

Toolbox Talk: Spotting and Avoiding Nesting Birds

Why is this important?

Nesting birds and their nests are protected by law. Disturbing them can lead to delays in our work and, more importantly, harm wildlife. Being aware and taking precautions helps us comply with regulations and protect biodiversity.

Key Times to Be Extra Vigilant:

- **Early Nesting Season:** Look for birds actively carrying nesting material (twigs, leaves, feathers). This is a clear sign a nest is being built nearby, even if you can't see it yet. **Avoid the area immediately.**
- **Peak Season (Quiet Period):** Bird activity around nests may decrease as they incubate eggs. Visual observation alone becomes less reliable.
 - **Direct Searches/Walkovers:** Be observant during walkovers. If a bird suddenly flies off or alarm calls, a nest is likely close.
 - **Trust Your Gut:** If a bird seems agitated by your presence, there's probably a reason. Proceed with caution or leave the area.
- **Post-Hatching:** Activity increases again as adults feed chicks. You'll likely see more birds flying to and from the nest. Be mindful and maintain a safe distance.
- **Throughout the Season:** Birds can have multiple broods, so vigilance is needed throughout the breeding season. A nest could be at any stage of use.

Spotting the Signs:

- **Active Nest Building:** Birds carrying materials.
- **Alarm Calls:** Birds making repeated, sharp calls indicating distress.
- **Agitated Behaviour:** Birds flying back and forth anxiously, or showing signs of wanting to return to a specific spot.
- **Distraction Displays:** Some birds (like mallards) may feign injury to draw you away from their nest.
- **Subtle Cues:** Coot and moorhen might quietly slip away from a nest but show clear intent to return.
- **Direct Observation:** Visually identifying a nest.

What to Do If You Suspect a Nest:

1. **Stop Work Immediately:** Do not proceed further in the immediate vicinity.
2. **Observe from a Distance:** Try to understand the bird's behaviour and pinpoint the potential nest location without getting too close.
3. **Report Your Findings:** Inform your supervisor or the relevant environmental contact. Provide as much detail as possible about the bird's behaviour and the location.

4. **Do Not Approach or Disturb:** Leave the area undisturbed until you receive further guidance.

Special Considerations: Schedule 1 Birds

Certain rare and vulnerable species (e.g., kingfisher, barn owl) have extra legal protection against disturbance. If you suspect a Schedule 1 species is nesting in the area, **always consult FBG for specific advice before taking any further action.**

Think About Unexpected Nesting Locations:

Birds can nest in various places:

- **Ground Nests:** Short or dense grassland.
- **River Shingle:** Loose stones and pebbles near water.
- **Equipment/Vehicles:** Especially if they have been stationary for a while.

If in Doubt, Seek Advice:

If you are unsure about a situation or require a more detailed survey, contact your manager for support and guidance on ecological contractors.

Team Discussion Points:

- What are some common nesting locations you might encounter on our sites?
 - How long would you typically spend observing an area for signs of nesting birds before starting work?
 - What are the key steps to take if you unexpectedly find a potential nest during work?
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Tips for Delivering a Toolbox Talk

Presenting a toolbox talk effectively is key to ensuring the message is understood and acted upon. Here are some tips of how to deliver a successful toolbox talk:

1. Preparation is Key:

- **Know your topic:** Be thoroughly familiar with the information you're presenting. If there is more than one topic, share the load with a willing colleague.
- **Keep it concise:** Focus on 2-3 key points. Remember the limited time.
- **Use visuals (if appropriate):** Simple diagrams, photos, or even the actual tools or equipment being discussed can enhance understanding.
- **Plan your delivery:** Even though it's informal, have a basic structure in mind. What will you say first? What are your main points? How will you conclude?
- **Consider your audience:** Tailor the language and examples to their specific roles and experiences.

- **Have any necessary materials ready:** Handouts, sign-in sheets, or PPE examples should be readily available.

2. During the Talk - Engaging Your Audience:

- **Start strong:** Grab their attention immediately. You could use a relevant anecdote, a recent incident (without blame), or a thought-provoking question. For example, a nesting birds talk, you might start with the legal implications of disturbing nests or a brief story about a project delay caused by nesting birds.
- **Be clear and concise:** Use simple, direct language. Avoid jargon or technical terms that your audience might not understand.
- **Maintain eye contact:** Engage with different members of the group.
- **Speak clearly and audibly:** Ensure everyone can hear you, especially in noisy environments.
- **Use a conversational tone:** Keep it informal and approachable. Encourage questions.
- **Show, don't just tell:** If demonstrating a safe practice or piece of equipment, physically show them. For the nesting bird talk, you could point to areas where nests might be found or demonstrate looking for signs.
- **Ask open-ended questions:** Encourage participation and check understanding. For example, "What are some signs you've noticed in the past that might indicate a nest?" or "Where are some less obvious places birds might nest on this site?"
- **Use real-life examples:** Relate the topic to their actual work experiences.
- **Keep it interactive:** Don't just lecture. Encourage discussion and sharing of experiences.
- **Be enthusiastic and passionate (where appropriate):** Your engagement will make the topic more interesting.
- **Be mindful of the time:** Stick to the planned duration.

3. Wrapping Up Effectively:

- **Summarise key points:** Briefly reiterate the main takeaways. For the nesting bird talk, this could be the different stages of nesting and the importance of reporting potential nests.
- **Reinforce expectations:** Clearly state what actions workers are expected to take.
- **Answer questions:** Allow time for questions and provide clear, concise answers. If you don't know the answer, say so and commit to finding out.
- **Thank the team for their time and attention.**
- **Document the talk:** Ensure attendance is recorded and the topic discussed is noted. This is important for demonstrating compliance.

4. Location and Environment:

- **Choose a suitable location:** Ideally, it should be a quiet area where everyone can hear and focus, but sometimes it needs to be on-site near the work.
- **Minimize distractions:** Try to avoid interruptions during the talk.
- **Consider the weather:** If outdoors, be mindful of rain, sun glare, or extreme temperatures.

In summary, a good toolbox talk is well-prepared, clearly delivered in an engaging manner, relevant to the work, and encourages participation. It's a short but crucial opportunity to reinforce safety and ensure everyone is on the same page.