
A Country Diary

The Metaphor that Wouldn't Fly

23 June 2014 - How sentimental. I watched two juvenile great tits leave the nest for the first time. Despite their grand name, they're pretty small birds - no more than a fistful.



Great tit (Photo: Luc Viatour www.lucnix.be)

I happened to glance out of the kitchen window, and saw a beak protruding from the nest box nailed to an East-facing wall in the garden. A young great tit flopped out, buzzing like a bumblebee towards the hedge opposite, which it barely managed to reach. But it did.

Following Big Sister came Little Brother.

Visibly smaller, and thinly covered in white fluff below which the black and yellow was discernable, out jumped Little Brother. And flopped onto the floor below. No jump to the hedge for him.

It had been getting audibly crowded on the floor of the deep nest box. Muffled, frantic scuffling and screeching could be heard inside, the young summoning their parents to come up with the goods, which they duly did, looking increasingly dishevelled as they shuttled back and forth. The two overworked adults had clearly had enough of this.

Sitting still on the edge of a pavement slab below the nest box, Little Brother did not appear to have got the hang of this flying-out thing yet. So we sit on the pavement, huh? And we try and pick little things from the gaps between them tiles? And how do I get away from here, anyway?

The little, not quite black, tit spent so long musing over its new circumstances that the sunny spot in the garden crept on, beginning to warm its little body. Little B. tried to hop, and managed to cross half the tile. And what if I rattle those wings? Goodness, that's a big jump.

Meanwhile, I had begun casting worried glances toward a pair of magpies gleefully rubbing their wings, scurrying high up in a conifer with an excellent view of our garden. Still clutching the wet dishcloth I was wiping the sink with when this whole rigmarole began, I

slunk outside, slowly lowering myself onto the garden bench. At least I was armed now.

Little Brother had made another jump and was now hanging on to a dead branch of a potted fuchsia in a corner of the terrace. One of the adults whistled a signature tune. Little Brother replied with its rough, repetitive beep beep beep, and Father Tit, or Mother, descended from the small oak tree with a mouthful of nourishment.

Big Sister was nowhere to be seen, probably gone frolicking inside the privet hedge, but Little Brother clung to his fuchsia twig in plain view, looking straight up, its beak spread wide open while its parent bent down from the only fuchsia branch in the pot that appeared to be alive. Tit Senior disgorged whatever it was - I'd rather not know - into Little Brother's beak. Little Brother appeared to derive a little more strength from this and managed another fluttering leap, ending up on the garden bench.

A new round of parental care followed, and finally Little Brother set off into the oak's leaves, where its relatives were happily tweeting and twittering, venturing out for an occasional circumnavigation of the tree. 'What? Nothing - just trying.' They stayed safely out of sight of the magpie hoodlums.

Having done the dishes I prepared to go out around the back of the house when I heard a nervous, even panicky chatter from the oak tree where a female blackbird had claimed its

regular branch back.

'Oo, she's big! Out of here!' The three black tits - parent, Little Brother and Big Sister - flew right past me as I stepped out of the kitchen door. Parent and Sister braked just in time to turn back over the hedge, but Little Brother, who looked as if he fluttered along just for fun, unaware of any potential danger, lost control and hit the kitchen window. Tock! Not a big slam, no, but not a big bird either.

Little Brother sat a little dazed on a tile below the kitchen window and scurried into the foot of the hedge when I tried to take a closer look. What a life: getting knocked out on your first big adventure.

When I came back from my errand I checked between the leaves where the tiny tit had been. Gone.

That's OK then. No stray feathers or bones left over from a magpie's feast.

Fledgling, I thought. That's what he was, a fledgling. I had used the word a thousand times in its metaphorical sense. Only now did this useful metaphor lose its status as an abstract expression. From now on I would always picture Little Brother when talking about a fledgling democracy, a fledgling enterprise or a fledgling state. Tock!

Rob Kievit

Today's cricket results

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Vestibulum id nulla a dui convallis porttitor non a elit. In vel orci consequat, molestie dolor quis, ultrices augue. Duis quis tortor a sem facilisis hendrerit. Aliquam condimentum nulla vitae sapien volutpat elementum. Nulla quis purus in felis tincidunt consequat non eget eros. Nam accumsan sed orci et molestie. Maecenas ac bibendum eros.

Quisque et iaculis augue, id interdum nibh. Phasellus ligula leo, commodo a consequat eget, rutrum at turpis. Aenean ultrices nisl sem, at iaculis magna gravida at. In euismod magna a sapien suscipit convallis sed eu nisl. Donec at orci pellentesque, porta odio eget, convallis ipsum. Nullam tempus pulvinar arcu. Ut at lorem justo. Nunc vel dignissim dolor, in tristique neque. Class aptent taciti sociosqu ad litora torquent per conubia nostra, per inceptos himenaeos. Nunc quis fermentum lectus, quis euismod elit. Cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. Vivamus mollis neque eu dui elementum, sed venenatis neque rutrum. Aliquam erat volutpat. Vivamus sollicitudin vehicula commodo.

Aliquam erat volutpat. Aenean non tincidunt diam, at malesuada est. Fusce ut viverra sapien. Maecenas ullamcorper hendrerit erat sit amet bibendum. Etiam elementum odio vitae feugiat ultrices. Phasellus imperdiet commodo sem, et dictum nisl euismod vitae. Duis gravida sollicitudin diam, vitae varius

lectus ultrices et. Ut eget tortor eu metus consequat posuere. Sed velit magna, lobortis nec nisi eget, posuere semper nisi. Quisque ullamcorper velit sit amet pharetra semper. Curabitur pharetra viverra urna, a egestas metus facilisis eget. Cras eget aliquet felis. Praesent eget egestas neque, sit amet iaculis erat.

Duis lectus nisi, hendrerit ac magna sed, convallis placerat odio. Proin ac tincidunt elit, eu tempus nunc. Fusce eu mi vehicula, condimentum risus quis, vestibulum magna. Proin justo libero, dictum nec tincidunt non, tincidunt imperdiet mauris. Praesent condimentum porttitor arcu, sed posuere dui tristique at. Nam semper iaculis rutrum. Cras ultricies mi lectus, at suscipit diam dignissim ut. Nunc rhoncus felis sed lacus tempor, vitae venenatis mi euismod. Vestibulum tempus auctor libero sed porttitor. Cras commodo nisl ut eros ornare lobortis. Suspendisse at sem quis diam interdum sagittis. In at porta risus, tempus viverra eros. Nulla aliquet sapien ut ultricies convallis. Pellentesque eros mauris, volutpat in sem id, adipiscing posuere diam.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. In aliquet elit tortor, at semper odio consequat id. Mauris tincidunt erat vitae commodo cursus. Nulla facilisi. Phasellus id metus mattis, feugiat libero sit amet, elementum velit. Pellentesque rutrum porttitor posuere. Pellentesque tellus sapien, faucibus non mi id, condimentum consequat leo. Mauris quis gravida velit.

