one due to the cold and wet spell at the beginning of June which saw a number of failures, as the young got too cold and died.

In spite of more Great Tit nests last year the number was down to two this year, but they did produce eight young that fledged, which is similar to previous years.

Box 13

Blue Tit sitting, Box 13

Blue Tit young, Box 12

The Blue Tits in Box 13 were fortunate as a Woodpecker attacked the hole and enlarged it. But in spite of this, they managed to raise and fledge two young.

As a result of the floods in 2024 a lot of the Ivy on the trees round the nestboxes died off, so leaving the boxes more exposed and more susceptible to the cold. Also, the cold weather in early June reduced the numbers that fledged this year. It was lower than average, but not significantly so.

One of the young Blue Tits from Box 12 that fledged in 2022, was found in a box in a garden in Links Way, St Ives rearing a family of her own. Unfortunately, the nest was not successful, three young were hatched but they all died of cold a week later in early June.

Box 25: Great Tit young Great Tit sitting Great Tit at entrance

This year has seen about the usual number of birds attempt to breed. Those that started early have been successful and those that waited till a little later were struggling and were less successful.

Other Species breeding on the Island

There seem to be good numbers of warblers using the Island, again this year; with several pairs of Sedge Warbler in the main reed bed and numerous Reed Warblers round the Island. The later are fledging at the time of writing this report. Several Garden Warblers have been heard and seen on the Island, recently a female with a brood patch caught, which suggests at least one pair are breeding on the Island.

After a poor year in 2025 the Blackcaps seem to be returning to the numbers they used to be, with a number of young birds being ringed recently. There appear to be two pairs of Cetti's Warblers on the island, it is hoped that they will be successful.

Box 22 Adult entering with food Box 1, Young Blue Tits Box 25 After fledging

Of the resident birds the Robins seem to have had a good year, as have the Dunnocks, but the Blackbirds have been less successful. Whether the slightly different management of the Island with less cutting of the grass paths and the edges next to the boardwalk has deterred them from using the Island.

Two pairs of Rooks nested on the Island this year, for the first time, they were part of the churchyard rookery which has been expanding in recent years. A juvenile Kingfisher was caught on the Island which suggests they bred nearby. One species that was absent was the Song Thrush.

The Swans again nested on the Island and fledged 5 cygnets but one died. The Great crested Grebes also had a nest by the Island and were seen with young

Avian Health

You will have noticed that at the beginning of May the RSPB and other conservation bodies issued some new guidance recommendations on bird feeding. On Holt Island we have been taking precautions for many years to reduce the transmission of infections between birds. Over the period we have been doing this the number of infected birds in the area has gone down. We think this is something that should be taken seriously so we have tightened up further our hygiene procedures and strongly recommend others do the same. Hygiene of water holders is particularly important and should be taken very seriously.

We are attaching a sheet which gives details of the RSPB recommendations that we are following on Holt Island, and suggest you adopt a feeding procedures to follow these as closely as possible, bearing in mind that each situation is different.

ADOPT-a-BOX 2027

We thank you for all your support this year, which is much appreciated and hope that you will feel able to sponsor a box once again next year.

All the boxes will be cleaned and disinfected during the winter months and several will be replaced, with added protection from woodpeckers

Nigel Sprowell and Julian Limentani, Friends.

Photos by Nigel Sprowell and Julian Limentani