

Field Note: a new use for old nests

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The habit of re-using the nests of other species is well established in the world of birds. For example used nests in trees and cliff ledges such as Buzzard and Raven are often used by Peregrine merely as a secure base in which to lay their eggs. With small passerines, various types of old nest are often used to provide stable sites for their own particular structures. Wrens normally have to find some sort of cavity for their domed nests - a gap in a crumbling wall, the shelter of an upturned tree root or, in this case (Plate 273), well-concealed in a gap in this lime tree growth. The example in Plate 274, sent to us by David Merrie, is a little different. This shows the use by a Wren of an old Swallow nest relying solely on the shallow mud cup for its support. This might indicate a cock's nest used for roosting or a nest possibly among several which he has built for the female but that she has not chosen - there would have been an interior feather lining which she would normally have added before laying a clutch.

Spotted Flycatchers will usually take advantage of any level hollow in which to place their neat open nest, like this one (Plate 275a) which uses the espalier growth on a garden wall. However they will also re-use an old nest, in this case again that of a Swallow (Plate 275b). I photographed it in the early eighties and since then have seen one or two using a Blackbird's nest. Spotted Flycatchers normally place their nest well above head height giving them easier access to their prey of flying insects.

In the last example, from David Abraham, Plates 275c–d again feature a Wren. This time it utilises the discarded nest of a Long-tailed Tit. There must have been many for it to choose from as the Long-tailed Tit nests very early and nearly all the initial nests are predated. Depending on the predator, the domed structure often survives almost intact and in this case the Wren has moved in to construct its moss-dominated nest



Plate 273. Typical Wren nest site, Baron's Haugh, Clyde. May 2015. © Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 274. Wren's nest on an old Swallow's nest, Fungarth, Dunkeld, Perth & Kinross, March 2016. © David Merrie



Plates 275 a–d (above). a) Spotted Flycatcher on the nest, Perth & Kinross, June 2012 © Jimmy Maxwell. b) Spotted Flycatcher's nest on an old Swallow's nest, Hamilton, Clyde, June 1981 © Jimmy Maxwell. c) Wren's nest in an old Long-tailed Tit's nest, Baron's Haugh, Clyde. June 2017. © David Abraham. d) Wren bringing food for the young, Baron's Haugh, Clyde. June 2017. © David Abraham.

inside. Although not a solid structure, the tit's nest is immensely flexible, being woven throughout with spider silk which binds the materials into a strong durable texture. Who knows, perhaps the Wren also chose this type of nest due to the camouflage it would gain from the original lichen-covered surface?

If you have any photographic examples of similar re-using of old nests, please send them in to us for the interest of our readers. Ed.

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