

## Criteria for categorising Willow Tit breeding evidence in the UK

| EBCC standard breeding categories   | Specific interpretation for Willow Tit  | Notes/rationale   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Possible breeding</b>  |   |   |
| 1. Species observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitats.  | <p>One or more birds seen in possible nesting habitat within the same general area between 1 February and 30 June, with no further indication of breeding.</p> <p>Favours damp woods and scrubby areas with rotting wood. In Britain it is found almost exclusively in early successional habitats along river valleys, overgrown flooded gravel pits &amp; wet woodland.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Willow Tits are largely solitary except when breeding, and tend to be resident at the same sites throughout the year. Recording sites occupied by at least one bird during the February to June period will give a minimum number of Possible breeding pairs within a county.</li> <li>● Great care must be taken to ensure that records are of this species and not the closely similar Marsh Tit. Familiarity with the distinctive calls of Willow Tit is an important factor in verification. The nasal buzzing call of Willow Tit is particularly useful in the location and identification of Willow Tits.</li> </ul> |
| 2. Singing male(s) present (or breeding calls heard) in breeding season.  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Main song period is February to mid April when the clear tew-tew-tew song can pinpoint territories.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Probable breeding</b>  |   |   |
| 3. Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season.  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Probable breeding is most likely to be determined by the observation of a pair excavating a nest hole (see 9), or by identification of a territory (see 4).</li> </ul>   |
| 4. Permanent territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song <i>etc.</i> on at least two different days a week or more apart at the same place). | <p>One or more birds singing in potential nesting habitat within the same general area between 1 March and 30 June on more than one occasion at least a week apart, or two males singing against each other at the same time.</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Willow Tits are easily overlooked so any records of territorial birds as per these criteria are valuable in determining the number of Probable breeding pairs in a county.</li> </ul>  |
| 5. Courtship and display.   |   |   |
| 6. Visiting probable nest site.   | See 9 below.  |   |
| 7. Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adults.   |   |   |
| 8. Brood patch on adult examined in the hand.   |   |   |
| 9. Nest building or excavating nest-hole.   | <p>Pairs excavate new nesting cavities in dead or rotting wood, typically less than 2m from the ground.</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Follow up excavation sites later in the season (May or early June) to confirm breeding.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Confirmed breeding</b>   |   |   |
| 10. Distraction-display or injury-feigning.   | Not applicable.   |   |
| 11. Used nest or eggshells found (occupied or laid within period of survey).  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Willow Tit eggs are similar to those of other tits and this evidence would only be useful if accompanied by other information on the breeding record.</li> </ul>   |

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| 12. Recently fledged young (nidicolous species) or downy young (nidifugous species).   | Recently fledged should be interpreted as full-sized young or juveniles which are still being fed by a parent.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In common with other tits, the begging calls of recently fledged juveniles (in late May or June) are a good way to find broods and to provide evidence of Confirmed breeding.</li> </ul> |
| 13. Adults entering or leaving nest-site in circumstances indicating occupied nest (including high nests or nest-holes, the contents of which can not be seen) or adult seen incubating. | Even if the nest cavities are low to the ground, it is unlikely that the contents can be seen. To qualify as confirmed breeding multiple visits by the adults should be observed. |   |
| 14. Adult carrying faecal sac or food for young.   | Adults carrying food or faecal sacs in May or June.   |   |
| 15. Nest containing eggs.  |   |   |
| 16. Nest with young seen or heard.   |   |   |

#### Notes.

- A major issue in the accurate recording of Willow Tits is identification and county bird recorders are encouraged to take care over all records to ensure that records attributed to this species have been verified. In this way, RBBP can compile reliable numbers and present accurate status information to assist with the conservation of this species and the sites it occupies.
- A recent review of criteria to separate Willow and Marsh Tits was published in *British Birds* (BB 102: 604-616, 2009) and this is recommended reading for local records committees operating in areas with Willow Tits.
- This species is largely resident so presence during the winter when Willow Tits may be more conspicuous can give an indication of sites occupied, but these should be checked in spring as noted above to determine at least Possible breeding.
- Submissions to the Panel: numbers of pairs should be submitted according to the criteria detailed here. Details of all sites should be given unless there are more than ten pairs in the recording area, in which case county totals of the number of pairs breeding in the three categories is acceptable.
- The recent dramatic decline of Willow Tits in some areas of Britain has meant that in some counties this is a local rarity requiring a description while in others the bird is sufficiently numerous that some Willow Tits will go unrecorded. County bird recorders are encouraged to prompt their observers to submit records of this species in the breeding season according to the definitions here.
- A survey for Willow Tits led by the RSPB in spring 2019 and 2020 recommended measuring presence by using call playback, during the period mid-February to mid-April, the period when Willow Tits are most conspicuous. [note that an earlier version of these guidelines suggested presence should be recorded from 1st March onwards].