

Unusual attachment of a Lesser Whitethroat nest utilising Bramble spines

The Lesser Whitethroat *Curruca curruca* has been studied in the Ayrshire and Clyde recording areas since 1983 (Byars 2010). Lesser Whitethroats nests are difficult to find in dense scrub. In 40 years observation, I have only studied ten nests in any detail. I tend to watch adults undertake feeding forays to the nest from a safe distance, ensuring disturbance is kept to a minimum. Once the brood has successfully fledged, I attempt to locate the nest, taking details for the BTO Nest Record Scheme.

On 21 June 2021, I successfully located a Lesser Whitethroat nest in my study site at Ardeer, Stevenston, Ayrshire. The pair had successfully fledged three young, but, despite watching the adults bringing food over ten days, I could not see the nest in an area of extremely dense scrub. Using garden secateurs, I cut a pathway and came across the nest, perfectly hidden when viewed from above by overhanging Gorse *Ulex europaeus* sprays. Pulling back the gorse, I measured the nest at 66.5 cm from the ground. Normally, Lesser Whitethroat nests are located under 1 m height in Bramble *Rubus* spp., then Gorse in preferential order (pers. obs.). Cramp 1992 states that "nest sites are in bushes and small trees, and occasionally perennial herbs, especially those with thorns, facilitating attachment". Simms (1985) states that "the nest is sometimes suspended in the manner of a Reed or Marsh Warbler". This nest was attached to four Bramble stems of varying widths, lying horizontally, and intersecting at the nest base. I thought this was unusual, as Lesser Whitethroat nests tend to have three anchor points on the nest rim, with nesting material such as dried grass stems wrapped around the Bramble stems as anchor points, which are normally vertical. So how was the nest secured where there were no anchor points around the rim? When I tried to remove the nest, I noticed the nest base was securely attached like Velcro to tiny hook shaped spines (1–5 mm) in length. These ran longitudinally along the thickest of the Bramble stems and can be clearly seen in the photograph. This was the first time I had seen a Lesser Whitethroat nest attached by only the base.



Plate 174. Lesser Whitethroat nest, Ardeer, Stevenston, North Ayrshire, 21 June 2021. © Tom Byars

References

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