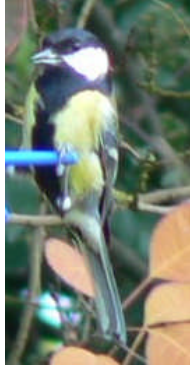


Great Tit



1. Life of a great tit

1.1. Courtship

A young female great tit met her mate in a local flock in April. The male established a breeding territory and would sing, sway his head and display his fine belly stripe and white cheeks to warn other great tits away. He did not want other males to tempt the female away.

He was a year older than her and experienced in how to bring up a brood and survive.

1.2. Nesting

They found themselves a small hole in a tree and she built a nest. She used moss and dried grasses, topped and lined with hair and fur to make the nest. The male stayed away from the nest whilst she was doing this.

In April she laid one egg a day until there were seven. The eggs were white with reddish brown spots.

When the last egg was laid she started to sit on them and incubate them. Every so often she would turn the eggs to ensure they were evenly warmed throughout. She had no help from her mate. His job was to find food for the female.

After 13 days the chicks hatched from their eggs.

1.3. Growing up

The chicks were completely naked and blind. In the first few days the female protected them and kept them warm. Then she left the nest to help her mate find food for the family. They were in and out of the nest hole all day long feeding the chicks.

The chicks were always hungry. They would beg for food, open their mouths wide, and their parents would drop food into them.

They would have to keep the nest clean by removing bird droppings from the nest. They would dispose of this a long way from the nest as they did not wish to betray its position to predators.

When the chicks were about 20 days old and their feathers had grown they practised stretching their wings. The parents stopped bringing them so much food and forced them to feed themselves. They encouraged them to leave the nest.

The pair kept a close eye on the chicks, teaching them to fly, what to eat, where to find the best food, how to sing, recognise alarm calls and how to avoid predators, especially sparrowhawks.

In the summer, as they became more independent, the family group broke up and the birds would join other young great tits and roved through the local area. Sometimes the group would be joined by long-tailed tits and chiffchaffs. Approximately half of the group perished and a few left the area to join other groups.

By the autumn the young great tits would be ready to establish their own territories.

1.4. Survival

Great tit adults might live to two years of age and only one bird from a nest may survive its first year.

Common predators include the sparrowhawk, weasels, green woodpeckers, owls, squirrels and cats.

One of the signs that warn predators of the great tits' existence is the sound of young chicks begging for food.

Other dangers are cold weather, starvation and disease. Sometimes adults will desert a nest and their family if they are in danger themselves or can't find enough food. They won't put their own lives at risk.

Great tits will join flocks as this helps the group detect predators more easily. By sharing lookouts for predators they can spend more time feeding themselves.

2. General data

2.1. Identification

Size	Robin size
Appearance	Black heads, white cheeks, and a black stripe running down their yellow breast. Their upper parts are greenish and blue. Males have a wider belly stripe than females and it extends to their legs.

Confusion	Blue tits
Sound	Wide variety of different songs.
When	All year
Where	Variety of locations including woodland, gardens, parks and hedgerows.
Movement	They take short flights. They are sprinters rather than long distance birds. They may need to fly quickly out of danger.

2.2. Feeding

Favourites	Chicks are mainly fed on caterpillars with the occasional spider and beetle In the autumn great tits will eat seeds from beech trees when they can find them.
Habits	They will search trees thoroughly for insects and when food is short hopefully find a bird table in a garden.

3. Useful words

3.1. Words about the great tits

See if you can find the following words in the word search.

Great tit, flock, decorated, topped, fly, avoid, stripe

G	R	E	A	T	T	I	T	Q	W
R	R	L	K	M	J	D	I	E	P
A	P	F	W	D	N	E	G	L	E
T	O	L	I	A	H	C	F	P	R
E	K	O	S	O	B	O	I	L	T
J	V	C	C	D	G	R	A	B	Y
A	R	K	F	E	T	A	S	G	I
U	G	X	P	S	V	T	X	M	U
H	T	O	C	H	F	E	D	K	O
Y	T	O	P	P	E	D	C	L	P

3.2. Unscramble the following words

ING ST CH RET	
ER LAR CAT PIL	
ISH EST ABL	
EX ND TE	
NG ER DA	
DD LE MI	
DD LY EN SU	
ER D I P S	
SE PO DIS	
A SE SE DI	

3.3. Understanding and problem solving

Now that you know about Great tits have a go at answering these questions.

What colour is a great tit's egg?

As a newly hatched chick how do you make sure that your parents feed you?

What survival skills do great tit parents need to teach their young?

Why do parents dispose of their chicks' droppings a long way from the nest site?

What is the difference between a male's belly stripe and a female's?

Why might young great tits flock together with long-tailed tits and chiffchaffs?

List some of the great tit's favourite foods.

List some great tit predators.