

Jan 2008

Weather conditions have prevented us from catching many birds this month though they've been feeding up to lay down muscle and lipid fat. A female Stonechat was caught in the heligoland and a female Dunnock had a large brood patch so maybe the breeding season will start earlier due to the mild temperatures.

Ringers have been busy with maintenance on the ringing sites, wood being replaced along the boardwalks and netting over the top to prevent wet boards becoming slippery. Also the crow trap is being restored and is coming along nicely should be ready soon which will give us another catching method when the wind is too strong.

Earlier in the month we were invited to one of our members' garden on the quest of Marsh Tits which proved very successful. Over a hundred rings were used within an hour and a half, many of them used for 30 Great and 58 Blue Tits. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was also ringed, Blackbird, Dunnock, Goldfinch, 2 Coal Tits and ultimately 8 Marsh Tits enough for everyone. A great time was had by all.



Feb 2008

Four Lapland Buntings have been ringed two males, two females, they continue to appear at the site feeding on seed oblivious to interested watchers.



The weather conditions are still challenging but we've had some success with *Whoosh netting** Snow Buntings on the beach with 13 ringed.



At the end of this month a Water Rail was caught in the *Heligoland Trap*** a species not often found on the reserves but increased water levels must have attracted it.

* *Whoosh netting* a catching method powered by elastic where the net goes over the top of feeding birds.

***Heligoland Traps* are a walk-through catching method where birds are driven in from a large open end of a funnel towards a catching box.

Mar 2008

Ringers are busy checking nest boxes on the reserves, for damage by woodpeckers and fallen trees. The boxes are then numbered, plotted on maps and additional information such as height, direction facing and species of tree used, all this data is used for the Nest Record Scheme run by the BTO. We have two new sights for this year so hopefully they'll be plenty of pulli (young birds ringed before leaving the nest).



Ringing has been slow so far with a few resident species ringed eg, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Blackbird, Greenfinch, Great and Blue Tit, hopefully when the strong winds subside numbers will increase.

May 2008

Half an acre of land has been rented from a local farmer and sown with untreated Barley as a standing crop, this area is now called The Big Bird Table. We have successfully whoosh netted Rook, Jackdaw, Magpie and most excitingly Corn Bunting. We have a good number of Corn Bunting across the reserves with sightings recorded daily and we are now looking into the possibility of colour ringing individuals to gather more information on this declining species.

Elsewhere on the reserves pulli ringing is well under way, mainly Great and Blue tit but also House Sparrow and Starling. The blip in the weather saw two tit boxes fail, this is thought to be due to the chicks newly hatching during the cold, wet weather and parents not able to feed and brood at the same time, of course it could have been inexperienced breeding birds but it seems odd that we lost a few boxes last year when the weather turned bad. A full report of the Nest Boxes will be available later on in the year.

Our first species of the year included Swallow, House Martin, Turtle Dove and Garden Warbler. The 27th proved to be an expensive day for one A-ringer who although has been ringing for many years only just managed to catch himself a Rook - £5 for the ringing kitty!

June 2008

Beginning of the month and the low cloud created great conditions for catching House Martin and Swallow, a party of Long-tailed Tits moved through the Oasis two previously ringed adults and 12 young. Highlight of the day was an adult male Little Owl. Young Starlings are on the wing with flocks bouncing around the observatory a few being caught in a box trap.

A Carrion Crow was caught in a mist net, previously ringed at the observatory in February 1991 as a nestling which means we can accurately determine this bird's age of 17 years old, the average lifespan is only 4 years! According to information on the BTO website this bird would have hatched earlier than average as adults do not usually lay eggs until mid March. There was one other Carrion Crow chick in the nest but nobody has sighted it since it was ringed. It is fascinating how much information can be gained from ringing birds but the most important information is found through retrapped individuals or field sightings (where a bird's ring number is recorded from the field/habitat in which it lives) therefore we must continue to record these numbers and encourage others to do the same. With the development of digital cameras and technology this is not as difficult as it once was but still challenging enough to keep the interest.

Aug 2008

August has proved to be a very difficult month, with plenty of rain and, even when it was dry, enough wind to prohibit ringing. Visits to the maize field have been few and far between and as a result our totals have been around two-thirds lower than at the same time last year. However, the 22nd was a rare good day and we trapped 106 Sedge Warblers, 74 Reed Warblers, a Whinchat and the *acredula* type Willow Warbler pictured below. The following day was a case of quality over quantity, with 4 Grasshopper Warblers and another Whinchat the main highlights.



Willow Warblers - an individual of the race *P.t.acredula* on left (photograph by Ian Hodgson)

Sept 2008



Although this month began very dull and autumnal, the weather has improved as the month progressed with the added advantage of easterly winds. Wheatears, Winchats and Redstarts that starting arriving in our area at the end of August becoming numerous therefore a few have been ringed using various catching methods. Blackcaps are being caught in good numbers, the highest daily total so far is 155 on the 13th. It is interesting to observe the fat scores increasing through the month as the Blackcaps lay down fat in preparation for migration to Africa. Fat - known as lipid fat on a bird - is visible just under the skin, mainly in the tracheal pit and abdomen areas and gives the skin a yellow tone.



Highlight of the month was a Melodious Warbler caught in the Haven area on the 16th (photograph on the Sightings page) resulting in two very happy ringers! Other birds of

interest include a sprinkling of Spotted Flycatchers and more than a handful of Pied Flycatchers, two Cetti's Warblers and our first Firecrest of the season on 15th. Just sneaking in at the end of the month 26th our first Yellow-browed Warbler of the season.



This bird is a Sedge Warbler caught on the 20th but note the unusually large spots round its throat that ringers refer to as the "necklace" seen only on juveniles - this one looks more like a chandelier!

Oct 2008



Lesser Redpolls are arriving with an unusual character caught on the 8th sporting a very distinct white ring at the back of its head. After a thorough examination and biometrics taken, it was confirmed as a Lesser Redpoll not a rarity but caused a great deal of excitement in the interim.

Goldcrests are still in good numbers, though less than the end of last month, also 3 Firecrest were caught on the 4th. Meadow Pipit is one of the recent target species with 12 caught on the 6th.

Thrushes are arriving 6 Song Thrushes (again on the 6th) and the first Redwing of the season caught on the 8th.

Two additional Yellow-browed Warblers have been ringed on 6th and 8th, looks to be a good month.



794 Lesser Redpolls were ringed this month, 114 Goldcrests, 93 Chiffchaffs and 1 Common Redpoll!

Nov 2008

On the 5th of this month the 1,000th Lesser Redpoll was ringed at SBBOT. This is the highest annual total since the species was split (Common and Lesser Redpoll) in 2001. Between 1952-2000 our total was 1,282 Redpoll sp. so we are hoping to double our overall total by the end of November as they usually leave for France, Belgium, Holland and sometimes Italy. The movements of this species are still not fully clear, particularly as they are so scarce in spring, so we are hoping a few of our ringed birds are recovered elsewhere. We have controlled 13 individuals this year, one of which had a Belgian ring, though it is too early to expect full details of its origins.

Most interestingly, we have trapped 2 Common Redpolls with significantly longer wings than the more familiar Lesser Redpolls that make up the vast majority of birds we have caught, which resemble individuals of the Greenland race *C. f. rostrata*. Measuring the exposed primaries relative to the exposed tertials has indicated a ratio of 1:1.6, compared to a maximum of 1:1.3 for Lesser Redpolls. Wherever they came from, they are very clearly long distance migrants.



Other species of interest include 4 Firecrest on the 2nd, 13 Siskin on the 4th and 1 Black Redstart on the 5th.



Dec 2008

Historically if we manage to ring 100 new birds in this month then we're doing well, today as I'm updating this it's the 27th and we have 98 new birds so we're doing ok! Most of the species are local with the exception of a few continental Blackbirds and earlier on in the month one Brambling and two Siskins. Today we caught 65 birds in total, 22 of which were new birds mainly Chaffinches and Greenfinches. We're still on the lookout for another Brambling but to no avail - perhaps tomorrow.