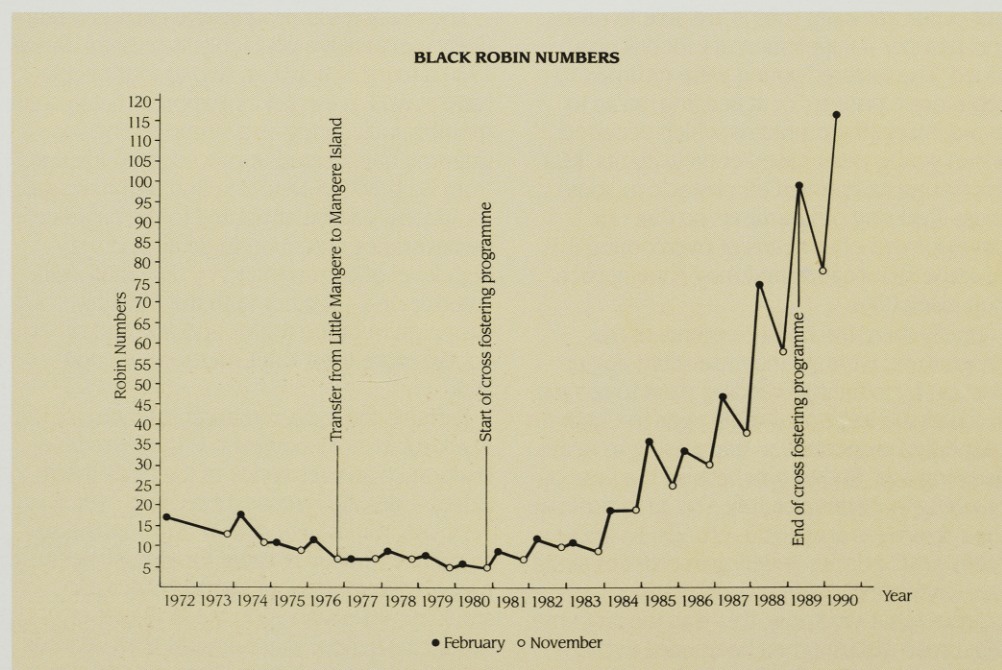




third clutches were normally left with their natural parents. Where practicable the commencement of incubation in two or more "close" clutches was synchronised so as to ensure the option existed to unite and return broods of similar age to robin nests prior to fledging. As will be seen later this synchronisation in hatching times of clutches was a key element in avoiding the effects of mal-imprinting.

Tit foster-parents were observed so that any behavioural problems were identified early. For instance, for the first 2-3 days following hatching, male tits and robins feed their young while females brood almost continuously. Inexperienced males must learn to respond to the female's cue to cease feeding her and start feeding the nestlings, and often the newly-hatched young perish in the process. Thus, it was necessary to have an alternative nest on hand to which such young could, if necessary, be transferred at short notice. Such inexperienced males were subsequently "taught" to feed young nestlings through our placing week-old tit nestlings in their nests for a few days. To facilitate this a continuity of "borrow-nests" was necessary.

Although the eggs and young were well protected from the outside – from attacks by starlings for example – nestlings in particular



remained vulnerable to attack from within (from nest mites or fleas), and losses occasionally occurred. To overcome this problem we fumigated and dusted nests with pyrethrum powder.

When about 15 days old, nestlings were sexed and individually colour banded, and those in tit nests were returned to robin nests where they were often united with a brood of similar age. Although broods of 4-5 young do