

**“This is fun”** says one of Woodborough Primary school’s children as he finishes his first tree sparrow box and collects his second kit. He can barely be heard over the sound of hammers banging nails in an almost hypnotic rhythm. The twenty five children of the after-school Wildlife Watch group are helping The Vitacress Conservation Trust meet their goal of increasing tree sparrow numbers on Vitacress Salad’s Mullens Farm, Manningford Bohune Common. With the help of Andy Elworthy, Mullens Farm general manager, Ruth Clarricoates, Wessex Chalk Streams Project Officer and Mary Partis, Wildlife Watch leader, the children made a total of 20 nesting boxes to be placed around the farm.

The Key Stage 2 children worked in pairs to construct the bird boxes, with the older ones expertly and confidently helping the younger ones. After all that hammering and with 320 nails safely in place it was reassuring to count the same number of fingers and thumbs at the end of the project as there were at the beginning!

School Deputy Headteacher, Mrs Prathayini Wright, comments that “We have been fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to extend our work with Watch Club into the community. The pupils have learnt about endangered species and have also thoroughly enjoyed building the boxes.”

Tree sparrows, a UK Biodiversity Action Plan listed species, have suffered an 85% population decline and 20% range contraction. The species is associated with mixed farming landscapes and was once widespread across Wiltshire. Mullens Farm possesses a variety of habitats that meet the tree sparrow’s feeding needs; weedy stubbles, wildflower margins and river corridors for seeds and insects. However, at the moment it does not have sufficient nest holes to encourage uptake by breeding birds. This is where the Woodborough Primary school project could help and will mark a positive first step. Encouraging the species to increase its hold within the Mullens Farm area as a breeding bird will help to develop a more self-sustaining local population. As one child put it “It’s great we are helping the birds.”

**Report by Dean Sherwin of the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust**