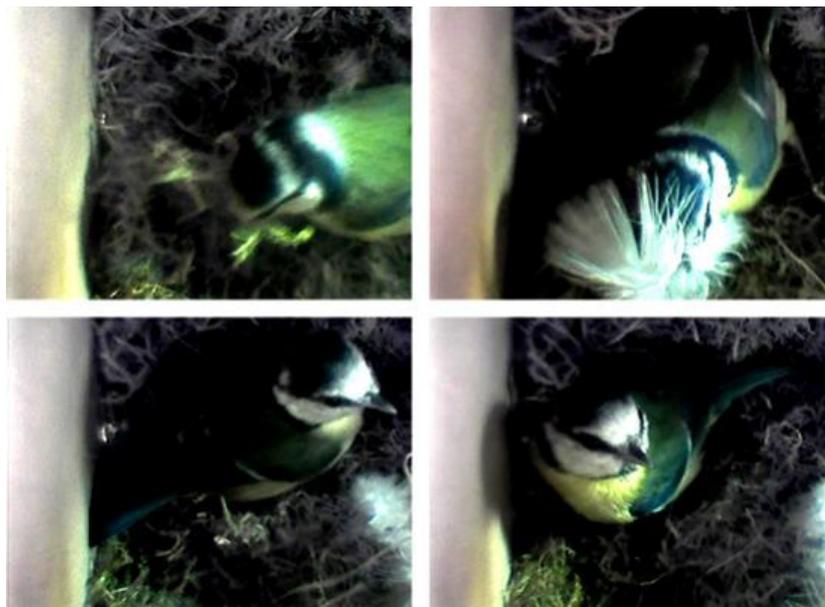


## Newcomers Eco-Home

New build ... in sought after area ... wooden construction ... open plan ... surprisingly light and airy... It sounded too good to be true, so we went to have a look and fell in love with the place. What had really clinched it was the fact that it was just the basic structure and we could do just what we wanted with the interior. The first thing was to remove the huge advertising notice the agents had, for some reason, left inside but it was easily dragged through the entrance and left by the hedge for them to collect next time they were passing; in less than 24 hours the notice had gone and we felt the place was really ours.

Me and the Missus had dreamt of having our own eco-home as we are very keen on upcycling natural products. We enthusiastically set about searching the locality for suitable materials. At first I just brought in a few samples and made up a mood board of greens and browns, this proved a very successful ploy because it met instant approval from my better half. Over the next couple of weeks we foraged for lots more and started to create our ideal home. Unfortunately this activity coincided with the cold wet weather so quite a bit of what we had collected got damp in transit meaning that once inside we had to fan lots of air through it to prevent it from going mouldy. At the same time I gave everything we brought in a close inspection for unwanted beasties, you have to be so careful with natural materials.

Both of us worked off and on for several weeks to get the basic layout to our liking before we could start the part I really like doing, the soft furnishings. Our next door neighbours had seen our modus operandi and kindly brought us some sheep's wool they had gleaned from the wire fence near the church leaving it plain sight for us when we next left our abode. With this and feathers and the like that we obtained ourselves, we were well on the way to making our new home really comfortable. Just in time too as the wife is getting broody and we are hoping to start a family soon. photo gallery on the village website [ladbroke-pc.org.uk](http://ladbroke-pc.org.uk)



**Mr A Bird, Cedar House, Ladbroke**

## A growing family

Soon after I wrote last month's article the Missus started laying eggs. At a rate of one a day that uses up a lot of calcium so she had one of those food fads so frequent among expectant mothers – bits of snail shell to compensate. She also told me in no uncertain terms that our routine was to change as eggs are very heavy and very fragile. I was instructed not to come inside until further notice, though she didn't mind me bringing her the odd treat. She, however would be in residence from early evening onwards, i.e. out during the daytime, when each new egg was starting to form and staying at home as the egg developed its hard, white shell with a few tiny terracotta coloured speckles; once this was laid in the early morning she would go out again.



We are strong believers in family planning and wanted all our youngsters to be the same age so, even though my beloved laid an egg each day for a week, incubation didn't start until we had a full set. In the meantime, to keep our treasures safe she hid them in the nest lining, very effectively at first, not even our nose neighbours realised they were there, but as the numbers increased they became impossible to hide. We decided to stop at seven, that's a bit on the low side for blue tits who usually lay 8 - 12 and sometimes up to 16, can you imagine coping with that number!

Where was I? Oh yes, seven eggs in our nest or perhaps I should refer to it as her's. I am told I am too clumsy to take part in the next stage of creating our family and that she will do the full 14 days incubation by herself. OK I know when I'm not wanted so I kept a low profile but a watchful eye on what was happening and there is a definite advantage, you don't need to develop that bald patch underneath for good heat transmission.

*Mrs Bird writes...*

*Two weeks is a long time when the average adult only lives a couple of years but I kept myself busy reminiscing and contemplating the future and with housework: rearranging my eggs into different patterns and fine tuning the soft furnishings ready for the babies' arrival with only the odd excursion outside. I had hoped for more of the latter but I knew I had to keep things as warm as possible for an early hatching to coincide with the arrival of those delicious caterpillars which would no doubt be putting in an early appearance due to the hot weather.*

*Our first egg hatched at 6pm on 17th May, followed a few minutes later by the second one.*

Obviously it was down to me as the responsible adult to remove the debris - taking half of each eggshell out of the nest and, in the interests of health just gobbling up the other part before cleaning the sticky stuff off the newborn. It was also time to start sharing child rearing with my other half, but we had to start carefully - I asked him to bring food but hand it over to me to feed the little ones. By the middle of next morning there were only three eggs remaining but there only seemed to be three ever-hungry beaks so I did a thorough check around and under the little ones and discovered a poor lifeless body, which I picked up in my beak and took well away from home.



Mr Bird here again.....

I'm exhausted seeking out food for our growing family. I don't know why the Missus insists I pass the food to her, she isn't exactly gentle with our youngsters, always prodding and poking them and I think she has OCD the length of time she spends up-ended fussing around in the bottom of the nest! Still I know my place and don't argue though occasionally, if she's not at home when I arrive, I slip a morsel into the nearest beak!



I must admit our babies are pretty ugly at present. Unlike chickens and ducklings and other birds which have downy feathers and leave the nest as soon as they hatch, ours will be at home for 19 days or so. Consequently, when they were born ours were really only embryos with beaks and even now, a week later, they wouldn't have any chance in a bonnie baby contest looking as they do like tiny "plucked chickens" with enormous heads.

They are starting to fill the nest though and that's just three of them - we still have two eggs in there (which won't hatch now) and the youngest addition to the family just couldn't compete with siblings

that were twice its age; though it had a bright yellow mouth like the others, its gape just wasn't big enough or in your face enough to get a fair share of the food. Unlike you humans we believe survival of the fittest is paramount and we are very proud of our three strong chicks. I expect they'll stay at home for another 12 days or so and by the time you read this we'll be watching them doing circuits with us around the locality to perfect their flying skills. Now, I must fly, beaks to feed and all that!

**Mr Bird, Cedar House, Ladbroke**

### Three's a crowd



Last time I told you about our three strong chicks, well three certainly was a crowd in our small home once they started to put on weight and feathers. The latter started almost imperceptibly, just the odd tuft over the eyebrows and black lines down their backs and wings at first but as these started to get thicker and longer you could see they were becoming proper feathers

The missus continued her up-ended housekeeping routine; even when the chicks were nearly as big as her she would push them out of the way to get on with her chores. Of course, there was no break in the gathering of tasty morsels to stuff into our kid's ever-open beaks and then waiting a moment to see if they would turn around and present us with a poo sac to take away.



We are strong believers that, as well as good personal hygiene, exercise is vital for health. So we were very pleased to see the youngsters taking it in turns to work through their routines, first Tai chi - stretching out leg or wing as far as space permitted and then as their muscles developed rapid flapping exercises. They mastered the art of preening too, though maybe they were just instinctively trying to get their growing feathers more comfortable.



The bowl of our nest expanded as the chicks grew but eventually they were large and curious enough to clamber out and look through the entrance. We were a bit concerned about this after spying a Great Spotted Predator on the ground below. However, thanks to the metal plate the builder installed on the front wall, the woodpecker couldn't enlarge the entrance

and steal our precious ones, a disaster which befell one of my relatives a couple of years ago.

We expected the kids to stay with us 19 days but they must have liked having devoted parents as personal slaves, for they showed no signs of leaving on day 20. Then at breakfast time the following morning (8th July) they upped sticks and went. There was not even a goodbye - we were out gathering food and both returned to discover much to our surprise that there were no noisy teenagers in residence - just two unhatched eggs and a single feather remained. The last few weeks have been a childrearing marathon but now me and the missus have our own lives back....until next year.

**Mr Bird, Cedar House, Ladbroke**