

Wildlife of the Month – House Sparrows

Risby is very lucky to have a thriving resident population of House Sparrows throughout the village: there are flocks at Woodlands Close, Alexander Way, the Lower Green and areas surrounding the Village Hall. Around the Village Hall, these special little birds are nesting in the hedges by the school and are feeding and retrieving nest material from the Village Hall guttering and roof. There have been nest boxes on the western wall, but these boxes were not used for nesting as it is believed that this wall was too hot for the birds. Currently the Village Hall is being renovated and the builders have been very careful to initially check that the birds were not nesting there and secondly, they are minimising any disruption to these gregarious, social little birds. Very soon nesting boxes for the House Sparrows will be put up on the northern wall of the hall, as this is seen to be a much better place for these resident Sparrows to continue to thrive and hopefully they will use these boxes!

Why are House Sparrows Special?

House Sparrows are on the Red List of Endangered Species, which means they are of the highest conservation priority. The RSPB says that: Monitoring suggests a severe decline in the UK house sparrow population, recently estimated as dropping by 71 per cent between 1977 and 2008 with substantial declines in both rural and urban populations.

RSPB information about Sparrows:

Pairs often remain faithful to their nest site and to each other for life, although a lost mate of either sex is normally replaced within days. A hole is filled with dry grass or straw with a nesting chamber lined with feathers, hairs, string and paper. Feathers may be plucked from a live pigeon! The main nesting season is from April to August, although nesting has been recorded in all months. Most birds lay two or three clutches, but in a good year fourth attempts are not uncommon. The female lays two to five eggs at daily intervals and often starts to incubate part way through egg-laying. Both sexes incubate, and the chicks hatch after 11-14 days. The parents share nesting duties equally. The young fledge 14-16 days after hatching. They are unable to feed themselves for about a week after leaving the nest and are cared for by their parents for around a fortnight. Post-fledging care is frequently left to the male as the hen prepares for the next brood. She can begin laying her next clutch of eggs within days of the previous brood leaving the nest. Newly independent young often gather in large flocks, anywhere there is an abundance of seed, invertebrates and other suitable foods. These may be areas of wasteland or around garden feeding sites. Later, rural flocks may move on to grain fields to feed on the ripening grain, often joined by adult birds, once they have finished nesting. Flocks tend to break up through the autumn and birds return to their nesting colony sites.

Risby Wildlife Working Group (WWG)

As a form of lockdown continues in the country, the WWG has no plans to meet up at the moment. However, you can follow us on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram. Hopefully, if transmission of the virus declines, we may be able to meet up soon. If you would like to know more or join our WWG, please contact Sophie: sophieflux@yahoo.co.uk

References: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/house-sparrow/>