

BLOGGING ABOUT BROODING

The brooding season is around the corner, and that is a busy time for PhD student Bernice Sepers, who is doing research on great tits. But she makes a point of finding time to blog about the daily life of these little birds.

On the website Beleef de Lente (Experience Spring, ed.), you can look inside the nesting boxes of more than 10 different birds. About 900,000 people watch the process every year – from the building of the nest to the departure of the fledglings. Once a week, Sepers blogs about the events that can be seen on the great tit webcam.

‘There is no nest-building yet, but you sometimes already see males

fighting. Then we write about the competition for the nesting box,’ says Sepers. ‘But when sad things happen, like baby birds dying or no longer being fed, it’s important that we comment on them as well. I explain that it is all part of nature, and that we don’t intervene. It is an ideal form of science communication, because you reach so many people.’

EDUCATIONAL

‘For a lot of people, nature is not part of their day-to-day lives. Not many people realize what a bird’s life is like. If we see that great tits have difficulty feeding their young, I write about that in my blog. There are fewer insects; is that something to do with pesticides? I hope it will make people realize that they can have a posi-

tive effect on nature themselves, and that research on this is important.’

PERSONALITY

Sepers keeps an eye on 250 nesting boxes for her research. She hopes to find out which mechanisms play a role in great tits’ personalities. ‘We know that great tits have personalities and that individuals differ. If you put a bird in a new space, for instance, you can see whether it quickly starts exploring or just stays in one place. That behaviour is linked to

other traits such as aggression.’ Personality is partly a matter of genetics, but it is also influenced by the environment. And scientists and 900,000 other interested people will be looking at that environment in the coming months on Beleef de Lente. **BCJ**



PHOTO: BERNICE SEPERS

