



**MERSEYSIDE  
RINGING  
GROUP**



**Annual Report  
2011**

# ***MERSEYSIDE RINGING GROUP***

*Registered Charity No 700044*

*www.merseysiderg.org.uk*

*Report Editor: Peter Coffey*



Cover photo: An adult Meadow Pipit ringed during the autumn passage at Oxmoor. The vast majority of those caught in autumn are first-years; only 33 out of 298 lured at Oxmoor 2007-11 were adults, although in 2011 the ratio was 24:149. The total of 175 Meadow Pipits ringed in 2011 is a Group record.

(Photo: D Norman)

## **Acknowledgements**

Merseyside Ringing Group receives vital co-operation from many landowners, farmers and gamekeepers in Merseyside, Cheshire and north Wales. They permit group members to work on their property and without their generous help, much of the work of the group would be impossible. The Group also receives considerable support from local authority countryside and ranger teams, local Wildlife Trusts and private individuals. Thank you all for your support.

Maps showing the distribution of controls and recoveries have been produced using DMAP.

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## **Editor's Note**

Throughout this Annual Report, bird species are listed in the revised taxonomic order used by the BTO. This involves quite significant changes. Some affect the general order (eg corvids and tits now appear much earlier in the order, pipits and wagtails much later); in other cases individual species have been reclassified (eg Cetti's Warbler, Long-tailed Tit, Spotted Flycatcher, Goldcrest and Firecrest).

## RECORDS SECRETARY'S REPORT

Bob Harris

Each ringing year appears to have its defining feature. In 2006 Shotton witnessed for the first time over 1000 (1196) Common Tern pulli ringed; 2007 was the year of the Barn Owl with 584 new birds ringed; and 2008 was a year for Brambling with 76 new birds caught and ringed despite it not being an eruption year for this species. Serin was the feature for 2009 with a single bird caught and ringed – a new species for the group. In 2010, although a further two new species were added to the Group's totals with Marsh Harrier and Icterine Warbler, its notable feature was that the Group had ringed over 100 species (106) in a single year – a feat which is not likely to be repeated sometime in the future without considerable effort.

This year will become noted as the year of the Siskin and, less consciously, the Meadow Pipit.

The Group's totals for Siskin have gradually been increasing in line with population increases documented in both England and Scotland via BBS over the last five years. However, this year was exceptional. In 2006 we ringed 375, in 2007 143, followed by 537, 656 and 299 for the next three years. In 2011 we ringed 1311 new birds and had 70 retraps and fifteen controls. The bulk of group's returns were from Llwynmawr, with two-thirds of all records coming from this site in north Wales. Of all the birds caught there was virtually even distribution of males/females and 2<sup>nd</sup> calendar year birds/ adults. Most birds were caught in the first three months of the year, with juveniles appearing in May (45 caught and ringed), peaking in June (153) and the tailing off through July (113) and Aug (16), with none caught after this month. Adults continued to be caught in August but tailed off rapidly thereafter. The bulk of retraps were from within 2011, with some from 2010, four from birds originally ringed in 2009 and one from 2008. Of the fifteen controls all but three were of birds travelling north. Three birds ringed by the group at three different sites, Bebington (2009), Bidston (2010) and Sutton Weaver (2011) were all controlled at Kildonan on the Isle of Arran, North Ayrshire in March /April. Three others were reported from other regions of Scotland, several were reported just slightly further north from the point of ringing and one individual was reported from Worksop in Notts. Of the three birds controlled while they travelled south the most interesting one was probably the bird caught as a 3J at Llwynmawr in May and then controlled in Surrey in August (273km) – a locally-bred bird perhaps?

Over the last five years we have ringed 16, 12, 20, 141 and 21 free-flying Meadow Pipits. This year we reached 167 new free-flying birds; with eight pulli, the total Meadow Pipits ringed was 175. Interestingly, both peak years have come from predominantly juveniles ringed at Oxmoor Wood. Clearly these figures are important given the overall European decline of this species and its amber listing within the UK where declines are believed to arise from nest failures at the chick stage. Disappointingly retraps and controls for this species are rare.

Another species where we are catching well is Grasshopper Warbler. This species is red-listed, and because there is not enough data to carry out any demographic analysis, the reasons for its decline are unknown. According to BBS there is a shallow recent increase – although there are still wide annual fluctuations. This bird prefers scrubby habitat for breeding so it is hardly surprising that most birds are caught at Oxmoor Wood, closely followed by Woolston. In 2003 we caught 30 new birds dropping to nine in 2004, before rising again to 29 in 2005, then falling to 19 in 2006 and one in 2007 – all serving to demonstrate the wide annual fluctuations (assuming ringing effort has been the same across years). Numbers have steadily increased over the last four years – 9, 13, 20 and 46 this year. Any retraps of this species tend to be 'same year same site' – the longest of which was 77 days between handlings – so any further data we can add on this species would be advantageous.

Other features of this year's totals that may require explanation are Pied Flycatcher and Sparrowhawk pulli numbers that appear to be down. Both of these are due to changing effort with, for Pied Flycatcher, two sites not visited this year. Interestingly, the last year when no Sparrowhawk pulli were ringed was 1980. Number increases for pulli of Kestrel, Stock Dove and Carrion Crow are all raised because of increased effort, especially by the Barn Owl ringers, rather than any national trends on bird demography. Tree Sparrow numbers have decreased for both adults and pulli as compared to 2010. Both of these reductions are likely to be due to a combination of factors – altered effort, the sporadic nature of this species and/or its continuing decline.

Ringling milestones of note exceeded this year include: Buzzard (200), Stock Dove (300), Cetti's Warbler (30), Blue Tit (80 000), Goldfinch (10 000), Lesser Redpoll (1000) and Bullfinch (5000).

Of the Top Ten species ringed for the year the top two, Blue Tit and Great Tit, stayed the same but with slightly reduced percentages compared to last year. Lower down the order Siskin jumped in at number three (having last been present at number five in 2004) comprising 5.98% of birds for the year, while swallow appeared at number 10 (after an absence in the list since 2006). The rest of the species were all the usual candidates with slight changes in rank.

This year 126 selected controls and recoveries are included covering 39 species. Four MRG-ringed birds were recaptured overseas, one each in Norway, Germany, France and Spain. For European ringed birds travelling the other way MRG controlled seven birds – two each from Norway, France and Spain and one from Portugal.

In the field 30 active ring strand 'sets' were held demonstrating at least 30 active ringers, although within the group this will be understated. Not counting barn owl boxes – which are classed as single sites – the group ringed at over 100 sites across the region with six of these sites returning greater than 1000 new birds ringed for the year. In rank order these were: Woolston bed 3, Oxmoor Wood, Llwynmawr, Woolston bed 1, Shotton, and Bidston. Fifteen members contributed nest record cards and annual data was submitted for three Group RAS sites at Prion and Glyn Arthur (Pied Flycatcher) and Woolston (Willow Tit). Elsewhere the group submitted data to the North-East Wales Bird Report, CAWOS (Cheshire Bird Report), and the L&CFS (Lancs Bird Report). All appropriate records were submitted to the BTO Bird Atlas 2007-11.

This year a comprehensive and detailed audit of ringling totals was undertaken, right back to 1963. Year-on-year it has been usual to add annual totals to the cumulative total in order to derive the grand total (of birds ringed). Increasingly it has become obvious that transcriptional errors, typographical errors and simple miscounts have all given rise to figures that, at times, simply do not add up. The 'new' totals have been derived by taking every bird ringed, from every year, and systematically adding them together over the years. We assumed that figures published in annual reports are correct and have checked the officially submitted group ringling totals with the BTO where potential anomalies have been identified. This will have reduced all manner of errors considerably and the totals produced this year are thus the best that we can get them.

## GRAND TOTALS 2011

<u>Species</u>	<u>Adult</u>	<u>Pullus</u>	<u>Total</u>
84	18567	3351	21918

## GRAND TOTALS SINCE 1954

<u>Species</u>	<u>Total</u>
197	731212**

## NEW SPECIES IN 2011

No new species in 2011

### *TOP TEN SPECIES RINGED IN 2011*

Species	Number ringed	% of yearly total
Blue Tit	3076	14.03
Great Tit	2077	9.48
Siskin	1311	5.98
Blackcap	1172	5.34
Reed Warbler	1106	5.05
Greenfinch	1093	4.99
Goldfinch	971	4.43
Chaffinch	848	3.87
Chiffchaff	840	3.83
Swallow	794	3.62
<b>Totals</b>	<b>13288</b>	<b>60.68</b>

\*\* The grand total since 1954 has been revised following a detailed audit (see comment in the final paragraph of the Records Officer's Report).

## RINGING TOTALS 2011

Taxonomic order and nomenclature based on BTO ringing reports

Species	Adult	Pullus	Total	Total since 1954
Mute Swan	3		3	762
Whooper Swan				1
Greylag Goose				1
Canada Goose	2		2	162
Shelduck				75
Mandarin Duck				10
Gadwall				7
Teal	1		1	1627
Mallard	2		2	1166
Pintail				40
Garganey				6
Shoveler				8
Tufted Duck				2
Red-legged Partridge				1
Grey Partridge				13
Common Pheasant				1
Fulmar				2
Manx Shearwater				1
Storm Petrel				21
Cormorant				228
Shag				109
Grey Heron		2	2	1691
Little Grebe				17
Great Crested Grebe				3
Marsh Harrier		2	2	5
Hen Harrier				1
Goshawk				3
Sparrowhawk	9		9	1493
Buzzard	8	19	27	208
Rough-legged Buzzard				1
Kestrel	2	78	80	1308
Merlin				12
Hobby				2
Peregrine		3	3	70
Water Rail	1		1	152
Spotted Crake				4
Corncrake				1
Moorhen	2		2	927
Coot				61
Oystercatcher		1	1	2677
Avocet				6
Little Ringed Plover		2	2	171
Ringed Plover		11	11	1298
Golden Plover				186
Grey Plover				30
Lapwing		12	12	2841
Knot				5292

Species	Adult	Pullus	Total	Total since 1954
Sanderling				3967
Little Stint				111
Pectoral Sandpiper				4
Curlew Sandpiper				44
Purple Sandpiper				1
Dunlin	12		12	22519
Buff-breasted Sandpiper				1
Ruff				77
Jack Snipe	2		2	108
Snipe	1		1	632
Woodcock				11
Black-tailed Godwit				19
Bar-tailed Godwit				190
Whimbrel				6
Curlew	2		2	351
Common Sandpiper				126
Green Sandpiper				9
Spotted Redshank				1
Greenshank	1		1	13
Wood Sandpiper				7
Redshank	119		119	4120
Turnstone				1125
Kittiwake				276
Black-headed Gull				6177
Little Gull				1
Common Gull				79
Lesser Black-backed Gull				1619
Herring Gull				5911
Yellow-legged Gull				2
Iceland Gull				1
Great Black-backed Gull				287
Little Tern		39	39	1039
Black Tern				3
Sandwich Tern				37
Common Tern				17472
Roseate Tern				1376
Arctic Tern				1583
Guillemot				242
Razorbill				57
Puffin				42
Stock Dove	2	29	31	317
Woodpigeon	29	148	177	2718
Collared Dove	16	2	18	939
Turtle Dove				13
Cuckoo				37
Barn Owl	25	278	303	2542
Little Owl		2	2	190
Tawny Owl	3	20	23	380
Long-eared Owl				53
Short-eared Owl				8
Nightjar				5

Species	Adult	Pullus	Total	Total since 1954
Swift	3	4	7	7712
Kingfisher	11		11	235
Hoopoe				1
Green Woodpecker				44
Great Spotted Woodpecker	70		70	1127
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	1		1	21
Woodchat Shrike				1
Magpie	23	26	49	1103
Jay	29	1	30	841
Jackdaw	23	13	36	337
Rook				612
Carrion Crow		24	24	404
Raven				31
Goldcrest	318	1	319	6962
Firecrest				72
Blue Tit	2202	874	3076	80429
Great Tit	1470	607	2077	42687
Coal Tit	199	8	207	6156
Willow Tit	54		54	1304
Marsh Tit	3		3	174
Bearded Tit				42
Woodlark				1
Skylark		3	3	831
Shore /Horned Lark				1
Sand Martin	134		134	18826
Swallow	488	306	794	75721
House Martin	40	4	44	2718
Cetti's Warbler	4		4	30
Long-tailed Tit	664	9	673	10954
Arctic Warbler				1
Pallas's Leaf Warbler				2
Yellow-browed Warbler				6
Bonelli's Warbler				1
Wood Warbler				459
Chiffchaff	815	25	840	9633
Willow Warbler	429	10	439	17643
Blackcap	1169	3	1172	12886
Garden Warbler	71	1	72	1366
Barred Warbler				1
Lesser Whitethroat	10		10	697
Whitethroat	490	32	522	8112
Grasshopper Warbler	37	9	46	555
Icterine Warbler				1
Aquatic Warbler				3
Sedge Warbler	304	6	310	13212
Blyth's Reed Warbler				1
Marsh Warbler				5
Reed Warbler	1077	29	1106	16949
Waxwing				46
Nuthatch	36	11	47	1890
Treecreeper	54	6	60	1032

Species	Adult	Pullus	Total	Total since 1954
Wren	361	21	382	11621
Starling	318	8	326	17360
Dipper				505
Ring Ouzel				53
Blackbird	508	46	554	29353
Fieldfare				1520
Song Thrush	79	4	83	6660
Redwing	22		22	5650
Mistle Thrush		3	3	860
Spotted Flycatcher				553
Robin	468	54	522	14249
Nightingale				2
Bluethroat				3
Red-breasted Flycatcher				2
Pied Flycatcher	77	376	453	22127
Black Redstart				1
Redstart	5	13	18	1192
Whinchat				1695
Stonechat				293
Wheatear	1		1	1695
Dunnock	359	7	366	12658
House Sparrow	201	33	234	3225
Tree Sparrow	23	56	79	6116
Yellow Wagtail				1877
Grey Wagtail	5		5	940
Pied/White Wagtail	2	10	12	2536
Tree Pipit				116
Meadow Pipit	167	8	175	2368
Rock Pipit				116
Water Pipit				1
Chaffinch	848		848	26499
Brambling	151		151	7639
Greenfinch	1087	6	1093	47747
Serin				1
Goldfinch	966	5	971	10063
Siskin	1311		1311	7835
Linnet	59	31	90	11911
Twite				86
Lesser Redpoll	315		315	1289
Common Redpoll				1
Redpoll sp.				3400
Common Crossbill				36
Bullfinch	350	5	355	5284
Hawfinch				1
Snow Bunting				37
Yellowhammer				1255
Little Bunting				1
Reed Bunting	414	5	419	19047
Corn Bunting				304
<b>Totals</b>	<b>18567</b>	<b>3351</b>	<b>21918</b>	<b>731212</b>

# SELECTED CONTROLS AND RECOVERIES 2011

Peter Coffey

A selection of 126 records from 39 species is shown below. Four MRG-ringed birds were recorded from four European countries (Norway, Germany, France, and Spain) and seven foreign-ringed birds (two Norwegian, two French, one Portuguese and two Spanish) were recorded or controlled here. Three late records are included, one for 2007 and two for 2010.

The symbols and conventions used are given below:

Sex: M = Male F = Female

Age when ringed (Euring Code):

- 1 Pullus (nestling or chick)
- 2 Fully grown – year of hatching unknown
- 3 Definitely hatched during the calendar year of ringing
- 3J Definitely hatched during the calendar year of ringing and still completely or partially in juvenile body plumage
- 4 Hatched before current calendar year – exact year unknown
- 5 Definitely hatched during the previous calendar year
- 6 Hatched before last calendar year – exact year unknown
- 7 Definitely hatched two years before year of ringing
- 8 Hatched more than two calendar years before year of ringing
- 9 Definitely hatched three years before year of ringing

Condition at recovery:

- X found dead
- XF found freshly dead or dying
- XL found dead – not recent
- + shot or intentionally killed by man
- +F shot or intentionally killed by man – fresh
- SR sick or injured – released with ring
- V alive and probably healthy, caught and released but not by a ringer
- VV alive and probably healthy, ring or colour marks read in the field but not by ringer
- R caught and released by ringer
- B caught and released by ringer – nesting
- RR alive and probably healthy, ring or colour marks read in the field by ringer
- // condition on finding totally unknown
- © bird caught at breeding colony
- ® bird caught at roost

## Abbreviations used for foreign ringing schemes:

ESI	Spain, Madrid (Icona)	ESM	Spain, Madrid	FPR	France, Paris
NOS	Norway, Oslo	POL	Portugal, Lisbon		

## Mute Swan

ZY1228	1 (9/9)	18.09.2010	Newport, Telford and Wrekin	
(C/R 7FVJ)	RR	23.04.2011	Anderton N Pk, Northwich, Cheshire	57km 351°
W04046	0 (?)	16.12.2000	Kingsway Bridge, Warrington, Cheshire	
	B (=M)	06.04.2007	Sandymoor, Runcorn, Cheshire	9km 231°
	B (=M)	16.05.2011	Sandymoor, Runcorn, Cheshire	9km 231°

**Canada Goose**

5176387	1	25.07.1999	Meols, Wirral, Merseyside <b>(4473 days)</b>	
	X	23.10.2011	Longton Marsh, nr Preston, Lancashire	43km 30°

**Buzzard**

GJ91269	1 (2/2)	12.06.1988	Cilcain, Mold, Flintshire <b>(8291 days)</b>	
	X	23.02.2011	Star Farm, Llangynhafal, Denbighshire	5km 248°

GH80287	1 (3/3)	20.06.1993	Nr Cilcain, Flintshire <b>(6544 days)</b>	
	XF	21.05.2011	Llandyrnog, Denbighshire	6km 270°

These two old Buzzards were long-lived but even GJ91269 (who lived for 22years 8 months and 11 days) did not beat the BTO longevity record of 25 years 6 months and 26 days.

**Kestrel**

ER93707	1 (3/3)	05.07.2005	Milton Brook Lodge, nr Stamford Bridge, Cheshire	
	X	(2007)	Nr Corwen, Denbighshire	46km 236°
			(Found at Goshawk plucking post)	

ET40728	1 (2/4)	22.05.2005	Brimstage, Wirral, Merseyside	
	R (=F)	03.06.2011	Great Altcar, Lancashire	25km 3°

**Peregrine**

GF66227	1 (3/3)	25.05.2011	Nr Northwich, Cheshire	
	XF	19.10.2011	Northwich, Cheshire	3km 270°
			(Found with broken wing; died in care at RSPCA, 24.10.2011)	

**Coot**

GN08869	3M	10.09.2010	Marton Mere, Blackpool	
	RR	21.08.2011	West Kirby, Wirral, Merseyside	50km 196°

**Redshank**

DD89528	6	13.02.2010	Bangor Harbour, Gwynedd	
	R	07.03.2011	Moreton, Wirral, Merseyside	69km 73°

DK64388	3	07.11.1998	Ogwen Estuary, Gwynedd <b>(4518 days)</b>	
	R	07.03.2011	Moreton, Wirral, Merseyside	68km 73°

**Dunlin**

NOS	3	21.08.2010	Makkevika, Giske 62°30'N 6°01'E More og Romsdal	
8E19307			NORWAY	
	R	05.03.2011	Moreton, Wirral, Merseyside	1145km 208°

**Black-headed Gull**

ER62787	6	16.02.1991	Rixton, Warrington, Cheshire <b>(7396 days)</b>	
	RR	26.04.2011	Sonke Nissen Koog, Vorland 54°36'N 8°52'E	
			Schleswig-Holstein GERMANY (+ 18.05.11)	754km 80°

**Herring Gull**

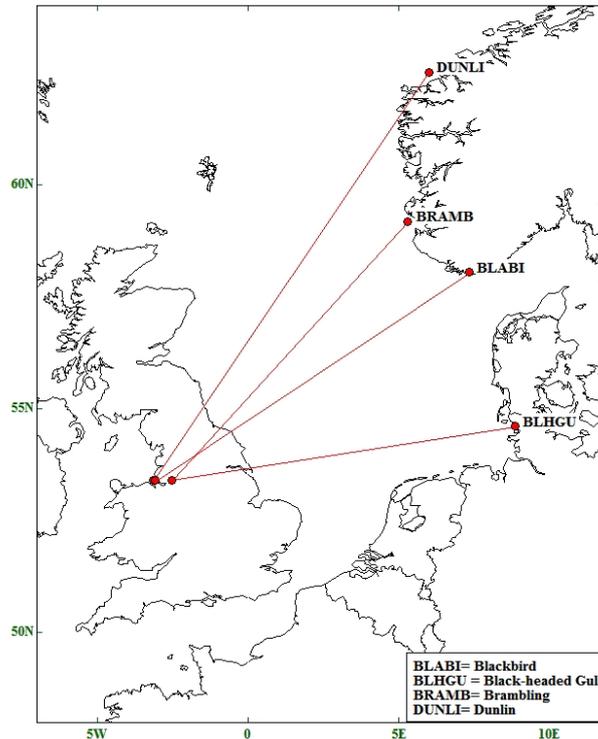
GF20914	12	27.01.1996	Moss Side Farm, Risley, Warrington <b>(5782 days)</b>	
	X	26.11.2011	Mersey Estuary, near Hale, Cheshire	24m 237°

**Common Tern**

SV82892	1	22.06.2003	Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire	
	X	(00.07.2011)	South Gare, Redcar & Cleveland	201km 39°

SV92284	1	22.06.2003	Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire	
	XF	17.05.2011	Ynys Feirig, Rhosneigr, Anglesey	100km 270°

### North European recoveries/controls



The following **Common Terns** were ringed as pulli at Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire on the left-hand date and had their rings read in the field at Seaforth Nature Reserve, Merseyside (28 km 3°) on the date(s) in the columns to the right:

SV41046 18.06.2000 06.06.2011  
 SV82240 22.07.2001 07.07.2011  
 SV82401 23.06.2002 07.05.2011, 05.06.2011  
 SR42749 25.06.2006 25.05.2011 (attempting to mate with a Roseate Tern) 03.07.2011  
 SR65026 01.07.2007 01.07.2011, 25.07.2011  
 SR65029 01.07.2007 07.07.2011  
 SR65298 29.06.2008 07.07.2011  
 SR65303 29.06.2008 21.06.2011  
 SR65498 29.06.2008 08.07.2011  
 SR65508 29.06.2008 09.06.2011, 21.06.2011  
 SR65533 29.06.2008 31.05.2011  
 SR65778 13.07.2008 11.06.2011

MRG regularly receives records of sightings at Seaforth but with the collapse of the Shotton colony increased numbers of birds have been counted at Seaforth (see report on pages 31-35). All birds ringed in 2007 or later will not have bred at Shotton.

#### Barn Owl

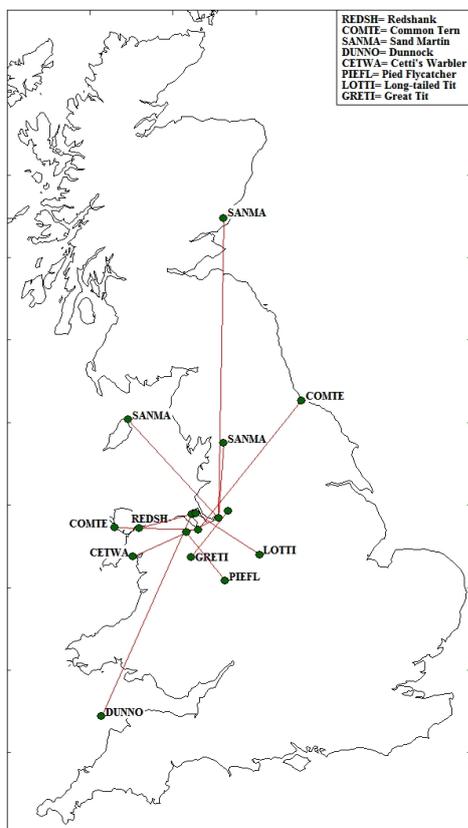
GF20784 1 (4/5) 29.06.2000 Frankby, Wirral, Merseyside (4032 days)  
 R (=F) 14.07.2011 Barnston, Wirral, Merseyside 3km 130°

At 11 years and 15 days this is still some way short of the BTO record-holder (14 years, 7 months, 22 days) but GF20784 is still alive and could provide further reports. In an MRG context, this bird was ringed as a pullus by the late Andy Madden and it is nice to note that one of 'his' birds is still giving useful data.

GF20797 1 (3/3) 19.06.2004 Childer Thornton, Cheshire  
 R (=F) 03.06.2011 Near Ledsham, Cheshire 2km 200°

GC14678	1 (5/7) R (=F)	18.05.2007 18.06.2011	Puddington, near Chester, Cheshire Nr West Kirby, Merseyside	16km 330°
GC14755	1 (7/7) X (Dead in nest box with two roosting adults)	11.06.2007 18.06.2011	Homewood, Edge Grange, Cheshire Nr West Kirby, Merseyside	43km 327°
GR25624	1 (1/1) X	14.07.2011 23.12.2011	Whitehead Farm, Cheshire Holyhead, Isle of Anglesey	129km 280°
Railway casualty – found on the front of a train. Whitehead Farm is within 5km of the London-Holyhead railway!				
GC51929	1F (4/4) B	28.06.2010 21.06.2011	Brook Farm, Great Barrow, Cheshire near Brook Farm, Cheshire	19km 91°
GC78527	1M (2/2) B	25.06.2010 26.06.2011	Whitehead Farm, Cheshire near Stublach Dairy Farm, Cheshire	23km 61°
GC27882	1 (1/1) V	10.07.2008 08.01.2011	Greenfield Lane, Rowton, Cheshire Eastham, Cheshire	19km 332°
GC27513	1 (7/7) R (=M)	03.05.2007 09.01.2011	Oscroft Hall, Oscroft, Cheshire near Brook Farm, Cheshire	18km 78°
Thirty-six other records were received relating to movements of <16km; nineteen were retraps, mostly as breeding adults, and seventeen were recoveries.				
<b>Kingfisher</b>				
SB06769	3 R (=F)	11.06.2011 30.06.2011	Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire Birchwood, Warrington	15km 51°
<b>Goldcrest</b>				
DLH127	4F R	05.11.2011 12.11.2011	Crosby Hall, Merseyside Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	12km 202°
<b>Blue Tit</b>				
V651834	1 (6/7) XF	07.06.2008 05.05.2011	Pandy, near Glyn Ceiriog, Wrexham Cwm Cottage, Clun, Shropshire	56km 164°
<b>Great Tit</b>				
L406377	3F R	15.11.2010 02.03.2011	Birchwood, Warrington, Cheshire Llwynmawr, Wrexham	72km 218°
L405610	3M XF (killed by a predatory bird)	28.10.2010 22.08.2011	Norton Priory, Runcorn, Cheshire Henllan, Denbigh, Denbighshire	55km 255°
T830453	3J R (=F) R (=F)	30.07.2006 18.05.2010 02.08.2011	Birchwood, Warrington Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire ® Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire ®	15km 231°
<b>Marsh Tit</b>				
L356025	1 (8/8) R	14.05.2011 19.06.2011	near Rhydymwyn, near Mold, Flintshire Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire	12km 61°
<b>Sand Martin</b>				
V217965	3J R (=F)	09.08.2007 27.06.2011	Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire ® Inverigthy, Friockheim, Angus ©	365km 1°

X308602	3J R (=F)	30.07.2009 13.07.2011	Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire ® Point of Ayre, Isle of Man ©	161km 317°
X931593	3J R (=M)	23.07.2010 03.07.2011	Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire ® Nether Burrow, Lancashire ©	91km 4°



**UK recoveries/controls involving movements of >70km**

**(all species except warblers, finches and buntings)**

(Editor's Note: Cetti's Warbler is shown here rather than with other warblers to reflect the changed taxonomic order used throughout this report)

**Swallow**

L871004	1 (5/5) R	28.06.2011 30.08.2011	Dairy House Farm, near Winsford, Cheshire Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire ®	22km 330°
X152411	1 (4/4) R	19.07.2011 19.08.2011	Broad oak Farm, Mobberley, Cheshire No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington ®	15km 302°
Y259115	1 (4/4) R	14.06.2011 19.08.2011	Atherton, Greater Manchester No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington ®	15km 189°

**Cetti's Warbler**

L870548	3M R	15.09.2011 02.10.2011	Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire Llyn Ystumlllyn, Gwynedd	112km 245°
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An interesting movement; Anglesey has a small population (5+ singing males) but records for Gwynedd are scarce.

**Long-tailed Tit**

ATY569	2 R R	04.09.2010 11.10.2010 24.04.2011	nr Landgate, Bryn, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Gtr Mcr Meols, Wirral, Merseyside Meols, Wirral, Merseyside (+ 21.03,10.04.11)	38km 247°
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This bird, one of a flock of eight that had been ringed together at Bryn and controlled at Meols, survived the harsh winter of 2010/11. The fate of the others is unknown.

CHP999	2 XF	12.10.2010 16.03.2011	Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside Great Gate, Staffordshire	92km 124°
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**Chiffchaff**

DPA832	3 R(=3)	18.09.2010 20.09.2011	Queen Mary Reservoir, Surrey No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	259km 328°
CHP490	4F R (=3)	14.08.2009 29.09.2011	Meols, Wirral, Merseyside Titchfield Haven, Fareham, Hampshire	314km 156°
EBE017	3J R	24.08.2011 17.09.2011	Frodsham Marsh, Cheshire Icklesham, East Sussex	355km 139°
ESI KG9696	3 R	13.10.2010 06.04.2011	Manecorro, Parque Nacional de Donana, 37°05'N 6°32'W Huelva, SPAIN Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire	1813km 9°

**Willow Warbler**

ATY519	4M R	25.06.2009 23.04.2011	Bryn, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Gtr Mcr Woolston Eyes, Warrington, Cheshire	17km 156°
CHT542	3 R (=M)	04.09.2009 03.09.2010	No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington Estuario del Mino, Salcidos, A Guarda, 41°54'N 8°51'W Pontevedra, SPAIN	1360km 201°

**Blackcap**

L405255	3M R	05.09.2010 11.06.2011	Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire Weeton Camp, Lancashire	55km 343°
L277703	3J R(=F)	12.06.2011 20.08.2011	Mere Sands Wood, Rufford, Lancashire No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	35km 144°
L408498	3M XF	18.09.2010 20.06.2011	Woolston Eyes, Warrington, Cheshire Handsworth, Sheffield, South Yorkshire	76km 91°
Y157208	3M R	17.09.2011 01.10.2011	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington Cissbury Ring, Worthing, West Sussex	316km 153°

**Sedge Warbler**

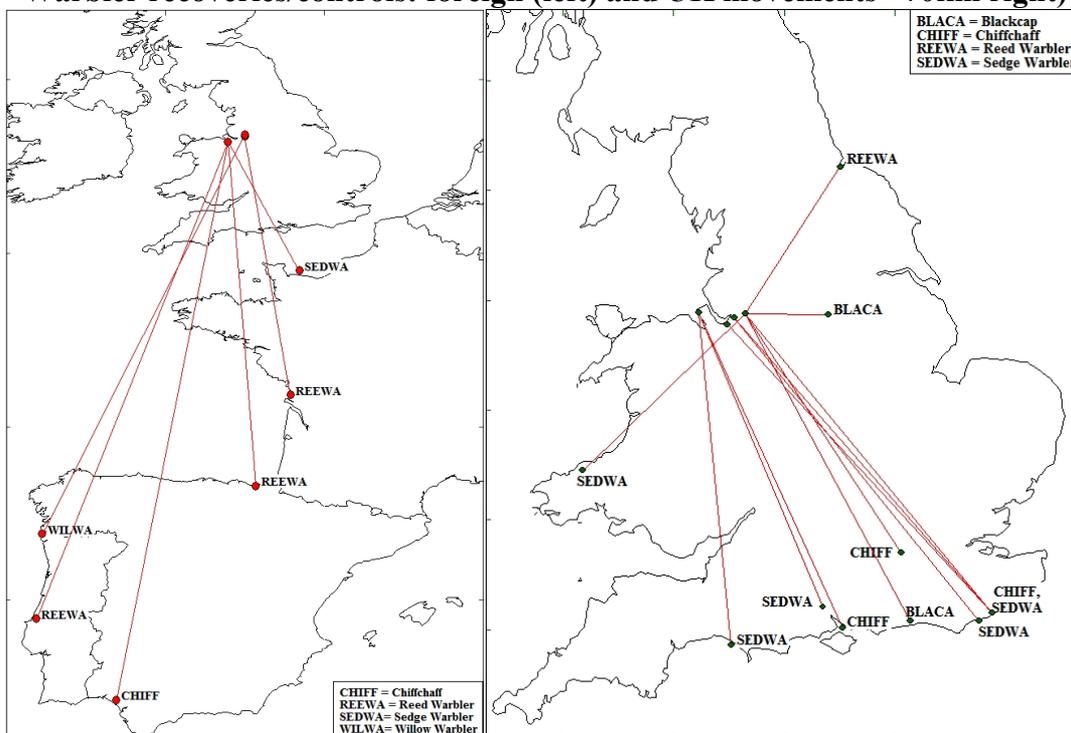
L637190	4 R	23.04.2011 25.04.2011	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington ( <b>2 days</b> ) Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire	11km 111°
L637855	4 R	23.07.2011 26.07.2011	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington ( <b>3 days</b> ) Teifi Marsh, Ceredigion	205km 225°

This bird, weighing only 9.8 g at 0515 when caught at Woolston, was caught three days later 205km away in Ceredigion weighing 10.7g at 0530.

X574480	3J R	23.07.2010 28.08.2011	Meols, Wirral, Merseyside Fish Lake Meadows, Romsey, Hampshire	290km 158°
L221807	3 R	07.08.2010 21.04.2011	West Bexington, Dorset Meols, Wirral, Merseyside	304km 354°
L868577	3J R	23.07.2011 03.08.2011	Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire Glyne Gap Marsh, East Sussex	353km 142°
L868765	3 R	30.07.2011 10.08.2011	Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire Icklesham, East Sussex	356km 140°

FRP	3	03.08.2010	Conchemarche, Mortagne-sur-Gironde 45°29'N
6534019			0°47'W Charente-Maritime FRANCE
	R	22.04.2011	Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire 875km 350°

**Warbler recoveries/controls: foreign (left) and UK movements >70km right)**



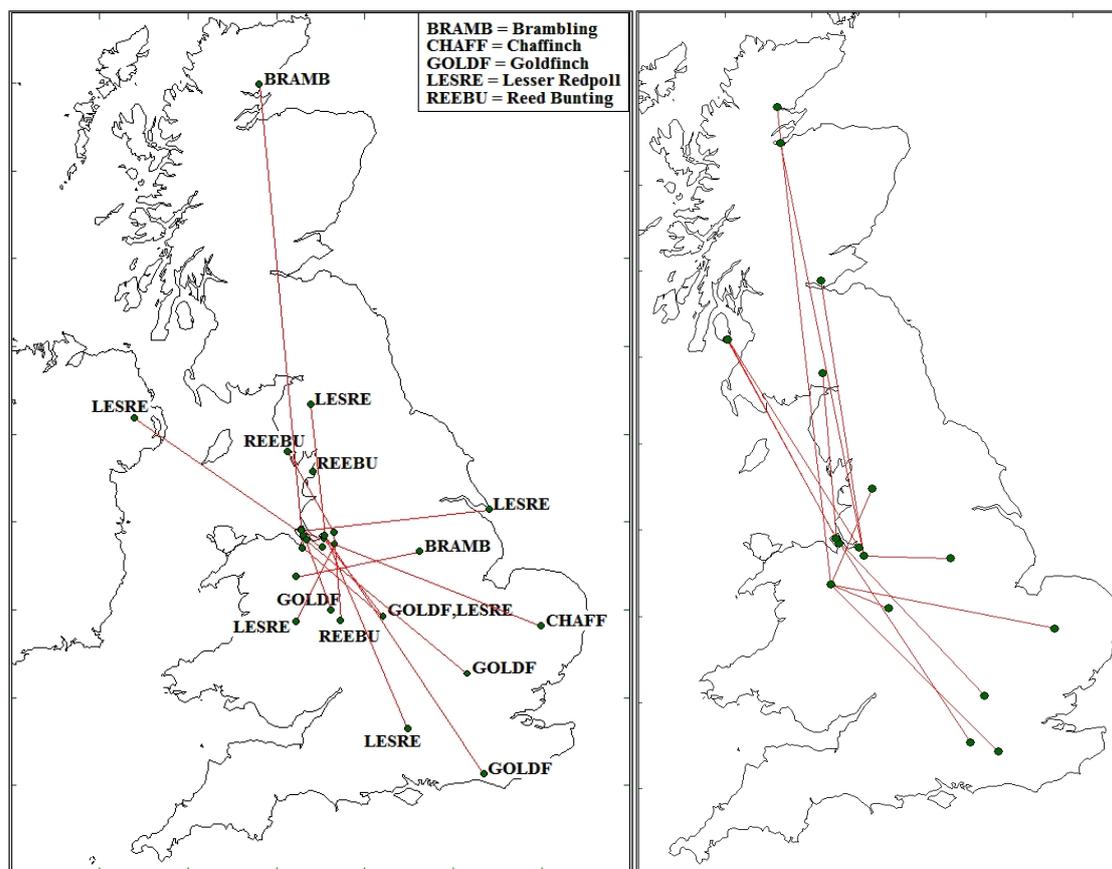
**Reed Warbler**

Y155227	3	06.08.2011	No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington (1 day)
	R	07.08.2011	Scotman's Flash, Wigan, Gt Manchester 17km 336°
L114165	1J	29.07.2010	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington
	R	01.07.2011	Nr Saltholme, Stockton-on-Tees 159km 33°
		(also caught on 06.07.2011)	
X061175	3J	28.07.2009	Woolston Eyes, Warrington, Cheshire
	R (=F)	29.06.2011	Betley Mere, Betley, Staffordshire 42km 167°
L381017	3	04.08.2010	Icklesham, East Sussex
	R	13.05.2011	No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington 52km 322°
L637920	3J	23.07.2011	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington
	R	16.08.2011	Plaisance, Saint-Froult 45°54'N 1°04'W Charente-Maritime, FRANCE 839km 173°
FRP	3	19.08.2010	Plaisance, Saint-Froult 45°54'N 1°04'W Charente-Maritime FRANCE
6128047	R (=M)	20.07.2011	Woolston Eyes, Warrington (also 23.07) 839km 353°
ESM	4	31.07.2010	Zarautz, 43°17'N 2°09'W Guipúzcoa, SPAIN
Y00365	R (=F)	24.06.2011	Shotton Steel Works, Flints (+ 30.07.2011) 1106km 357°

POL A287919	3 R	10.09.2009 24.07.2010	Paul da Tornada, 39°27'N 9°03'W Leiria PORTUGAL Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire	1597km 17°
<b>Nuthatch</b>				
TK14892	1 (5/6) XF	15.05.2008 11.09.2011	Budworth Mere, Cheshire Frodsham, Cheshire	14km 270°
<b>Blackbird</b>				
LA53908	6M R	22.01.2011 18.03.2011	Birkenhead High School Academy, Wirral, Merseyside Bongsto, Mandal, 58°02'N 7°22'E Vest-Agder, NORWAY	832km 52°
<b>Pied Flycatcher</b>				
T834336	1 (7/7) B (=M)	07.06.2006 28.05.2011	near Loggerheads, Mold, Flintshire Glyn Arthur, nr Llangwyfan, Denbighshire	6km 289°
This 5-year old male was controlled just 6km from its natal site but had not been recorded in the intervening years.				
L113742	1 (8/8) B (=F)	02.06.2010 15.05.2011	Nant, Gwynedd Llewesog Hall, Prion, Denbighshire	42km 104°
V651823	1 (8/8) XF (=M)	07.06.2008 05.05.2011	Pandy, near Glyn Ceiriog, Wrexham Cwm Cottage, Clun, Shropshire	56km 164°
V370971	1 (6/6) R (=F)	05.06.2010 24.05.2011	The Wrekin, Wellington, Telford and Wrekin Penbedw, Flintshire	75km 321°
L329516	1 (8/8) B (=F)	07.06.2010 30.05.2011	Bucknell Wood, Shropshire Ddol-hir, near Pandy, Wrexham	65km 348°
Three other movements of <15km were reported in 2011.				
<b>Dunnock</b>				
L037967	3 R	14.10.2010 08.04.2011	Lundy Island, Devon Meols, Wirral, Merseyside	267km 23°
According to the BTO, there have only ever been 30 Dunnock movements >100km within Britain and Ireland, and none in the last five years.				
<b>Tree Sparrow</b>				
TL06111	1 (4/4) XF	18.06.2009 09.09.2011	near Ince, Cheshire Chester, Cheshire (killed by cat)	13km 207°
<b>Chaffinch</b>				
N284178	5M XF	24.04.1999 06.05.2011	Greasby, Wirral, Merseyside ( <b>4395 days</b> ) Greasby, Wirral, Merseyside	0km
This bird was found freshly dead on the grille of a car. It becomes the BTO-ringed longevity record-holder at 12 years 12 days, exceeding the previous 11 years 7 months 21 days. The European record, calculated as age of bird rather than elapsed time between ringing and finding, is held by a Swiss bird at >15 years 6 months.				
V851043	3F R	01.12.2009 25.06.2011	Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside Garboldisham, Norfolk	292km 113°
<b>Brambling</b>				
NOS EC36149	4F R	01.10.2010 22.01.2011	Blikshavn, Karmoy, 59°10'N 5°19'E Rogaland, NORWAY Birchwood, Warrington, Cheshire	799km 218°

L004290	5F R	07.01.2010 30.01.2011	near Culmailly Farm, Golspie, Highland Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire	530km 174°
X065709	6M R	08.03.2009 06.02.2011	Llwynmawr, Wrexham Bursheart Hill, near Edwinstowe, Notts	145km 78°
L639285	3M R	19.12.2010 13.03.2011	Meadow Bank Farm, Broxton, Cheshire Llwynmawr, Wrexham	31km 237°
<b>Greenfinch</b>				
TL07590	3M XF	28.11.2010 01.03.2011	Meadow Bank Farm, Broxton, Cheshire Haslington, Cheshire	26km 86°
TL06228	3 X	19.12.2009 16.05.2011	Woolston Eyes, Warrington, Cheshire Kidnal, Malpas, Cheshire	45km 204°
<b>Goldfinch</b>				
X305108	3J R(=F)	02.09.2010 18.02.2011	Higher Bebington, Wirral, Merseyside Wyke, Much Wenlock, Shropshire	89km 158°
X572958	3 R(=M)	18.10.2009 20.01.2011	Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire Hams Hall, Whitacre Heath, Warks	112km 143°
X066214	3 R (=M)	09.10.2009 12.11.2011	Brookhurst, near Bromborough, Merseyside Temple End, Hertfordshire	236km 131°
L868996	3JF R	14.08.2011 14.11.2011	Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire Wales Farm, Plumpton, East Sussex	325km 147°
<b>Siskin</b>				
X571357	6M XF	02.05.2010 29.01.2011	Llwynmawr, Wrexham Balchrinch, Ardgay, Highland	558km 352°
X063334	5M R	28.03.2009 22.01.2011	Sandiway, Cheshire North Kessock, Highland	488km 348°
X842936	6M R	15.02.2010 28.02.2011	Townhill, Dunfermline, Fife Sandiway, Cheshire	324km 171°
R803789	6F R	14.03.2009 21.03.2011	Higher Bebington, Wirral, Merseyside Kildonan, Isle of Arran, N Ayrshire	268km 330°
V571121	6F R R R	24.03.2010 17.03.2011 21.03.2011 01.04.2011	Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside Kildonan, Isle of Arran, N Ayrshire Kildonan, Isle of Arran, N Ayrshire Kildonan, Isle of Arran, N Ayrshire	262km 330° 262km 330° 262km 330°
L639976	5M R R	15.03.2011 07.04.2011 13.06.2011	Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire Kildonan, Isle of Arran, N Ayrshire Kildonan, Isle of Arran, N Ayrshire	283km 327° 283km 327°
T006834	5F R	16.03.2009 16.03.2011	Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside Torwood Lodge, Lockerbie, Dumf +Gall	92km 355°

## UK movements of > 70km for Siskin (right) and other finches and buntings (left)



X065904	5M R RR	23.04.2009 17.02.2011 03.04.2011	Llwynmawr, Wrexham New Laithe Farm, Lancashire (to 17.03.11) Stocks Reservoir, Lancashire	123km 23° 128km 22°
X629734	3J R (=M)	13.07.2010 16.03.2011	Belmont, Bolton, Blackburn with Darwen Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire	38km 200°
V812361	5M R	07.02.2008 19.02.2011	Brewood, Staffordshire Llwynmawr, Wrexham	72km 293°
L640813	5F R	19.03.2011 09.04.2011	Sandiway, Cheshire Fire Tower, Birklands, Warsop, Notts	99km 92°
L742377	5M R	29.01.2011 11.03.2011	Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	248km 318°
T580346	3M R	01.10.2005 23.01.2011	Brandon, Suffolk ( <b>1940 days</b> ) Llwynmawr, Wrexham	260km 282°
L867948	3J R (=M)	25.05.2011 22.08.2011	Llwynmawr, Wrexham Dukes Warren, Surrey	273km 136°
L447431	5F R	05.03.2011 11.03.2011	Fleet, Aldershot, Hampshire ( <b>6 days</b> ) Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	281km 327°

There were three other controls/recoveries involving movements of < 30km.

**Lesser Redpoll**

X067538	6M R	05.04.2009 31.12.2011	Fox Howl, Delamere Forest, Cheshire Dunmurry, Antrim, Northern Ireland	261km 305°
Y170336	4F R	23.09.2011 16.10.2011	Greystoke Forest, Cumbria Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire	150km 174°
L653657	3F R	04.10.2010 31.03.2011	Kilnsea Clays, East Riding of Yorkshire (Spurn BO) Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	214km 265°
L410068	3 R	19.11.2010 13.10.2011	No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington Clow Bridge, Burnley, Lancashire	45km 25°
L113592	3 R	08.10.2010 11.04.2011	Marston, Cheshire Clun Forest, Clun, Shropshire	99km 206°
R964541	5 R	12.04.2009 01.04.2011	Hams Hall, Whitacre Heath, Warwickshire Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire	121km 311°
L912383	5 R (=M)	06.04.2011 20.10.2011	Greenham Common, West Berkshire Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire	240km 337°

There were four other controls/recoveries involving movements of < 30km.

**Reed Bunting**

L352143	3M R	04.10.2010 19.02.2011	Kirksanton, Cumbria Woolston Eyes, Warrington, Cheshire	105km 150°
L445006	3F R (=M)	08.09.2010 13.10.2011	Middleton Nature Reserve, Lancashire Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire	76km 170°
X572927	3M VV	17.10.2009 27.02.2011	Meadow Bank Farm, Broxton, Cheshire Tittesworth Reservoir, Staffordshire	52km 82°
L752226	6F R (=5)	09.01.2011 11.02.2011	Chelmarsh Reservoir, near Bridgnorth, Shropshire Woolston Eyes, Warrington, Cheshire	101km 355°

## SELECTED RETRAPS 2010-11

Peter Coffey

Records from 33 species are featured below and include retraps from 2010 and 2011. In this edition, retraps are presented to reflect a number of themes: longevity, return of absent friends and interesting biometrics.

### Longevity

Sparrowhawk	DK83268	5M	28.01.2005 11.02.2010	Eastham, Wirral	5 yrs 14 days
Barn Owl	GF66059	4F	14.06.2004 16.06.2005 25.08.2005 22.06.2006 03.10.2006 19.09.2007 16.07.2008 04.06.2009 20.06.2011	Stapleford Hall, nr Tarvin, Cheshire Brereton Park Fm, nr Hargrave (2 km) Nr Stapleford Hall, nr Tarvin Sheaf Farm, Hockenhull (2 km) Ford Farm, nr Stapleford Sheaf Farm Sheaf Farm Nr Hockenhull Hall Ford Farm	7 yrs 6 days
This female is an old favourite that had raised at least one brood every year except 2010 so it was nice to see her again in 2011. She moves between farms in a local area of the Gowry valley.					
Great Spotted Woodpecker	RP32433	4F	05.06.2004 15.05.2010	Llwynmawr	5 yrs 344 days
Jay	DB80026	4	01.07.2002 07.04.2011	Bidston, Wirral	8 yrs 280 days
Great Tit	P860645	5F	24.02.2002 21.03.2010	Fox Howl, Delamere (+ 01.05.2002)	8 yrs 25 days
Coal Tit	R804588	4  4M	05.06.2004 20.09.2007 02.07.2009 18.04.2010 13.05.2011	Birchwood, Warrington  (also 30.08+17.10.2009) (also 28.10.2010) (also 01.06+04.09+16.10.2011)	7 yrs 133 days
Willow Tit	V214001	3J	13.08.2006 12.09.2007 05.08.2008 16.02.2009 29.10.2010 14.04.2011	Birchwood (also on 7.09+24.12.2006) (+17.12.2007) (also 19.10+22.11.2008) (also 12.09+28.11.2009)  (also on 24.08.2011)	5 yrs 11 days

Long-tailed Tit	1U5888	3J	04.06.2002 14.02.2004 05.03.2005 23.09.2006 10.02.2007 23.02.2008 17.01.2009 19.02.2010	Woolston No 3 (05.07+ 20.07+ 11.09.02) (also 30.04+11.09+ 13.11.2004) (also 26.03.2005)     (31.01+14.02+ 21.02+ 07.03+15.12.2009) (also 23.02+ 13.03+20.03+21.10.2010)	8 yrs 139 days
See Woolston Eyes Ringing Report 2011 (p 50) for further comments on this long-lived bird.					
Chiffchaff	BHJ670	4M	20.04.2008 22.03.2009 10.04.2010 08.04.2011	Meols (26.04+16.05+04.06+ 05.06.2008) (also 16.04+11.09+14.09.2009)	2 yrs 353 days
Chiffchaff	AKB109	4	13.08.2008 17.09.2011	Woolston No 3 bed	3 yrs 35 days
There is little difference in the age of these two Chiffchaffs but whereas AKB109 has been retrapped just once, the other has been retrapped ten times.					
Willow Warbler	AYC217	3J 4F	26.08.2005 30.06.2006 16.07.2010	Woolston No1 bed (also 27.08.2005)	4 yrs 324 days
Blackcap	T156039	3JM	01.08.2004 11.07.2009 17.07.2010	Oxmoor Wood, Cheshire (also 16.07.2009)	5 yrs 350 days
Garden Warbler	X306153	4	09.08.2009 27.06.2010 26.06.2011	Anderton NP, Cheshire	1 yr 321 days
Lesser Whitethroat	V214696	5	10.05.2008 01.05.2010	Woolston No 1 bed	1 yr 356 days
It's not surprising that the maximum age of retrapped Garden Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat is low; only twelve Garden Warblers and four Lesser Whitethroats were retrapped in 2010 and 2011 combined, a very small sample size.					
Whitethroat	R250413	3J	18.07.2003 24.04.2004 09.07.2005 02.05.2009 24.04.2010 23.04.2011	Woolston No 1 bed	7 yrs 279 days
Reed Warbler	P640450	5M	28.07.2001 30.04.2011	Woolston No 3 bed	9 yrs 276 days
Nuthatch	TB81671	3F	17.10.2004 30.11.2004 20.11.2010 31.01.2011	Delamere, Cheshire	6 yrs 106 days

Wren	AYD739	3	27.10.2006 04.03.2007 30.10.2008 09.01.2010	Norton Priory, Cheshire	3 yrs 74 days
Starling	CW48005	3JM	07.07.2006 14.03.2008 25.05.2011	Sutton Weaver	4 yrs 322 days
Blackbird	CF41503	3M	05.09.2001 04.01.2002 07.09.2003 06.04.2004 21.01.2005 12.05.2007 01.01.2009 08.01.2010	Bidston, Wirral (also 05.02+ 06.07+03.08.02) (also 27.10+14.11.03)  (also 11.08+15.08.05) (also 01.08.2007) (also 06.01+01.03+13.04+25.04.2009) (also on 02.04+03.05+21.06+27.11.2010)	9 yrs 83 days
This Blackbird had been retrapped 23 times up to November 2010 but had not been caught again by the end of 2011.					
Song Thrush	RT96570	3 5M	29.09.2007 21.06.2008 18.07.2009 10.04.2010 12.07.2011	Woolston No 3 bed	3 yrs 286 days
Robin	R677822	3J	01.07.2004 22.02.2005 11.06.2010	Bidston, Wirral (also 06.03+24.03+08.09.2005)	5 yrs 345 days
Pied Flycatcher	R036041	1(7/7) 6F(B) 6F(B)	06.06.2003 28.05.2007 03.06.2010	Pandy, Wrexham	6 yrs 362 days
R036041 was ringed as a pullus and has been retrapped only twice as a breeding adult. She was still breeding in 2010, laying a small clutch of 4 eggs and successfully fledging 3 chicks.					
Dunnock	R803211	4 4M	18.01.2004 05.05.2010	Anderton NP (+ 4 other occasions in 2004)	6 yrs 107 days
Greenfinch	TC83970	3F 4F	16.11.2005 13.12.2006 23.10.2008 18.08.2009 01.02.2011	Birchwood, Warrington	5 yrs 77 days
Goldfinch	R804202	5M	20.04.2004 05.05.2010	Llwynmawr, Wrexham	6 yrs 15 days
Bullfinch	T277491	5M	19.07.2005 04.06.2006 05.07.2009 18.04.2010 19.04.2011	Birchwood, Warrington (+13.12.2006)	5 yrs 274 days

Reed Bunting	R248807	5M	21.06.2003 16.04.2005 25.11.2006 12.01.2008 07.02.2009 29.01.2010 25.03.2011	Woolston No 1 bed     (also on 05.02.2010)	7 yrs 277 days
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### Absent friends

Even in intensively-ringed sites, birds can turn up after many years of absence. Some of the birds listed above exhibit this characteristic: the Jay at Bidston (8 yrs), Great Tit at Fox Howl (8 yrs), Reed Warbler at Woolston No 3 bed (9 yrs), Dunnock at Anderton NP (6 yrs) and Goldfinch at Llynmawr (6 yrs). A few more examples are given below.

GS W'pecker	CT63740	5F	19.03.2005 20.02.2010	Fox Howl, Delamere	4 yrs 338 days
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Blue Tit	T156605	3 6F(B)	28.09.2004 21.05.2010	Sutton Weaver (also 31.10.2004)	5 yrs 235 days
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This female was ringed as a first-year in 2004 and never seen again until, nearly six years later, she was lifted off three downy chicks in David Norman's garden nestbox.

Great Tit	R249011	3M	23.11.2002 05.01.2003 24.03.2004 28.12.2009 23.03.2010	Delamere, Cheshire	7 yrs 118 days
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After a couple of retraps within 18 months of ringing, this Great Tit went missing for a period of 5 years 279 days between 2004 and 2009.

Reed Warbler	R034411	4	18.05.2003 10.07.2005 09.05.2010 03.07.2011	Shotton, Flintshire	8 yrs 46 days
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This Reed Warbler was absent for four breeding seasons (2006-09) before reappearing in 2010.

Robin	T275068	5	01.01.2005 10.02.2010	Norton Priory, Runcorn	5 yrs 40 days
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Chaffinch	V217122	3F	03.11.2006 07.11.2011	Meadowbank Farm, Cheshire	5 yrs 4 days
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Reed Bunting	T156312	3J 6M	15.08.2004 10.07.2010	Oxmoor Wood, Cheshire	5 yrs 329 days
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### Interesting Biometrics

Dunlin	NT96541	4	11.08.2010 15.08.2010	Frodsham, Cheshire	45.1g 49.8g
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The wader ringing at Frodsham often produces an interesting catch. This Dunlin was caught on both nights of the August 2010 session and in that short period gained 4.7g, more than 10% in weight. It was a Dunlin of the *Schinzii* race fattening up to go to Africa.

Swift	SB12100	6F	20.07.2003 18.07.2004 23.07.2006 13.07.2009 (x2) 13.07.2010	Cotebrook, Cheshire
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Swift colonies are great places for retraps. This Swift at the Cotebrook colony was caught in the same part of the net every time, presumably emerging from the same nest-site. On 13 July 2009 she was recaptured after 2 hours 15 minutes, on her way back to the nest, having put on 1.3g in weight (probably the bolus of food she was carrying for the chick(s)).

Firecrest	CHR247	3F	21.11.2009 18.12.2009 25.01.2010 30.01.2010 28.02.2010	Norton Priory	5.0g @ 07:00 5.3g @ 10:00 5.5g @ 15:00 5.8g @ 16:00 5.2g @ 08:00
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CHR247 is probably MRG's most-handled Firecrest ever! As well as survival through a hard winter, note the rising weights as the day progresses.

Sedge Warbler	L406470	3J	22.08.2010 27.08.2010	Frodsham, Cheshire	12.1g @ 07:50 17.1g @ 12:15
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The average weight of 43 Sedge Warblers caught at Frodsham between 22<sup>nd</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> August 2010 was 11.2g. L406470 had already started to fatten up by the time it was first caught and had a fat score of 3. By the time it was retrapped five days later it had increased its weight by 5.0g (fat score of 7) and must have been ready for imminent departure for Africa.

Chaffinch	V850270	5M	12.01.2008 28.11.2010	Meadowbank Farm	92mm
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With a wing of 92mm, this bird must have been a Scandinavian bird and this is a nice example of recurrence in winter quarters. David Norman had ringed 626 Chaffinches at Meadowbank Farm between 2006-10 and had no controls or recoveries or any other retraps from one winter to another.

# NEST RECORDS 2011

David Norman

The revised strategy of the ringing scheme, with more focus on demographic monitoring, is supposed to be emphasising the role of nest recording so it is good that MRG are, as so often, 'ahead of the game'. Our total of 831 submitted records this year was the second largest in the national scheme; this figure is higher than that published in the BTO's *Nest Record News* owing to late submission of some cards.

Our records came from 15 members and covered 57 species, with our top five, as usual: Blue Tit, Great Tit, Barn Owl, Swallow, Pied Flycatcher. Almost half (49%) of our total of nest records was from species considered to be Birds of Conservation Concern, 59 on the **Red List** and 346 on the *Amber List*. 294 of our total were cavity-nesting passerines and 151 open-nesting passerines, the latter a category for which the Nest Record Scheme is keen to encourage more records.

Grey Heron	3
Mute Swan	2
Canada Goose	4
<i>Mallard</i>	3
<i>Marsh Harrier</i>	1
Sparrowhawk	1
Goshawk	2
Buzzard	12
<i>Kestrel</i>	18
Peregrine	1
Coot	4
Avocet	1
<i>Oystercatcher</i>	1
<b>Lapwing</b>	8
<i>Black-headed Gull</i>	1
<i>Stock Dove</i>	22
Woodpigeon	5
Collared Dove	5
Tawny Owl	11

<i>Barn Owl</i>	101
<i>Swift</i>	1
Jackdaw	9
Carrion Crow	1
Raven	1
Blue Tit	133
Great Tit	115
Coal Tit	1
<b>Skylark</b>	1
<i>Swallow</i>	87
<i>House Martin</i>	4
Long-tailed Tit	12
Chiffchaff	2
<i>Willow Warbler</i>	2
<i>Whitethroat</i>	10
<b>G'hopper Warbler</b>	2
Reed Warbler	7
Nuthatch	1
Treecreeper	1

Wren	10
Dipper	1
Blackbird	48
<b>Song Thrush</b>	1
<i>Mistle Thrush</i>	2
Robin	12
<i>Pied Flycatcher</i>	77
<i>Redstart</i>	5
<i>Dunnock</i>	7
<b>House Sparrow</b>	14
<b>Tree Sparrow</b>	24
Pied Wagtail	3
<i>Meadow Pipit</i>	2
Chaffinch	10
Greenfinch	3
Goldfinch	5
<b>Linnet</b>	9
<i>Bullfinch</i>	1
<i>Reed Bunting</i>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>831</b>

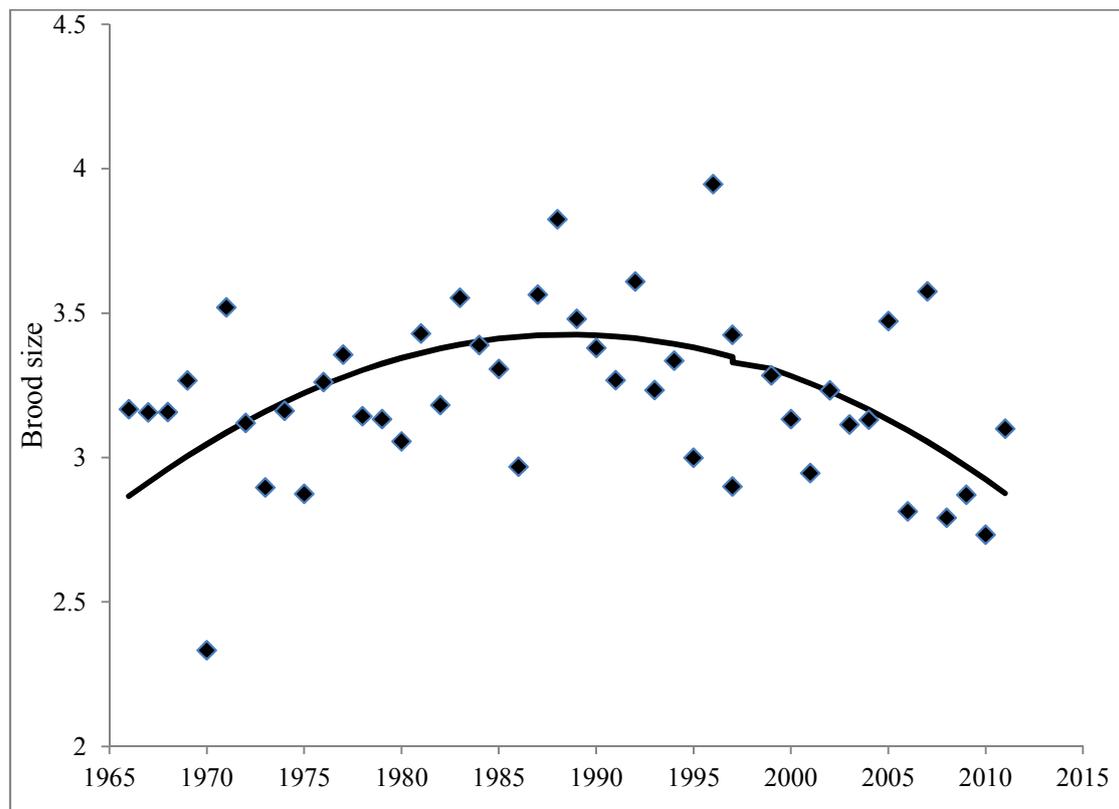
# 2011: A BARN OWL YEAR IN MID-CESHIRE.

Andrew Duncalf

## Introduction

Nationally Barn Owls had a disappointing season in 2010 with mean brood sizes suffering a 10.8% decline, the lowest level since 1985 (see fig.1). The extremely cold winter of 2009/10 may have left females in poor condition at the start of the breeding season, reducing the amount of energy available to invest in egg production, leading to below average clutch sizes. The harsh winter weather conditions may also have affected vole numbers later in the season, although snow cover can actually be beneficial to small mammals as it shields them from predators.

Figure 1: Mean brood size for Barn Owls, 1966-2011.



(Source: [www.bto.org/birdtrends](http://www.bto.org/birdtrends))

This picture was reflected in our own local experience in mid-Cheshire. The Cheshire Barn Owl Groups discovered 132 breeding pairs during 2010, of which 12 sites had unhatched eggs, 8 sites had totally failed broods and many sites hatched young that subsequently died. Overall 2010 had not been good for breeding owls.

During the winter of 2010/11, for a second year in a row, many areas of the UK experienced prolonged and deep snow cover, this time in December 2010. Once again it resulted in raised levels of winter mortality in Barn Owls. However the snow finally disappeared from most areas by January revealing an abundance of vole runs. As long as vole numbers had held up from 2010 and there were no further prolonged heavy snow falls, Barn Owls should have been able to achieve breeding condition for egg-laying at the normal time in April/May and go on to breed successfully but we were not really sure quite what to expect in the subsequent breeding season.

## The Breeding Season, 2011

Normally checks begin in late spring at traditional breeding sites for indications of the likelihood of success for that particular season. This is done before going on to begin the inspection of all nest box locations. In late April I found the first breeding bird of 2011, a second year female proudly sat with five eggs. Her partner was providing well for her, as the cache of field voles awaiting consumption in the box (pictured) demonstrated. Perhaps things were going to be fine for 2011.

However, subsequent checks throughout May were to result in the loss of some long-standing breeding sites. One, in Appleton, was expected as the breeding male had been discovered frozen to death during the winter months but the others were beginning to cause concern.

Eventually, on 6<sup>th</sup> June, I found the first chicks that were ready to ring and the proud mother (below) had a healthy brood of four young.



Slowly but surely I began to find breeding birds and to counteract the loss of many traditional sites 14 new breeding locations were found during the next few weeks. It is likely that the network of nest boxes facilitates the movement of birds more readily than natural sites will otherwise allow.



During June checks on Kestrels also began to bear fruit and several broods of healthy size were found, including these five birds at Tabley.

A trip to one of our regular breeding sites in mid-June was rewarded with a nice healthy brood of four feisty Kestrels (in the regular Barn Owl box) and then four young Barnies in the adjacent box. The owls were happy to go back to sleep as I ringed them whereas their falcon neighbours were more interested in drawing my blood!

A late brood of three on the 24<sup>th</sup> July in Little Budworth provided the 100th young owlet that I ringed in 2011. More satisfying was the fact that the farmer who accompanied me to witness the ringing was able to see young barn owls for the first time in his life and he is nearly 80!



### Challenging Breeding

In early June I discovered a new breeding female at Arley sat snugly on eggs. Upon returning to check progress on 27<sup>th</sup> July the attentive female was still brooding an increased clutch of six eggs. I suspected that some of the earlier eggs were infertile and her desire to breed meant that she had tried again.

Progress of our last brood of the season was checked on 4<sup>th</sup> September. Happily Mum's tremendous efforts were rewarded with a healthy brood of four young. She was, however, in a pretty grubby state, the result of being cooped up in the nest box for about three months. Although she had started to moult her feathers on her left wing, the right one was in poor condition. The rich habitat around the box would enable both the brood to thrive and allow her to quickly regain her health as she started to get out and feed. Happily subsequent checks proved this to be the case.



The ringing of broods had stretched out from the first on 6<sup>th</sup> June to the last one on 4<sup>th</sup> September. Subsequent checks of breeding pairs in late autumn revealed that no birds had second broods in 2011.

### Breeding success

The year got off to a relatively slow start, By taking measurements of the emerging primary feathers it is possible to age owlets with a high degree of accuracy. Subsequently, by allowing a set time for incubation, it is possible to determine when egg-laying has taken place for each bird. Table 1 shows the wide variations in the earliest egg-laying date from year to year; 2011 is nine days later than the mean date of 30<sup>th</sup> March.

**Table 1: Calculations of earliest Barn Owl egg-laying date in mid-Cheshire.**

2005	23 March
2006	04 May
2007	21 February
2008	13 April
2009	11 March
2010	02 April
2011	08 April

During 2011 I had ringed 110 owlets at 44 breeding sites in mid-Cheshire and the average brood size increased from 1.78 in 2010 to 2.63 birds per pair. Similarly improved performance was reported across Cheshire: a total of 144 Barn Owl breeding sites were located resulting in 395 chicks being reared, a 10% increase compared to 2010 with the average brood size increasing from 2.0 to 2.7 birds per pair. Barn Owl territories in mid-Cheshire consistently appear to be less productive/more marginal than other areas of Cheshire, and as a result broods are smaller than the county average, but good breeding success in 2011 reduced the difference to a small margin. It was not our best year but it still turned out to be quite productive.

The severe cold weather of December 2010 appeared to have had little or no effect upon the number of breeding Barn Owls in the county. The preliminary results from the British Trust for Ornithology's 2011 Nest Record Scheme also indicated a happier 2011 for the nation's Barn Owls following the disappointments of the previous year with average brood size increased from 2.73 to 3.10 (see fig 1).

### Acknowledgement

Thank you to all the landowners, whose support and cooperation is essential for the continued expansion and monitoring of the Barn Owl nest box scheme in mid-Cheshire.

# SURVEY OF COMMON TERNS IN THE DEE ESTUARY APRIL- JUNE 2011

Peter Coffey, David Norman and John Birch

## Introduction

The Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* is listed among the reasons for designation of the Dee Estuary as a Special Protection Area and a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. The failure of the breeding colony at Shotton in 2009 and 2010 is a cause for concern and has been examined by a multi-agency working group convened by Merseyside Ringing Group (MRG)\*. MRG has extensive data on their breeding performance at Shotton but there is very little data from any source on their activity in the estuary such as preferred feeding locations or prey items.

To try to fill this gap, MRG volunteered to conduct a survey of Common Terns in the period late-April to early June 2011 to assess the behaviour and activity of birds returning to the Dee estuary to breed. This involved traverses of the estuary by boat in conjunction with Countryside Council for Wales (CCW); land-based observations from locations around the estuary, principally from the Welsh bank; and observations at the site of the breeding colony at Shotton.

The total time spent by MRG members surveying terns in the estuary (excluding Shotton) was 92 hours 20 minutes in 20 sessions ranging from 1 hour 15 minutes to 8 hours. Seventeen sessions were logged at Shotton between 25/04/11 and 19/06/11; total observer time of 79 hours 50 minutes came in sessions ranging from 30 minutes to 9 hours 15 minutes. Two non-MRG observers submitted logs totalling 17 hours in 12 sessions.

The key findings of the survey are presented below.



Survey boat with Peter Coffey and Kenny McNiffe plus a CCW observer on board 10/05/11(Photo: D Norman)

\*See [www.davidnorman.org.uk/MRG/shotton\\_common\\_terns.htm](http://www.davidnorman.org.uk/MRG/shotton_common_terns.htm) for the full version of this report and more information about the multi-agency working group.

## Survey results

### *Number of birds and distribution*

The earliest date Common Terns were observed at Shotton was 25/04/11 when three were seen. Numbers built up rapidly over the next few days with groups of up to 80 birds being seen in the estuary and at Shotton during the last week of April. Only small numbers were seen at Hilbre at this time or the subsequent week.

In the first nine days of May five land-based counts around the estuary and four at Shotton presented a disappointing picture with only one sighting of groups larger than 30 birds and long periods with no birds at all. However the boat trip on 10/05/11 demonstrated that groups of more than 100 birds were present at a number of locations in the estuary (most notably off-shore from Caldy/Thurstaston, between Greenfield-Flint Point and mid-river by buoy No 6). As the tide rose, more birds concentrated at Flint Point with several groups of more than 100 birds gathering. On the same day counts of up to 225 birds were registered at Flint Point. Further observations from the Flint area on 11-12/05/11 registered maximum counts of 150 and 100 birds respectively and approximately 175 and 40 birds were counted downstream at Bagillt on 13/05/11 and 16/05/11 respectively.

By contrast, throughout this period counts at Shotton and Broken Bank were very low, with a maximum of 20 birds on 12/05/11. Broken Bank was chosen as a survey point because it was anticipated that Common Terns flying between the estuary and Shotton would pass by, either along the main river channel or across the saltmarsh to the north-east.

More than 20 hours of logged observations between 17-27/05/11 registered very few birds and only one Common Tern was seen on the last boat trip on 1/06/11. In this context it is perhaps surprising that a group of 75 Common Terns visited Shotton on 17/05/11, landing on the islands and sitting on posts. They arrived at approximately 0800 and left by 1045 and did not return. A group of 100 Common Terns visited Shotton on 2/06/11 and again landed on the islands – they were first observed at 1100 and all had gone by 1545. On 5/06/11 a large number of Common Terns (maximum 150) were present between 0700-1400 during which time they landed on the islands. Between 1400-1430 the birds rose high above the islands and then flew off towards the river. It has since been confirmed that some birds laid eggs but they were predated by corvids after the birds had deserted. Small numbers of terns continued to visit Shotton throughout June.

### *Bird movement*

The movement of Common Terns appeared to be very fluid. Some birds were moving upstream whilst others were flying downstream and many of the movements involved small numbers, often two birds together, usually apparently pairs. As numbers increased, birds would still move in pairs or small groups but may then settle to join others loafing on a sandbank.

Larger groups of roosting/loafing birds would form on favoured sandbanks at low water. It would be a loose grouping with birds leaving and others joining continually. On a rising tide, the birds steadily moved upstream as their sandbanks became flooded, with birds becoming more concentrated as the availability of sandbanks diminished.

As these larger groups were moving to the next sandbank, often they would spiral to high levels above the river before breaking up and descending to suitable sandbanks. On two dates, 10+11/05/11, small groups of Common Terns were observed landing on the water and drifting upstream before eventually moving to a sandbank.

It is not known where birds went at high tide. With all sandbanks covered there is no opportunity to roost. On one occasion (30/04/11) birds roosted with Oystercatchers at Oakenholt Marsh but eventually flew off towards Gayton Sands. Very few birds were recorded flying downstream in the three-hour period after high tide.

### *Courtship*

Courtship displays were observed amongst the earliest arrivals. Males carrying fish in display flight were observed at Shotton on 27/04/11 and on 29/04/11 a male was seen feeding a female that had alighted on the water. The male appeared to try to copulate and after a few seconds both birds took off. The male subsequently executed a full dive into the water but it was not clear if this was part of the courtship or an attempt to catch another fish. Similar behaviour was observed on a number of occasions during the survey.

Courtship displays increased throughout the next fortnight with mate selection, food exchanges and copulation all evident. The population in the Dee appeared to be in good condition and ready and eager to breed.

### *Foraging*

The most successful foraging occurred as the incoming tide swept around the margins of sandbanks. Potential prey (whitebait/sprats) was caught in the shallow shoaling waters and lines of terns would dive in. Although the outcome of all dives could not be confirmed, the success rate for one such incident observed at close quarters appeared to be greater than 50%.

A secondary foraging strategy, on a falling tide, involved birds diving into shallow pools left between the ridges of sandbanks for trapped prey, and into shallow channels cut off by the falling tide.

The height of the tide affects foraging. On neap tides foraging activity would decline two hours before high tide but small numbers of Common Terns could still be seen foraging up to 30 minutes before high tide. On spring tides foraging appeared to decline approximately three hours before high tide with limited foraging thereafter. As mentioned above, few birds were reported flying in the three-hour period after high tides but five of those were seen foraging.

For long periods of observation there was little evidence of birds foraging. On one occasion, a shrimping trawler was throwing discards over the side attracting a number of gulls. Two Common Terns flying close by made a few contact dips but other Common Terns ignored the food and flew straight on, perhaps indicating that the birds were not hungry.

Only two Common Terns were seen in the estuary upstream of the Flint bridge and neither of those was seen to dive, although one appeared to be hunting. Five birds were observed hunting in front of the Connah's Quay nature reserve (CQNR) on 08/05/11 and groups of up to 30 birds hunted along the main channel opposite the reserve 30/04/11 and 08/05/11 but no birds executed dives.

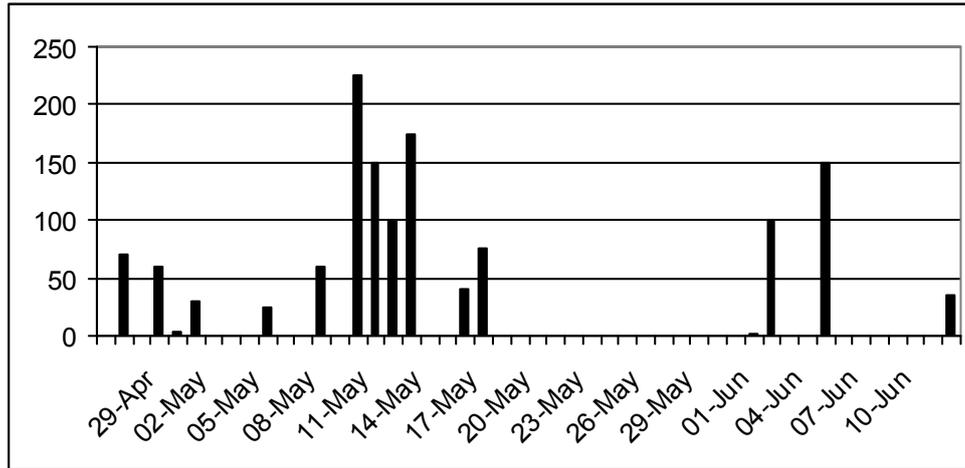
## **Discussion**

The Shotton colony failed yet again in 2011 but has this study yielded any useful information to identify the cause of failure?

In 2008, the last year the terns bred at Shotton, there were 624 'apparently occupied nests', suggesting a total Common Tern population in the Dee of at least 1300 adults (including some non-breeding birds). Whilst the population this year may have been significantly smaller than that, it is not unreasonable to estimate 500+ birds, based on actual counts factored to allow for undercounting because of limited observer numbers.

The maximum number of birds observed in a group each day has been plotted in Diagram 1. Higher numbers in the period 10-14/05/11 relate to birds concentrated in the Flint/Bagillt area in the period approximately one to two hours before high tide. Lower readings do not necessarily indicate that there were fewer birds in total in the estuary.

**Diagram 1: Maximum size of Common Tern groups**



However the diagram shows an absence of Common Terns in the period 18/05/11-01/06/11. Checks have been made to see if it reflects lack of observations and/or the timing of observations relative to high tide. Observations were made on eight days during that period and whilst some coincided with high tide others covered low water and rising tide periods where counts would have been expected.

It has also been correlated with reports from the Seaforth colony: on 24/05/11 Common Tern numbers had built up to 1400 (later rising to 1500) and the Liverpool docks site used for the first time last year had been colonised again. On 6/06/11, up to 200 pairs were counted at the dock, 40 on nests with eggs. The timing of activity at the Seaforth/Liverpool docks colonies is consistent with reports for 2009 and 2010.

So why did the terns spurn the Dee and move to breeding colonies on the Mersey? There was no sign the Dee estuary population was in poor condition, either on arrival or during their first few weeks on the estuary. Stocks of prey species (sandeels, whitebait/sprats, shrimps) are reportedly in good supply although they are not uniformly available throughout the estuary and informal tests of the transparency of water in the Dee gave reasonable results, suggesting that birds would not find it too difficult to locate prey. There were long periods of observation when birds were not hunting; they were either loafing, in courtship displays or flying around the estuary in pairs or small groups. On occasions birds did not catch prey even though they appeared to be hunting but there was another occasion when birds had the chance to feed on discards from a trawler but chose to ignore the opportunity. Taking all observations into account there is no conclusive evidence that availability of food is likely to be cause of failure.

However it was noticeable that very few birds were seen upstream of CQNR and none of those were seen to dive for prey. This is the section of the Dee closest to the Shotton colony where terns have foraged successfully in the past. There appears to have been a change to the regime of the river during the last few years which may have affected its suitability as a foraging area. The cause of that change is undetermined but MRG hope to pursue further investigation.

The BTO Interim Report: “Determining the foraging use of the Dee estuary by Common Terns” refers to a review of foraging distance (Thaxter et al), noting an average maximum foraging distance of 15km and an average foraging distance of 4.5km. For the Shotton colony, the 15km distance extends from Glan-y-Don (between Mostyn and Greenfield) on the Welsh bank to Thurston on the English bank, a sector in which most of the Common terns have been observed. The 4.5km distance extends from Flint sewage works to Denhall House Farm encompassing an area that largely comprises saltmarsh. Only 25-30% of the area is river channels/sandbanks and this reduces even further to 15-20% if the channel upstream of CQNR is discounted. Flint Point, where the terns tended to concentrate before high tides, is

approximately 6km from Shotton. From this calculation, it would appear that the average foraging distance from Shotton would have to be greater than 4.5km; perhaps this is a flight too far?

For those birds that had returned to the Dee, even the earliest arrivals engaged in courtship and mating within the first few days and that activity continued right through the survey period. However despite the build-up of numbers in the estuary, visits to Shotton were fitful and it was not until 17/05/11 that birds, part of a large group (c.75), landed on the islands only to disappear. A group of terns returned in early June and laid eggs but the colony was then abandoned. Were these terns desperately seeking a safe nesting site that the overcrowded Seaforth site could not offer? The timing of the nesting attempt at Shotton (2-5/06/11) ties in with the Liverpool docks colony where only 20% of pairs had laid eggs by 6/06/11.

The only glimmer of hope is that small groups of Common Terns continued to visit Shotton into early July, much later than for the last two years. Common Terns were also heard calling through the night in early July, perhaps using Shotton as a roost.

MRG have not given up on 'our' terns and will work with other agencies to review possible causes of failure and consider actions that can be taken to draw birds into the colony.

### **Acknowledgements**

Our thanks go to the observers who contributed many hours to the survey: MRG members John Birch, Peter Coffey, John Elliott, Terry Lowe, Kenny McNiffe and David Norman; Tata Steel's Steve Hughes and Leon Castell for observations at Shotton, Richard Smith (Dee Estuary Conservation Group) and Paul Day (CCW) who not only put in many hours of observation but also coordinated the boat trips to ensure MRG members could be on board. Thanks also to Keith Marland, owner of the boat, who helped us to get close to the action tracking birds in the estuary.



Common Tern resting on an old scaffolding pole at the Shotton colony.  
Photo taken by Richard Birch.

# INITIAL FINDINGS FROM RECOVERIES OF WOODPIGEONS RINGED AS NESTLINGS IN SUBURBAN LIVERPOOL

Paul Slater

## **Summary**

*Initial results from the ringing of nestling Woodpigeons in suburban Liverpool are presented. Between 1993 and 2011, 1833 nestlings were fitted with rings. These generated 71 recoveries, giving a recovery rate of 3.9%. This study has shown that many of the Woodpigeons reared in suburban areas (83.9% of recoveries where cause of death is reported) are shot. The suburban areas are likely to act as a reservoir of birds, lessening the local effects of Woodpigeon shooting in agricultural areas. There are two peaks in recoveries from shooting, February and July/August. Suburban-reared birds have been found to be fairly sedentary, with only a small number, of predominantly first-year birds, making long-distance movements. Mean age at recovery, for all birds, is 18.5 months. For birds reaching at least one year of age, mean age at recovery is 34.8 months. The oldest bird recovered to date was in its twelfth year.*

## **Introduction**

As part of a long-term study investigating the breeding ecology of Woodpigeons *Columba palumbus* in suburban Liverpool, between 1993 and 2011, 1833 Woodpigeons were fitted with British Trust for Ornithology leg rings. Previous data presented (Slater, 2001 and 2011) focused on the breeding ecology at Sefton Park (SJ3787), where intensive nest finding and monitoring has taken place. Although most of the ringing occurred in Sefton Park, a number of nestlings have also been ringed at nearby suburban sites. For this analysis, ringing recoveries of birds found before they could have fledged or found close to the site of ringing shortly after fledging have been omitted from the results. A single retrapped bird is also excluded. To date, that leaves 71 recoveries generated from this suburban area. It is felt this is a sufficient sample size to analyse and report some initial findings. Some of the recoveries have been detailed in annual reports of the Merseyside Ringing Group (1994 – 2010).

## **Recovery rate and comparison with previous studies**

The ringing recovery rate from this study presently stands at 3.9% but may rise, as some birds ringed are still likely to be alive, and further recoveries may be generated for a number of years to come. In Britain, the oldest Woodpigeon was recovered in its eighteenth year of life (Coiffait *et al.*, 2008). In this particular study, the oldest bird so far reported was in its 12th year of life.

The recovery rate, although likely to increase, is notably lower than the recovery rate from previous studies. Hickling (1983) gives Woodpigeon recovery rates for particular years, of 6.7% (1960), 9.9% (1970) and 9.3% (1980). Extrapolation from figures presented by Aebischer (1995) gives a recovery rate of 7.8%, from an analysis of 17424 Woodpigeons ringed between 1965 and 1990, of which 50% had been adult. Murton (1961) reported a recovery rate of 9.5% only considering birds ringed as nestlings, but including some birds found dead in and around nests, presumably before they could have fledged. Ash *et al.* (1956) had a recovery rate of 16.1%, from 257 Woodpigeons ringed as nestlings, in Northumberland between 1943 and 1952.

However, the recovery rate of the current study at 3.9% (all birds ringed as nestlings) is higher than the recovery rate of 2.7% given by Robinson *et al.* (2009) for Woodpigeons ringed as adults, during the 1990s. Robinson *et al.* demonstrated that there was a steady decline in the recovery rate for Woodpigeons ringed as adults from 14.8% (1960s), 8.0% (1970s) and 6.1% (1980s) and speculated that a reason for this decline may be a reduction in shooting pressure. They found that between 1960 and 1969, 75% of Woodpigeon recoveries (n = 679) were of

birds that had been shot. Between 2000 and 2008, the proportion of recovered birds (n = 168) reported as shot had dropped to 67%.

Robinson *et al.* note that recovery rates of many species of bird, including Woodpigeon, have reduced recently. Possible reasons include people being less likely to write letters to report ringed birds (mainly due to the prevalence of electronic communications), a belief that enough is already known about bird movements (with a consequent perception that it is not worth reporting the finding details of a ring), a fear of examining, or touching, dead birds and an increase in scavengers/carrion eaters making it less likely for corpses to be found.

### **Causes of mortality, and the impact of shooting**

Table 1 shows that out of the 71 recoveries to date, 52 have been of shot birds (73.2%). For recoveries where the cause of death is given (i.e. omitting those with unknown/unreported cause of death), this percentage rises to 83.9%.

**Table 1: Recovery circumstances for Woodpigeons ringed as nestlings in suburban Liverpool**

<b>Cause of mortality</b>	<b>Number recovered</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Bird shot	52	(73.2)
Unknown/unreported	9	(12.7)
Taken by Cat	3	(4.2)
Hit window	3	(4.2)
Hit by car	2	(2.8)
Hit wires	1	(1.4)
Taken by bird of prey	1	(1.4)

Ash *et al.*(1956) reported that 85.4% of their recoveries were due to shooting. Extrapolation from figures given by Hickling (1983) shows that 74.1% of all the recoveries generated (n = 1836) were of shot birds, rising to 90.8% of birds where cause of death was reported. On a similar basis, Inglis *et al.* (1997) found that for the national population between 1950 and 1992, shooting accounted for 90.3% of recoveries. Aebischer *et al.* (1999), looking at the effects of shooting on Woodpigeons, separated recoveries into a period prior to 1977, when shooting accounted for 78% of recoveries. This is the same figure arrived at by Murton (1961), analysing the recoveries of 366 birds that had been ringed as nestlings. Aebischer *et al.* also looked at the period after 1977. In the latter period, shooting accounted for 82% of recoveries. In a similar analysis, Aebischer (1995) combined the figures for birds ringed as nestlings and adults, when looking at the recoveries.

Aebischer *et al.* suggest there was little difference in the percentage of recoveries caused by shooting before 1977 (78%), and after (82%). However, Murton *et al.* (1974) report that of 189 Woodpigeons recovered during January to March, between 1958 and 1964, 75% were shot. For the same months between 1965 and 1968, 241 Woodpigeons were recovered, of which 60% had been shot. The high early recovery rates may well have been influenced by the fact that between 1953 and 1965, the shooting of Woodpigeons was encouraged through a Government subsidy which contributed half the cost of cartridges (Murton *et al.*, 1974). Ash *et al.* (1956) also attributed the high recovery rate, with 85.4% reported as shot, to the intensified control of Woodpigeons by shooting, instigated by the Ministry of Agriculture during, and just after, the Second World War.

In their analysis, Robinson *et al.* (2009), who only considered birds ringed as adults, suggested shooting pressure may have lessened in recent years. Studies by Harradine and Reynolds

(1997) and BASC (2001) show a shift in shooting from the late winter period to late summer, but do not suggest any reduction in overall shooting pressure.

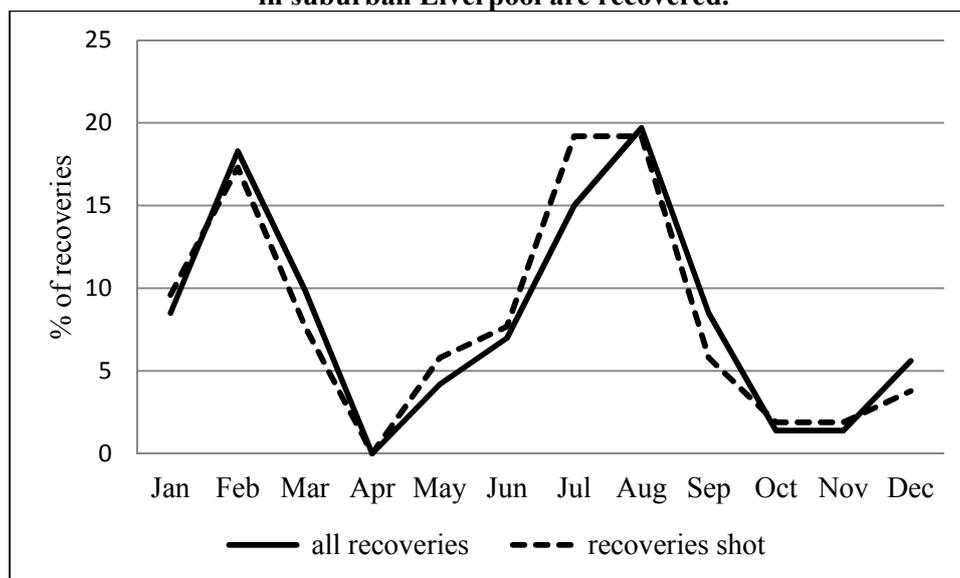
There is a potential bias when investigating recoveries, in that birds that are shot are more likely to be found and reported than birds dying of natural causes. In similar vein, shooting pressure will bias other analysis of the recoveries. For example, birds are more likely to be reported from places where shooting takes place, and at the times of year when shooting occurs. An example is given in Figure 1 where the month of recovery for all Woodpigeons reported is given. If the shot birds are separated out, and the data presented for just the birds reported as shot, a very similar pattern emerges. There are not sufficient recoveries from causes other than shooting to look at how these recoveries vary throughout the year.

### Time of year when recoveries occur

Figure 1 shows two peaks in recoveries, February and July/August and confirms that these recoveries are due to shooting, and the seasonal preferences/activity of shooters. The peak in recoveries in February will be due to the roost shooting that occurs at this time. Additionally, the game and wildfowling seasons will have come to an end, with some shooters probably now switching to Woodpigeons as an alternative quarry. Added to this, at sites where Woodpigeon shooting may have been discouraged during the Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* shooting season, it may now be tolerated or even encouraged.

The second peak occurs in late summer (July/August) when large numbers of Woodpigeons are descending into fields of ripening crops, as well as stubble fields as they become available. Shooters find there are more birds to shoot over a longer time period (than for roost shooting or winter decoying), and birds are easier to decoy. Therefore a high level of Woodpigeon shooting takes place at this time of year. These findings are confirmed by membership surveys and research, carried out by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (Harradine and Reynolds, 1997; BASC, 2001). Personal observations, around Merseyside and North Cheshire, also confirm that a lot of shooting takes place at this time of year.

**Fig 1: Time of year when Woodpigeons ringed as nestlings in suburban Liverpool are recovered.**



There are times of the year when there are very few recoveries. For example, there have been no recoveries of birds during April (although a bird ringed as a nestling at Sefton Park was mist-netted here, 56 months after ringing, during the month of April).

October and November are also periods of low recovery. At first glance, this would appear surprising; with the breeding season having recently finished, there will be a lot of young, relatively inexperienced birds in the population. A possible reason for the low recovery rate in the autumn is that Woodpigeons often feed in woodland (especially when there have been heavy crops of tree seeds, such as those of Beech *Fagus sylvatica* and Oak *Quercus*) where they are much more difficult to decoy and shoot.

In some years, birds also display behaviour that would suggest that the birds are engaging in migratory activity in October/November. This includes the observation of large numbers of, mainly south-bound, high-flying Woodpigeons, and a subsequent reduction in the local population. An example of this is given by Cockbain (2009). This behaviour has also been described by Lack and Ridpath (1955), Murton and Ridpath (1962) and Murton (1965a).

Additional factors at this time of the year may be that shooters, who target Woodpigeons at other times of the year, may now have switched to other quarry, such as gamebirds and wildfowl. Also, on land where Pheasant and Partridge (*Perdix perdix* and *Alectoris rufa*) shooting takes place, Woodpigeon shooting may be discouraged, or not allowed, at this time of year. This is due to the potential disturbance to game birds, and disruption to driven shoots.

### **Distances moved**

The mean distance moved by birds ringed as nestlings from the study area is 24.7km (n=71). Recoveries of four birds that moved over 100km distorts this figure. If these are removed from the analysis the mean distance moved drops to 14.8km (n=67). 80% of birds recovered have moved no further than 25km. Only 5.7% of recoveries are birds that moved more than 100km.

Table 2 shows how mean recovery distance varies throughout the year, with birds recovered at greater distances during the winter months. For some months where there are few recoveries, individual recoveries of exceptionally long distance will distort the figures. For example, the June figure is distorted by the movement of a bird that was recovered at a distance of 117km. If this recovery is omitted, then the mean distance of birds recovered in June reduces to 7.3km. Over time, the generation of more recoveries should help smooth out such anomalies.

Birds in winter (October to March) are found a greater distance away (mean of 40.4km), than birds recovered during the summer period (May to September, mean distance of 13.4km). The mean recovery distance for the period November to February (which excludes late breeding birds and birds possibly on the move) increases to 45.3km.

**Table 2: Mean distance (in kilometres) moved by Woodpigeons, ringed as nestlings in suburban Liverpool, for each month**

<b>Month of Recovery</b>	<b>Mean distance moved (km)</b>	<b>Number of Recoveries (n)</b>
January	54.3	(6)
February	40.0	(13)
March	19.4	(7)
April	No recoveries	(0)
May	18.3	(3)
June	29.2	(5)
July	12.4	(11)
August	10.8	(14)
September	5.6	(6)
October	11.0	(1)
November	48.0	(1)
December	48.0	(4)

There are differences between birds recovered less than one year old (mean distance = 28.3km) and those recovered at over one year of age (mean distance = 20.9km). Table 3 shows that a greater proportion of birds that move long distances are first-year birds. The combined findings of tables 2 and 3 suggest that the Woodpigeon is largely sedentary, but that birds (predominantly first-years) move greater distances in the winter.

**Table 3: Distance moved by Woodpigeons, in relation to age.**

<b>Distance away from nest site, where bird recovered</b>	<b>0 - 8 km</b>	<b>8 - 16 km</b>	<b>16 - 40 km</b>	<b>&gt;40 km</b>
Total number of Woodpigeons recovered (n = 71)	17	31	15	8
Total recovered less than a year old (n = 41)	9	15	11	6
Total recovered more than a year old (n = 30)	8	16	4	2
Percentage recovered that are first-year birds	(52.9)	(48.4)	(73.3)	(75.0)
Percentage recovered as first-year birds from Murton and Ridpath, 1962	(39.0)	(53.0)	(73.0)	(78.0)

These findings are supported by studies involving an analysis of the national ringing recovery data between 1950 and 1992 (Inglis *et al.*, 1997), and radio-tracking of Woodpigeons in Eastern England (Haynes *et al.*, 2003). Inglis *et al.* (1997) found that birds in their first year moved a mean of 20.6km, whilst the mean distance of birds recovered as adults was 13.2km. This latter study also looked at the impact of the increase in the growing of Oilseed Rape *Brassica napus*. It was found that in areas where a lot of Oilseed Rape was grown, the mean distance moved by Woodpigeons declined, whereas in areas where little Oilseed Rape was grown, the mean distance moved by Woodpigeons increased. The amount of this crop grown appears to have influenced the movements of Woodpigeons. A similar factor is probably at work in the suburban population, with birds moving out to good arable farmland areas. This might partly explain the greater mean distances moved by the suburban birds.

### **Direction moved by birds**

The sample size for this analysis is slightly smaller, due to a number of recoveries being very local to the place of ringing. Taking all recoveries into account, there is a clear tendency for birds to fly between north and south-east (see Table 4). This is less apparent, if winter-only recoveries are considered. The findings probably reveal more about the geography of Liverpool, rather than any inherent directional tendencies in the Woodpigeons breeding here. The lack of recoveries to the west and north-west, is probably due to the presence of the Irish Sea. Not only are Woodpigeons reluctant to cross large stretches of water (Murton and Ridpath, 1962), but any birds moving in this direction would be unlikely to be recovered.

The high number of recoveries in the sector north to south-east is a reflection of the high-quality agricultural land found in these areas. Birds are more likely to move to these areas to feed but also stand more chance of being shot in these areas, hence the pattern observed.

Most birds are recovered between north-east and east (46° to 90°) although none of these are winter recoveries. This highlights the intensity of summer shooting, with many of the birds reported as shot from the farmland areas in this sector during July and August. Winter months produce a higher proportion of recoveries of birds making southerly movements. However, the sample size is small; hopefully as more recoveries are generated a clearer pattern will emerge.

**Table 4: Direction moved by Woodpigeons ringed as nestlings in suburban Liverpool.**

Bearing taken by bird	Number Recovered	Number Recovered during Winter (Nov-Feb)
0 <sup>0</sup> to 45 <sup>0</sup> (North to North-East)	12	8
46 <sup>0</sup> to 90 <sup>0</sup> (North-East to East)	19	0
91 <sup>0</sup> to 135 <sup>0</sup> (East to South-East)	16	6
136 <sup>0</sup> to 180 <sup>0</sup> (South-East to South)	6	3
181 <sup>0</sup> to 225 <sup>0</sup> (South to South-West)	4	3
226 <sup>0</sup> to 270 <sup>0</sup> (South-West to West)	2	2
271 <sup>0</sup> to 315 <sup>0</sup> (West to North-West)	0	0
316 <sup>0</sup> to 360 <sup>0</sup> (North-West to North)	2	1

Interestingly three of the four birds recovered over 100 kilometres away were recovered to the south during winter. It has already been established (Murton and Ridpath, 1962) that a small number of Woodpigeons (mainly first-year birds), make long-distance movements, predominantly to the south, during the winter months. From all of the Woodpigeons ringed in Britain since the inception of the ringing scheme, forty birds have been recovered in France (Coiffait *et al.*, 2008).

However, the fact remains that the recovery data suggest that most of the population is sedentary, with just a small proportion of predominantly first-year birds making long-distance movements. Ringing data does not throw any light upon what is happening in the autumn, when large numbers of high-flying Woodpigeons are observed at a number of locations. These impressive-looking flights, as well as tending to have a southerly orientation, also give the impression of birds migrating. Numerous bird reports such as the Cheshire Bird Report (CAWOS, 2006 - 2010) and the Lancashire Bird Report (White, 2006 - 2010) give details of some of these observations; the behaviour of the birds involved deserves further study. However, analysis of the present ringing information gives no indication as to the origins, or destinations, of these flights.

### Longevity and mortality

The mean age of recovery for all Woodpigeons ringed as nestlings in the suburban study area is 18.5 months. There is an exceptional recovery of a bird recovered in its twelfth winter after ringing. If this bird is omitted, then the mean age at recovery drops to 16.9 months. Both figures are lower than the mean of 24.8 months found by Murton (1965b) for 241 birds from the period 1911 to 1963. Ash *et al.* (1956) recorded a mean age at recovery of 27.9 months.

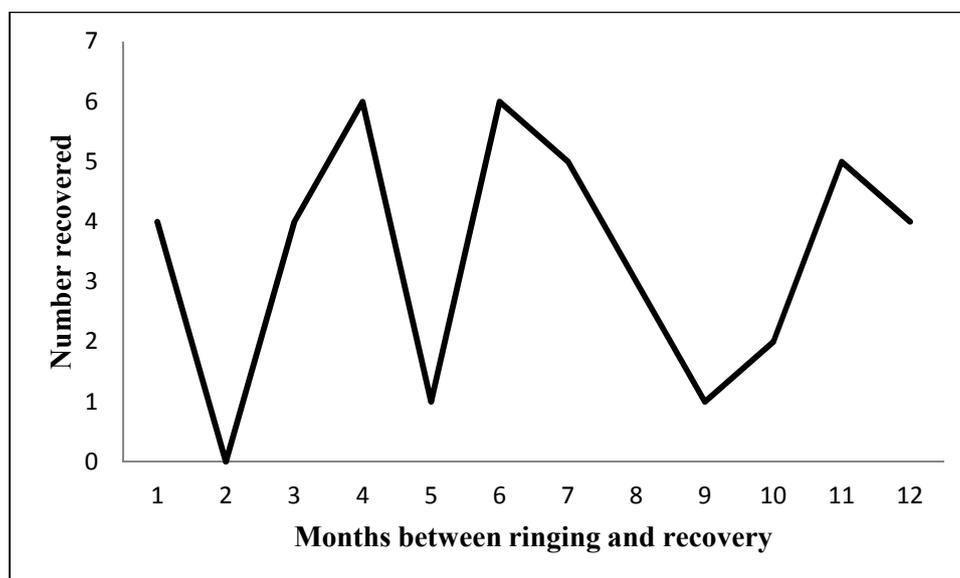
The figures for the suburban-reared Woodpigeons compare well with the mean age of 17.3 months given by Van Troostwijk (1964), from 177 birds ringed in Holland. The figure is higher than the mean of 14 months from 120 birds ringed as nestlings in Scandinavia (Van Troostwijk, 1964). However, Murton (1965b) pointed out that the low figure for Scandinavian ringed birds was likely to be due to higher mortality amongst an almost completely migratory Scandinavian population.

For birds reaching adulthood (greater than one year of age), mean age at recovery is 34.8 months. If the bird recovered 135 months after ringing is omitted, then this figure drops to 31.3 months. Murton (1961) found the corresponding figure from 142 birds, ringed before 1951, to be 38 months. He also arrived at this figure when analysing recoveries up to 1960 (Murton, 1965b).

The mean age of Woodpigeons from suburban Liverpool recovered in their first year of life is 6.6 months. Figure 2 shows how recovery rate fluctuates in the first year of life. The rise in numbers recovered in months 11 and 12 is a reflection of the high intensity of shooting around

the time of harvest. Whether these birds are shot when they have started breeding is unknown, something that it would be interesting to know in trying to determine what effect shooting has on the breeding success of Wood pigeons. It is believed that shooting during the breeding season is lowering the reproductive output of Wood pigeons, and may consequently be acting as a control on numbers (Inglis *et al.*, 1994 and 1997; CSL, 2005).

**Fig 2: Number of months, between ringing and recovery, for birds recovered in their first year of life.**



The lack of recoveries in the second month after ringing is puzzling at a time when lots of young inexperienced birds are flying around. What birds do in the first two months after fledging is another aspect of the ecology of suburban-reared birds worth further investigation. Murton (1961) commented that much mortality must occur soon after the young leave their nests, but before they reach an age at which they are likely to be shot. Of the four birds that were found dead within a month of being ringed, three had flown into windows. No other Wood pigeons older than this were recorded as meeting their end in this manner.

From a smaller number of nestling Wood pigeons ringed on farmland around the edges of Liverpool between 1990 and 2004, there is one recovery of a bird shot one month after ringing. The minimum time period between the ringing of a nestling in suburban Liverpool and recovery from shooting is three months.

Table 5 shows the proportion of first-year birds to adult birds shot each month. Sample sizes for September to December are too small to be meaningful. However in February a high proportion (77.7%) of the birds shot are first-years. By the following breeding season in July/August this proportion drops to 30% partly because the population has fewer first-years and partly because of a change in behaviour of adults at this time of year as they start to feed in farmland areas, increasing their risk of being shot. Murton (1961) found that a decreasing proportion of first year birds were found in monthly recoveries of shot birds from September through to the start of the following breeding season. He attributed this to inexperienced birds being removed from the population (leaving fewer birds to be shot), along with the remaining birds becoming more wary with age.

Forty-one of the 71 Wood pigeons recoveries to date (57.7%) involved first-year birds. Twenty-eight of the 52 Wood pigeons recovered as shot (53.8%) were first-year birds.

**Table 5: Proportion of shot birds each month that are less than one year old.**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Number of birds shot</b>	<b>Number less than one year old.</b>	<b>% of shot birds less than one year old</b>
<b>January</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>(60.0)</b>
<b>February</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>(77.7)</b>
<b>March</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>(50.0)</b>
<b>April</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>May</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>(66.6)</b>
<b>June</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>(75.0)</b>
<b>July</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>(30.0)</b>
<b>August</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>(30.0)</b>
<b>September</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>(33.3)</b>
<b>October</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>
<b>November</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>
<b>December</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>

Murton (1965b) suggests that winter shooting of Woodpigeons does not limit numbers and more recently Haynes *et al.* (2003) have indicated that localised winter shooting has little effect on numbers for the following breeding season, due to movements of birds into and out of areas. Birds shot may have moved into the area from other areas, and may not have settled in that area to breed. Similarly birds reared in the area may have moved out, possibly to areas where little shooting takes place, returning to their natal areas in the breeding season. The dispersal of young birds reared in suburban areas into agricultural areas could also mean that a high number of Woodpigeons could be shot in those areas during the winter, with little effect upon the subsequent breeding population the following year. Interestingly, although 229 Woodpigeon nestlings have been ringed in farmland areas around Liverpool between 1990 and 2004, none of these have been recovered in nearby suburban areas.

Inglis *et al.* (1994 and 1997), along with the CSL study (2005) indicate that summer shooting may now be affecting Woodpigeon numbers by reducing breeding success. Removal of one or both adults by shooting at the egg stage will cause failure. Even if one adult attempts to incubate the eggs alone, there will be times when it has to leave the nest unguarded to feed. Unguarded Woodpigeon eggs are very conspicuous in nests, and there are numerous potential predators that will take advantage of this. Studies by Murton and Isaacson (1964) have shown that Jays *Garrulus glandarius* and Magpies *Pica pica* actively search some areas for nests. This is less of a problem at the chick stage but removal of an adult will increase the time that young are left alone, as well as reducing their provisioning of food.

Evidence gathered and reported in Slater (2001 and 2011) strongly suggests that Woodpigeons breeding in suburban Liverpool fly out to agricultural areas to collect food for their young. This means that these birds are at risk of being shot during their breeding season. In the present study, 58.3% of all adult Woodpigeons recovered as shot occurred during the months of July and August. It is possible that some of these could be birds that have dispersed out into farmland areas, and attempted to breed here. From colour-ringing of nestlings (carried out between 1997 and 2001), it is known that some birds reared in Sefton Park breed here in later years. It is not established whether the risk of being shot for suburban-breeding birds is any different from that for birds breeding in the agricultural areas. Despite a high level of shooting on nearby farmland (where they are suspected of feeding), Woodpigeons in suburban Liverpool continue to have high breeding success (Slater, 2011). A connecting factor here could be the presence of a population of non-breeders/delayed breeders. At Sefton Park, there have regularly been occasions when birds have held territories in particular areas. However, despite intensive searching around these areas, no nests have been located at these sites.

## Conclusion and recommendations for further study

This study shows that many of the Woodpigeons reared in suburban areas (83.9% of recoveries where cause of death is reported) end up being shot. Whether shooting during the summer is affecting the breeding success of suburban birds has not yet been established. Despite the high levels of shooting across farmland areas where it is suspected that suburban Woodpigeons feed during the breeding season, birds breeding in suburban areas continue to have a high breeding success rate. This suggests that suburban areas are likely to act as a reservoir of birds, lessening the effects of local Woodpigeon shooting in agricultural areas. As the CSL (2005) study of Woodpigeon numbers highlights the potential for a decline in Woodpigeon numbers resulting from the shift to more summer shooting, further monitoring and enhanced study of some aspects of the ecology of suburban reared Woodpigeons would be useful.

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# WOOLSTON EYES RINGING REPORT 2011

**Michael Miles**

(on behalf of the ringing team Jason Atkinson, Kieran Foster, Zoe Houghton, Hugh Pulsford, Margaret Rawlins, Dave Riley, Lisa Warvill. The team on No.1 bed received occasional help from Sam Bayley and Liz Kerr.)

Ringing operations in 2011 were carried out in just two areas of the Reserve: the east end of No. 1 bed and the centre of No.3 bed. The grand total of 5,213 birds of 50 species newly-ringed across the Reserve was a 21% decrease on the 6,607 birds of 58 species ringed in 2010 and a little below the 10 year average of 5,637. This decrease of 1,394 birds is not a reflection of a poor breeding season but rather of a significant reduction of ringing effort on No.1 bed where Dave Riley was ringing alone on many weekends and using a reduced number of nets as a consequence. The comparative figures demonstrate this effect. On No.3 bed where ringing effort was broadly comparable the 3,489 new birds ringed was only 8% below the 3,784 ringed in 2010. The corresponding reduction on No.1 bed was 38%. This significant change in ringing effort implies the need for caution when interpreting year-on-year changes in numbers of birds ringed. Based on the results from No.3 bed it seems that most species had a reasonable breeding season. An exception was species depending on soil invertebrates such as Blackbirds and Song Thrushes where it was certainly 'a game of two halves'. They had very poor success with early broods as a result of the dry spring but later broods were considerably more successful.

Just two species were ringed in record numbers: Coal Tit and Brambling. The 15 Coal Tits ringed is another example of an essentially woodland species moving into Woolston. The record number of 76 Bramblings ringed is a combination of a large invasion of Bramblings from Scandinavia and the regular provision of food. The winter of 2010-2011 may not have experienced the largest Brambling invasion in the 32 years of ringing at Woolston but it was certainly the largest since continuous winter feeding commenced.

The single Sparrowhawk ringed represented the worst year since 1999 and the ten-year average ringing total for this species is six. Catching Sparrowhawks is always somewhat opportunistic as they fly into nets set for other species. A second bird was caught on No.3 bed which had originally been ringed in 2010. In contrast two Kestrels were trapped on No1 bed and these are the first since 2005. For the second year in succession no Water Rails were trapped and the two Moorhens ringed compares poorly with the ten-year average of 14. This is more a reflection of low levels of trapping effort than a plunge in the populations of these species at Woolston. Just a single Kingfisher was ringed, the lowest total since 2004. The ten-year average is six. Nearly all the Kingfishers ringed at Woolston are caught on No.1 bed and it is probable that reduced ringing effort has had some impact on the number caught but two harsh winters in succession may have reduced the population. Woolston's seventh Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was caught on No.3 bed in the same area where another was caught in 2010. Both were first year males. There is a traditional nest site on the south side of the Manchester Ship Canal opposite No.3 bed and it is probable that these catches demonstrate juvenile dispersal from this site.

Blue Tits and Great Tits enjoyed a good breeding season albeit a little down on the exceptional year in 2010. Willow Tits had another good year with 37 new birds ringed. The ten year average is 33. As in 2010, a modest roost of hirundines formed on No.3 bed and steady effort resulted in another reasonable catch over the late summer and early autumn. The open aspect of areas of No.1 bed is attractive to migrating chats and this year's catch of two Redstarts is the first 'double' since 2003. In the case of Cetti's Warbler two birds were trapped in the autumn compared with one in 2010. This is now six years in succession that this warbler has been caught at Woolston and with breeding confirmed not far away at Oxmoor L.N.R. it surely cannot be long before this species is proved to breed at Woolston. Catches of long-tailed Tits

were lower than in 2010 on both beds and the impression is that this species did not have a particularly successful breeding season with an absence of the large family parties sometimes encountered in the summer and autumn.

When comparing the number of Warblers ringed in 2011 with the previous year, the reduction in ringing effort impacts on the figures. Accordingly the following comments relate to No.3 bed only, where ringing effort was broadly constant. Nine species of Warblers were ringed during the year. Although fewer Grasshopper Warblers were trapped than in 2010 the eight birds ringed across the whole reserve was exactly the ten year average. Of the eight remaining species, the four *sylvia* warblers, Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler and Blackcap, were caught in numbers within ten per cent of the total in 2010. The two reedbed and reedbed-fringe specialists fared less well with 86 Sedge Warblers ringed compared with 111 in 2010 (down 23 per cent) and 423 Reed Warblers ringed compared with 514 (down 18 per cent). These catches are a mixture of birds breeding at Woolston and birds migrating through the reserve from sites further north so the reasons for this decline may be complex. Contributing factors may include the drying out of the reed bed at Woolston and an apparent lack of Plum Reed Aphid at the key time in the breeding season. The Woolston Eyes Conservation Group (WECG) are formulating a major plan to restore the reed bed. It should also be noted that 2010 was a record year for both these species on No.3 bed and when viewed against recent averages 2011 was a reasonable year.

Although catches of Reed Buntings were below the level in 2010 this is primarily a reflection of reduced ringing effort on No.1 bed which is one of the best areas of the reserve for this species. No new species were added to the Reserve's ringing list in 2011 so the number of species ringed remains at 103. Individual species milestones included the 11,000<sup>th</sup> Greenfinch, the 7,000<sup>th</sup> Willow Warbler, the 5,000<sup>th</sup> Great Tit, the 250<sup>th</sup> Jay, the 200<sup>th</sup> Brambling and the 150<sup>th</sup> Treecreeper.

#### *No.1 bed*

Ringing took place on most weekends along the south side and around the east end of No. 1 bed. As mentioned above, reduced ringing effort contributed to the 38% decrease in birds ringed compared to 2010. Another possible cause of this reduction is the continued encroachment of birch scrub into open areas of the bed which future management work will address.

A male Sparrowhawk, caught on 2<sup>nd</sup> January, was the only one ringed during the year. For only the second time in the history of ringing on the bed, two Kestrels were caught, an adult female on 11<sup>th</sup> June and a juvenile female on 29<sup>th</sup> July. For the third year running a Moorhen was caught on the bed, a single on 11<sup>th</sup> March. As in 2010 just a single Woodpigeon was caught, on 22<sup>nd</sup> April. The trend in Kingfisher catches is depressing with six in 2009, four in 2010 and just a single bird this year. Two harsh winters in succession appear to have reduced the population of this species at Woolston. For the first time since 2006 no Green Woodpeckers were caught on the bed. Five Great Spotted Woodpeckers were ringed and three retrapped that had been ringed in previous years. Only one bird, a male, was in breeding condition. Corvids were represented by two Jays, both caught on 15<sup>th</sup> April. One, a female, was in breeding condition. It was the first blank year for Magpies since 2004.

It was another improved year for Goldcrests with 37 new birds ringed. In addition three Goldcrests, originally ringed in autumn 2010, were retrapped over two days in early March and these were probably locally-bred birds returning to their natal sites. The peak day of the autumn passage was 28<sup>th</sup> October when 14 birds were ringed. The 15 Willow Tits ringed was only slightly below the 18 in 2010. A further nine birds were retrapped from previous years with the oldest from 28<sup>th</sup> July 2006. A record nine new Coal Tits were ringed but for the second year running no birds were retrapped. Blue Tits and Great Tits were caught in average numbers and appear to have enjoyed a reasonable breeding season. Sixty-three Blue tits were retrapped, the oldest from 12<sup>th</sup> November 2004.

No significant roost of Sand Martins formed on the bed and just eight were ringed. The situation with Swallows was better with 69 ringed. These roosts are predominantly of juvenile birds. On the evening of 19<sup>th</sup> August 67 new birds were caught together with two Swallows that had been ringed elsewhere as chicks in the nest. One was from Atherton in Greater Manchester and the other had been ringed by the writer at a farm in Mobberley, Cheshire. The parents of this latter bird raised three broods successfully and launched 13 offspring into the population. The 39 Long-tailed Tits ringed was the second lowest total since 1995. Catches were also down on No.3 bed and it appears that this species had a poor breeding season. Fourteen birds were retrapped from previous years with the oldest having been ringed on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2006.

The 161 Chiffchaffs ringed in the year implies a fair year for this species. The first, a returning bird, was trapped on 18<sup>th</sup> March. The last migrant was ringed on 1<sup>st</sup> October but a wintering bird was trapped on 10<sup>th</sup> December. Likewise, 160 new Willow Warblers ringed was a good achievement in the circumstances. The first ten were caught on 15<sup>th</sup> April and included six returning birds. In total 20 Willow Warblers were retrapped from previous years with the oldest having been originally ringed on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

For the first year since 1995 no Lesser Whitethroats were caught on the bed. The 49 Common Whitethroats caught represents the second lowest total since 1995 but data from No.3 bed imply that this species had a good year at Woolston overall. Garden Warblers were caught in average numbers and the 121 new Blackcaps ringed was a reduction from 180 in 2010 but a reasonable total under the circumstances. Just six Blackcaps previously ringed at Woolston were retrapped. If this ratio of 6 retraps to 121 new birds is compared with Reed Warblers where 44 retraps sit alongside 151 new birds it can be seen that whilst there is a good breeding population of Reed Warblers on the bed most Blackcaps must be passing through from other sites.

Four new Grasshopper Warblers were ringed which is average. This total included two juveniles and the first of these, caught on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, probably fledged locally. Sedge Warblers appear to have had a poor year with just 18 ringed, by far the lowest annual total on No.1 bed and difficult to ascribe solely to reduced ringing effort. There were no returning adults included in this total. A relatively low 151 new Reed Warblers were ringed, the lowest since 2004. Of the 38 retraps from previous years the oldest had been ringed on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2003. In addition six birds were retrapped that had originally been ringed on No.3 bed. Sixty-four adults were caught in breeding condition, 32 of each sex. It seems likely that reduced ringing effort during the peak period when Reed Warblers from further north are migrating through Woolston will have impacted on these results.

A female Nuthatch with a brood patch was trapped on 11<sup>th</sup> June and was probably visiting from Lymm Golf Club across the Manchester Ship Canal. Seven new Treecreepers were ringed and two more were retrapped, a further indication of how this attractive species has become established at Woolston. It is tempting to suggest 'ringing effort' again as the reason but catches of Wrens were significantly down on No.3 bed as well and were caught in numbers markedly below the ten-year average. It may be that two harsh winters have reduced the breeding population of these species and we must wait to see if catches recover after a mild winter.

Just 27 Blackbirds were ringed, the fourth lowest total since 1995, but this species was caught in good numbers on No.3 bed. By observation it appears that first broods, which are always more susceptible to predation in the sparser spring foliage, also suffered because the very dry spring made soil invertebrates less available to the adults. Catches improved later in the year and second broods fared much better. Seven Blackbirds were retrapped from previous years, the oldest being ringed on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2006. Song Thrushes continue to be caught in low numbers with just 13 ringed and catches on No.3 bed were also low. The dry spring was very poor for the slugs and snails that form an important food source for this species. Two Redwings were ringed during the autumn influx of this species in October and this was a typical catch.

After a blank year in 2010, two adult male Common Redstarts were caught, both in breeding plumage, the first on 10<sup>th</sup> June and the second on 1<sup>st</sup> July. The second bird was in heavy moult and had probably been on the bed for some time. In view of the dates on which these birds were caught it may be that there is a small breeding population nearby. As with Wrens, catches of Dunnocks were significantly down on No. 1 and No.3 bed and were markedly below the ten-year average. This was the first blank year for Tree Pipit since 2006 but the dispersal of juvenile Meadow pipits was well sampled with 18 birds ringed of which only one was adult. The ten-year average for this species is 22.

As well as the impact of reduced ringing effort, the catches of finch species which come to feeders was reduced by a lower feeding regime occasioned by a problem with Grey Squirrels. Just 31 new Chaffinches were ringed, the lowest total since 1998 and 155 new Greenfinches was the lowest total since 1997. Just five Goldfinches and a single Siskin were caught whilst the two new Linnets was the lowest total by far since 1995. In contrast the 84 new Lesser Redpolls ringed was second only to the 88 ringed in 2010. Nine of these were ringed in spring and a single female with a brood patch in summer. The rest were part of the autumn influx. Bullfinches continue to thrive at Woolston and 72 new birds were ringed. A further 14 were retrapped from previous years with the oldest having been ringed on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2007. Reed Buntings appear to have had a poor year with just 84 new birds ringed. A further 29 birds were retrapped from previous years with two birds from 2003 being the oldest.

#### *No.3 bed*

Ringing activity in the centre of No. 3 bed resulted in 3,489 new birds being ringed in 2011, a decrease of 8% from the record total of 3,784 ringed in 2010.

For the second year in succession a combination of adverse weather and a focus on other activities meant that very little trapping was carried out and no Water Rails or wildfowl were trapped. The only duck caught was an adult male Teal that flew into a mist-net set for Snipe on 12<sup>th</sup> November. This is the first Teal ringed at Woolston since five were caught together on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2008. It was a poor year for Sparrowhawks and the only one caught was a female originally ringed on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010. The other raptor highlight was a 'near miss'. A juvenile Hobby flew into a mist-net set for the Swallow roost but extracted itself just as the ringers got close to it. As a result of the limited amount of trapping just a single Moorhen was ringed, a juvenile bird trapped on 30<sup>th</sup> July.

As in 2010, a single Common Snipe was caught in front of the Frank Linley hide where a small roost had developed. Two Jack Snipes were caught, one at each end of the year. These were just the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> caught at Woolston. Ringing captures probably represent 'the tip of the iceberg' for this species at Woolston which is difficult to detect unless trapped in flight. Catches of Woodpigeons are increasing at Woolston and the nine birds ringed in 2011 are second only to the 13 ringed in 2010. In part this reflects the increase in food provision because Woodpigeons scavenge split seed below the feeders and are sometimes netted as a consequence. Great Spotted Woodpeckers are also common at the feeders and 47 captures during the year included 12 new birds, six hatched in 2011 and six from 2010. On 21<sup>st</sup> October 2010 the writer was delighted to catch a juvenile male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in a mist net on the edge of the north meadow. Just to prove that this was not a fluke on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2011 he did it again. This year's bird was also a juvenile male indicating probable breeding success at the site on the south side of the Manchester Ship Canal. An adult Tawny Owl, sexed as female based on size, was ringed on 26<sup>th</sup> February but there was no evidence of breeding on the bed this year.

Only nine new Jays were ringed, a little below the seven-year average of 11. It is possible that the spread of this woodland species has been checked by the coppicing work on the bed. Another good year for Magpies resulted in five new birds being ringed. It is worth repeating that this species is common on the bed but difficult to catch because of their size and intelligence.

Goldcrests maintained their recovery from the low of 2009 and 21 were ringed including a juvenile caught on 17<sup>th</sup> August. It was another blank year for Firecrest. Six were caught between 2000 and 2007 but this species now appears to be getting rarer as a visitor to Woolston.

Tits had a good year. Twenty-two new Willow Tits were ringed, all juveniles. This is second only to the record of 33 in 2010. Seven Willow tits were retrapped, the oldest from 2007. Six new Coal Tits were ringed. This is still a rare species on the bed but captures spanned 2<sup>nd</sup> January to 13<sup>th</sup> August. Of the 184 new Blue Tits ringed 23 were ringed as pulli in the nest boxes. Thirty-nine Blue Tits were retrapped from previous years, the oldest being two from 2006. A total of 199 Great Tits ringed included 55 pulli. This latter figure compares with 106 pulli in 2010 and would have been higher but for a high level of predation in the nest boxes where entire clutches were taken when nearly ready to ring. The boxes had not been broken into which rules out Great Spotted Woodpeckers but beyond that we have not identified the predator. When cleaning out the boxes after breeding had finished only one ring was found indicating that of the ringed chicks only one had subsequently died before fledging. Thirty-nine different Great Tits were retrapped, the oldest from 2006.

A mixed roost of several hundred Swallows and Sand Martins formed in late summer. Persistent effort resulted in a catch of 351 Swallows which is the second best total since 2004. In contrast only six Sand Martins were ringed. The Sand Martins appeared to roost further out into the reed bed than the Swallows and were beyond the reach of the mist nets. Two Cetti's Warblers were ringed in the autumn. The first, a female based on biometrics, was trapped on 29<sup>th</sup> October and retrapped on 5<sup>th</sup> November. The second, an unsexed bird, was trapped on 12<sup>th</sup> November. Eight Cetti's Warblers have now been caught on No.3 bed, all in the same area of the Phragmites bed and all between 6<sup>th</sup> October and 20<sup>th</sup> November during post-breeding dispersal. Only 48 new Long-tailed Tits were ringed and the absence of large family parties in summer and autumn might indicate a poor breeding season on the bed. A further 28 Long-tailed Tits were retrapped with the oldest being three birds from 2007.

Turning to warblers, 1,463 new birds were ringed of nine species compared with 1,564 new birds, also of nine species, in 2010. This decline can be ascribed in its entirety to a reduction in catches of Sedge Warblers and Reed Warblers but 2010 was a record year for both these species. Yet another record was set for Chiffchaff with 200 new birds ringed exceeding the 180 ringed in 2010. The eight-year average is 144. The first was ringed on 26<sup>th</sup> March, the first warbler of the year on the bed and, to the ringers, the harbinger of spring and the 'new season'. Willow Warblers also had a good year with 75 new birds ringed. This species has also reacted well to the coppicing on the bed. The 488 new Blackcaps ringed was a little below the record of 515 in 2010 but a period of poor weather in September coincided with the peak passage time for this species and we feel that without this interruption the previous year's figure would have been exceeded. The first Blackcap was ringed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April and the last of autumn on 15<sup>th</sup> October. Two Blackcaps were ringed in November and these might have been birds that were aiming to overwinter in the U.K. Garden Warblers had a record year with 38 new birds ringed, again just exceeding the 34 ringed in 2010. Lesser Whitethroats are not common on the bed and there was no evidence of breeding but three birds, all juveniles, were ringed in August. Whitethroats enjoyed a second exceptional year and the 144 new birds ringed just exceeded the record of 139 set in 2010 and confirms the improvement in the habitat for Whitethroats on the bed. Six Whitethroats were retrapped from 2010.

As in 2010 five Grasshopper Warblers were handled during the year. This year there were four new birds and one returning from 2010. We were not able to prove breeding this year. As mentioned above, the 86 new Sedge Warblers ringed was 25 below the record in 2010 and the 423 new Reed Warblers a reduction of 91. However, both totals compare well with recent averages and the year can be considered a reasonable one. Six Sedge Warblers returned, all from 2010. In contrast the 40 returning Reed Warblers included representatives from all ringing years back to 2006. Three Reed Warblers were controlled, including a bird with a French ring.

Nine new Treecreepers were ringed with the first juvenile on 18<sup>th</sup> June. Wrens probably suffered from the harsh winter and dry spring that made the invertebrates on which they feed more difficult to obtain. The 89 new Wrens ringed was a reduction from 113 in 2010. It must be noted that 2010 was a particularly good year and 2011 compares better with the average catches over the last ten years. Blackbirds were caught in record numbers with 72 new birds ringed. Although first broods appeared to fare badly in the dry spring, second broods had a much better experience and were caught in good numbers. Although down on the record catch in 2010, the 20 new Song Thrushes ringed was close to average. The first juvenile was not caught until 1<sup>st</sup> August, much later than in 2010 when a juvenile was caught on 15<sup>th</sup> May and this thrush may have been especially affected by the dry spring. The autumn influx of Redwings was very light and only three were caught, all between October 22<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>. Robins had a good year with 90 new birds ringed compared to 88 in 2010 and a recent average of 83. In contrast the 56 new Dunnocks compared to 82 in the previous year. The autumn Meadow Pipit migration was not evident on No.3 bed and none were caught.

Chaffinches had a good year with 229 new birds ringed. The seven-year average is 149. The first juvenile was caught on 10<sup>th</sup> June, a typical date. Many birds were caught around the feeding station and the winter seed crop in the North Meadow during autumn and winter and some birds were long-winged and probable winter migrants from Scandinavia. Eighteen Chaffinches were retrapped from previous years with the oldest being two birds from 2007. The 76 new Bramblings ringed were certainly winter migrants from Scandinavia and this total is the best in recent years and nearly twice the seven year average. All 76 were caught in the first winter period and comprised 48 males and 28 females. In the second winter period, with reports of relatively benign conditions in their breeding areas, Bramblings were absent from Woolston. A total of 253 new Greenfinches were ringed which is in line with the seven-year average. Only five Greenfinches were retrapped, four from 2010 and one from 2008.

Goldfinch remains a rare bird on the bed and the nine new ones ringed is nearly twice the seven-year average. The first juvenile was caught on 29<sup>th</sup> July. A single male Siskin was caught on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, the first on the bed since 20<sup>th</sup> March 2004. Despite being seen and heard regularly over the beds in the winter period Siskins are rarely caught at Woolston. In part this may reflect the absence of suitable seeds, both natural and in the feeders. No Linnets were caught in 2011. Thirty new Lesser Redpolls were ringed during the autumn migration between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 12<sup>th</sup> November. Fifteen of these were caught on 1<sup>st</sup> October and this is the earliest first arrival date ever, beating 2010 by one day. Bullfinches had another good year although the total of 125 new birds ringed was below the record of 147 ringed in 2010. An interesting comparison is that 41 Bullfinches were retrapped from previous years and this compares with 42 such retraps in 2010. The oldest retrap in 2011 was from 2006.

The year started poorly for Reed Buntings with only 20 new birds ringed up until the end of September. Only five of these were newly fledged and the evidence suggested a poor breeding season. In October a roost formed in the Phragmites and birds were caught leaving this roost. We ended with 84 new birds ringed, second only to the record 90 ringed in 2007. The roost may well have concentrated birds from other parts of the reserve or from outside the reserve so the total ringed probably overstates the breeding success in 2011 which is better reflected by the low catches earlier in the year.

Finally, I would like to report on a bird that we did not catch in 2011. 1U5888 was a female Long-tailed Tit first trapped and ringed on No.3 bed as a juvenile on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2002. She was then retrapped a further 23 times, the last being on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2010. The BTO measures longevity as the elapsed time between first and last handling and, on this basis she was 8 years 4 months and 19 days old when last handled. The oldest bird in the BTO database was 8 years 8 months and 5 days. We have not caught her in 2011 and conclude that the harsh weather in winter 2010/2011 was too much for such an old bird.

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>No.1</b>	<b>No.3</b>	<b>TOTALS 2011</b>	<b>TOTALS 1980-2011</b>
Sparrowhawk	1		1	92
Kestrel	2		2	32
Moorhen	1	1	2	222
Lapwing		1	1	60
Jack Snipe		2	2	11
Common Snipe		3	3	53
Woodpigeon	1	9	10	82
Tawny Owl		1	1	13
Kingfisher	1		1	83
G Spotted Woodpecker	5	12	17	228
L Spotted Woodpecker		1	1	7
Jay	2	9	11	254
Magpie		5	5	122
Goldcrest	37	20	57	1391
Blue Tit	134	184	318	8600
Great Tit	93	199	292	5145
Coal Tit	9	6	15	93
Willow Tit	15	22	37	615
Sand Martin	8	6	14	1097
Swallow	69	351	420	11522
Cetti's Warbler		2	2	11
Long-tailed Tit	39	48	87	3256
Chiffchaff	161	200	361	5502
Willow Warbler	160	75	235	7138
Blackcap	121	488	609	7879
Garden Warbler	12	38	50	738
Lesser Whitethroat		3	3	245
Whitethroat	49	144	193	4517
Grasshopper Warbler	4	4	8	180
Sedge Warbler	18	86	104	4705
Reed Warbler	151	423	574	8710
Nuthatch	1		1	7
Treecreeper	7	9	16	154
Wren	47	89	136	5165
Blackbird	27	72	99	2327
Song Thrush	13	20	33	1037
Redwing	2	3	5	249
Robin	63	90	153	3684
Redstart	2		2	24
Dunnock	17	56	73	3327
Meadow Pipit	18		18	565
Chaffinch	31	229	260	3857
Brambling		76	76	241
Greenfinch	155	253	408	11013
Goldfinch	5	9	14	638
Siskin	1	1	2	43
Linnet	2		2	1084
Lesser Redpoll	84	30	114	1645
Bullfinch	72	125	197	1997
Reed Bunting	84	84	168	6439
Others (53 species)				1850
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>1724</b>	<b>3489</b>	<b>5213</b>	<b>117949</b>

# Glyn Arthur 2011

Bob Harris

Another cold and snow-swept winter, with many nights below freezing, necessitated an early visit (9<sup>th</sup> April) to check the over-wintering condition of the boxes. Six boxes were replaced with another eleven requiring replacement or drastic repair in order to permit their use. Activity on site was understandably low; three nest-boxes on the north-facing slope had activity, two at N1 and one at N2, while on the south-facing slope eleven boxes had early building, six at N1 and five at N2. All of this related to Blue or Great Tit activity.

The second visit two weeks later, on 21st April, followed several days of good, fine weather. Initial impressions on the day were not good. Checking of the north-facing boxes revealed only eight with any activity, two with four eggs (each of a tit species) and the rest all with early building. Two were possibly due to Pied Flycatchers – only one female of the species actually being seen. Checking of boxes along the stream and on the south-facing slope was much more promising. A final total revealed an additional 24 nests with eggs (3x1, 1x3, 3x4, 7x5, 1x6, 1x7 and 3x9) with three having unknown counts due to sitting birds (1xGT, 2xBT). Furthermore 37 boxes revealed signs of building activity. Initially 13 boxes were thought to be due to Pied Flycatchers, three to Redstart and a further three to either of these two species. Surprisingly very few birds were actually seen or heard, and certainly no Redstarts. Unexpectedly Box 16 held what I considered to be the egg of a Redstart – the first time (for me) that one has been laid before Pied Flycatcher (a back calculation on final dates revealed this as the earliest first egg date for Redstart recorded at Glyn Arthur, compared to the 26<sup>th</sup> April for PF). At the end of the day 26 nests had eggs, with a further 43 boxes showing signs of activity. In comparison activity on the equivalent day in 2010 only had eight boxes with eggs and activity in another 23. Thus my initial impression on the day was far from accurate or representative.

Elsewhere on site the ponds contained numerous tadpoles and Chiffchaff and Willow Warblers were in evidence with Blackcap and Garden Warbler also on site. Swallows were absent, having been present on 9<sup>th</sup> April, and Cuckoos were conspicuous by their absence. Raven and Buzzard were about, as was Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jay and Tawny Owl (flushed while walking through the wood). Treecreeper, Goldcrest and Coal Tit were heard. Chaffinches were numerous and a few pairs of Wrens were about. Birds of the day were a pair of Yellowhammers viewed near the main house.



Figure: an overlay of nestboxes, positioned via GPS, onto a Google map screen grab of Glyn Arthur

The next visit was May Day – a warm and dry day but with increasing wind. Today was a six hour day as, in addition to checking all of the boxes, GPS readings were generated for all of them with a hope of being able to undertake some detailed mapping in the future (see figure).

For Blue and Great Tits at this time of year a week is a long time. Sixteen Blue Tits were now sitting on eggs as were twelve Great Tits. A further eight nests had clutches of unknown size due to sitting birds that weren't lifted and another three boxes had eggs of uncertain origin. A single Coal Tit was on nine eggs. For the blue-egg species, ten boxes contained eggs of Pied Flycatcher (from one – six eggs) with another six nests ready for eggs. Three of the four nests put down to Redstart had eggs (two, five and six). Elsewhere evidence of breeding included a Mallard with seven young in the middle pond, and Blackbird and Mistle Thrush carrying food.



Newly hatched Blue Tits – about a day old (or less).

The next weekend visit (9<sup>th</sup> May) witnessed the first hatchings of the year with five of the Blue Tit nests having (literally) young breaking out of their shells. This was off-set by finding three nests that had been being predated at some time during the week (two Blue one Great Tit). In all the other boxes things were found as expected – either clutches had increased in size and/or incubation was continuing.

The first Pied Flycatcher females were lifted on this visit. Of the sixteen active nests nine females were lifted, ringed (if not already), measured, photographed and returned. Four of the nine were totally new birds. Of the rest, four were retraps and one a control:

- T834607 ringed as a pullus in 2006 (and re-caught 2007,08,10, but not 2009)
- V570527 caught as an adult female in 2009, then again in 2010
- X060227 caught as an adult female in 2010
- X060348 ringed as pullus in 2010
- X932462 ringed as an adult female at Prion 06.06.2010. (8.1km away)

At the end of the day the total number of active nests was 43.

The first chicks were ringed on the next visit (15<sup>th</sup> May) – a nice warm sunny day and a pleasure to be out. Blue Tits were ringed at a size of 'feathers medium', indicating their first egg date of the 10<sup>th</sup> April, while the Great Tit chicks were less advanced (with a first egg date of 18<sup>th</sup> April – a full week after the first Blue tit egg). A further two broods were 'lost' due to both being found to contain dead starved small chicks. One assumes the local Sparrowhawk had also been out feeding.

The Coal Tit had hatched eight of its eggs, but the young were still too small to ring, and the four Redstart and twelve of the Pied Flycatchers were all incubating. A further five Pied Flycatcher nests were still accumulating eggs – one of which never progressed from a single egg which was deserted early. A further four females were lifted, two new, and two retraps:

X060332 ringed as an adult female in 2010

V570710 ringed as a pullus in 2009, caught on-site as an adult in 2010

With the season now at its peak the next week consisted of checking the state of some nests, ringing chicks in others and, for some, not visiting them at all as birds were incubating. On the down side three nests were lost, one due to woodpecker predation – of a whole brood of Blue Tit chicks almost ready to fledge – and two due to unknown causes with both nests containing dead chicks.

The first Redstart chicks were ringed – a brood of seven (in-pin) – while of the other nests one clutch was just hatching and the other two were still incubating. From the Pied Flycatcher boxes seven had chicks, the oldest of which were about three days old but most were at the just-hatched one day stage. Another female was lifted (L638089, a new bird) and the first male was trapped – another new bird for the year.

The last visit in May (28<sup>th</sup>) was a case of mopping up all of the last of the tits which consisted of only three nests – two of Great Tit and one of Blue. Final figures for these two were:

	No. nests	Successful nests	Average eggs/ nest	Average pulli/ nest	No. fledged	% success	% failure	% unknown
Blue Tit	18	10	7.3	6.2	4.3	56	39	6
Great Tit	15	10	7.1	5.7	5.1	67	20	13

The first Pied Flycatchers were ringed this visit, in all 59 individuals. Additionally eight adults were taken – three new males, one male first ringed as an adult last year, and another ringed as a pullus in 2009 and caught again on-site in 2010. Another was a bird ringed as a pullus at Loggerheads (c. 6 km away) in 2006 and first caught here in 2010. Of the other two birds, females, one was ringed as a pullus in 2010 and the other was ringed as a pullus in 2006, caught in 2010, and now again in 2011 – a bird five years old.



The last visit of the breeding season was made on the 4<sup>th</sup> June with two broods of Pied Flycatcher and one brood of three Blue Tit ringed. A second brood of Redstarts were also ringed – with the other two nests lost, one deserted just before hatching and the other when the nest box had been used as a scratching box by one of the resident horses who used it to destruction. Another new nest was found with a sitting female, but this nest was not followed up. Four additional, new, Pied Flycatcher males were trapped. Interestingly, while setting up a trapping trip-wire, I accidentally flushed a Mallard who was sat on five eggs amongst the last of the Bluebells alongside the stream.

The end of year figures for Pied Flycatcher and Redstart were:

	No. nests	Successful nests	Average eggs/ nest	Average pulli/ nest	No. fledged	% success	% failure	% unknown
Pied Flycatcher	16	13	7.3	5.8	5.6	81	6	13
Redstart	5	2	6.2	4.2	3.4	40	40	20

So, in brief, how did this year compare with last? For Blue Tit this year was significantly worse than 2010. In all parameters analysed (number of nests, number of nests successful, average eggs, pulli fledged, percentage success and failure) values were worse than 2010. In ‘percentage success’ alone, figures had dropped from 92% (on 13 nests) to 56% on 18 nests – the failure rate going from 8% to 39%. In real terms the numbers of chicks fledged fell from 6.6 to 4.3 per nest.

For Great Tit the picture was similar but much less severe than for Blue Tit – the success rate dropping from 83 to 67% but with the failure rate being only 6%. Here the chick fledging rate was 6.6 in 2010 compared to 5.1 in 2011.

For Redstart the comparison is highly tongue-in-cheek because there was only one nest in 2010 (with a 100% success rate). This year there were five Redstart nests, with only two proving successful and a third having an unknown outcome (as it wasn’t followed further). Thus success rates for 2011 are appropriately recorded as 40%, but equally could have been as high as 60% if the last nest proved successful.

For the target species of Pied Flycatcher the outcome is mixed but improving overall. The 2010 success rate was 87% and this year was slightly down at 81% (based on 13 successful nests in both years). In chick fledging rates however there was an improvement from 4.5 to 5.7 chicks per nest. Next year is awaited with anticipation.



My personal thanks and appreciation to the Williams family for continuing to allow me free access to their land in support of this study (which has now been on-going, unbroken, for more than 30 years – but not always by me!).

# SHOTTON 2011

John Birch, Rob Cockbain and Graham Thomason

It is now over 50 years since Merseyside Ringing Group began regular ringing activities at what is now known as the Shotton Reserve. During that time huge changes have taken place on the reserve and in the surrounding area but one thing has remained constant: Shotton has always been good for birds. 2011 proved to be no exception; despite the continuing disappointment at the failure of the Common Terns to re-establish their colony and the absence this year of any particularly rare or unusual birds, it is always an enjoyment to spend time at Shotton.

With a total of 1157 birds ringed and 96 species recorded at the site, the authors of this report consider it a privilege to have been associated with the reserve for all of its existence.

## RINGING ACTIVITIES

2011 was an extremely good year for ringing at Shotton. Although the species count was down from 2010, the total number of free-flying birds caught was the highest for several years. Eight species of warbler accounted for over 30% of all birds caught. Particularly surprising were 10 Grasshopper Warblers, 55 Blackcaps and 82 Chiffchaffs and totals for other warbler species also increased. Finches were also prominent in the totals with 15 Bramblings, 150 Goldfinches, 25 Lesser Redpolls and two Siskins together with 49 Reed Buntings. Totals for all species are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: 2011 Ringing totals for Shotton

<b>Species</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Species</b>	<b>Total</b>
Kingfisher	3	Wren	30
Great Spotted Woodpecker	11	Blackbird	25
Blue Tit	105	Song Thrush	5
Great Tit	48	Robin	16
Coal Tit	1	Dunnock	19
Swallow	2	Chaffinch	102
Long-tailed Tit	28	Brambling	15
Chiffchaff	82	Greenfinch	120
Willow Warbler	24	Goldfinch	150
Blackcap	55	Siskin	2
Garden Warbler	2	Linnet	1
Whitethroat	20	Lesser Redpoll	25
Grasshopper Warbler	10	Bullfinch	12
Sedge Warbler	42	Reed Bunting	49
Reed Warbler	153	<b>All species (29)</b>	<b>1157</b>

## BIRDS AT SHOTTON

There was a better-than-average start to the year with good numbers of birds on the reserve. Despite cold and wintry weather for most of January, the provision of food ensured birds remained in the area. Less usual visitors on 2<sup>nd</sup> included five Pochard, 16 Teal, two Water Rail, ten Brambling and a House Sparrow. A total of some 600 Wigeon passed over the reserve during the day. A party of 47 Gadwall were present on 9<sup>th</sup> and the Brambling flock had increased to 30. A further influx of Gadwall saw the flock increase to 62 on the 30<sup>th</sup> and a group of 30 Lesser Redpoll were also recorded. A total of 129 birds ringed in January included 14 Brambling and ten Reed Buntings.

Only two visits were made to the reserve in February; nine Goldeneye and a Siskin were recorded on 17<sup>th</sup> and a brief snatch of song from a Cetti's Warbler was heard on 28<sup>th</sup>.

March started quietly with Raven, Brambling and Siskin the only birds of note on 6<sup>th</sup>. On 13<sup>th</sup> two Chiffchaffs were singing and a pair of Stonechats were observed in courtship display. This is the first record of this species at Shotton for a number of years. Things livened up somewhat on the 27<sup>th</sup> with a Peregrine, a pair of Lapwings, seven Sand Martins, a Blackcap, five Chiffchaffs and a Goldcrest.

A pair of Shelduck were on the pools on 3<sup>rd</sup> April and spring migrants were more evident with two Sand Martins, a Blackcap, ten Chiffchaffs and three Willow Warblers. Two Peregrines were over the reserve on 10<sup>th</sup> and two Lapwings, two Little Ringed Plover and a Common Sandpiper also recorded. Far more unusual, and possibly a record for Shotton, was a Dotterel flying east over the pools. Seven Swallows, one Grasshopper Warbler (caught) and a Reed Warbler were the first of these species to be recorded in 2011. On 24<sup>th</sup> another Grasshopper Warbler was caught and Sedge warbler and Whitethroat put in their first appearance for the year. Three Common Terns were reported on 25<sup>th</sup> and by 27<sup>th</sup> this number had grown to 70. New species for this spring included House Martin and Garden Warbler and yet another Grasshopper Warbler was caught on the same day.

May is the month which usually heralds the arrival of large numbers of Common Terns at Shotton. Sadly it soon became apparent that it was unlikely they would breed. Ten visits were made to the reserve during the month and although some terns were present on six of those visits the maximum number recorded was 75 on 17<sup>th</sup>. (See separate article ' *Survey of Common Terns in the Dee Estuary* ' pp 31-35)

For other species, May was reasonably productive. On 1<sup>st</sup> a higher-than-usual count of 48 Tufted Duck were recorded as was a single Black-tailed Godwit. Migrants were also present in reasonable numbers with seven species of warbler counted. Fifty Swifts and a similar number of House Martins were present on the 8<sup>th</sup> and a singing male Stonechat and a Grasshopper Warbler giving an alarm call were discovered on 15<sup>th</sup>. A calling Whimbrel overflowed the reserve on 22<sup>nd</sup> and two pairs of Grasshopper Warblers, probably breeding, were found. Lower than usual water levels on the pools allowed two pairs of Lapwing to attempt breeding and on 29<sup>th</sup> one was observed sitting on a nest.

On 5<sup>th</sup> June up to 150 Common Terns were present and a visit to the islands on 12<sup>th</sup> resulted in the discovery of a number of eggs which had been eaten by Carrion Crows or Magpies. On 17<sup>th</sup> Steve Hughes (Tata Steel) observed a Common Tern sitting on a scrape for most of the day. A single Oystercatcher chick was on one of the islands on 19<sup>th</sup> and four Grasshopper Warblers were ringed on 26<sup>th</sup>, confirming our suspicion of breeding.

July was fairly quiet but two overnight stays on 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> and 30/31<sup>st</sup> in decent weather was very pleasant. A Garden Warbler was caught on 3<sup>rd</sup> and three young Lapwings were observed on 10<sup>th</sup>. A Kingfisher was ringed on 24<sup>th</sup> and three Green Sandpipers were present on 31<sup>st</sup>.

Five visits were made to the reserve during August but only the overnight stay on 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> brought any birds of particular interest. A Spoonbill was seen flying northeast on 20<sup>th</sup> and a Golden Plover flew east on the same day. A single Linnet, an unusual visitor these days, was recorded on 21<sup>st</sup>.

On 4<sup>th</sup> September a pair of Little Grebes with three young were on the pools as were five Shoveler. Low water levels made the reserve attractive for Teal, with 14 present on the same day. An estimated 20+ Chiffchaffs were recorded on 11<sup>th</sup> and 25 Gadwall, 12 Teal and two Shoveler were seen on 25<sup>th</sup>.

October proved fairly quiet in terms of unusual birds but a Rock Pipit on 2<sup>nd</sup> and six Crossbills on 9<sup>th</sup> added some interest. Finch numbers began to increase towards the end of the month

doubtless in response to the provision of food; 50 Chaffinches were present on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 50 Goldfinches on 30<sup>th</sup>.

The first Goldeneye was seen on 6<sup>th</sup> November together with 31 Teal, three Pochard and a Green Sandpiper. A lone Fieldfare and four Siskin (one was caught) were also present. On 20<sup>th</sup> 36 Gadwall and 11 Goldeneye were about and 500 Chaffinches/Goldfinches were seen moving into a brisk north-westerly wind on 27<sup>th</sup>. The third Kingfisher of the year was caught on the same day.

Two visits in December in fairly poor weather found three Water Rails, two Snipe and two Woodcock on 18<sup>th</sup> to be the only records of note.

Table 2: Birds recorded at Shotton 2011

Little Grebe	Whimbrel	Willow Warbler
Cormorant	Curlew	Blackcap
Little Egret	Redshank	Garden Warbler
Grey Heron	Green Sandpiper	Whitethroat
Spoonbill	Common Sandpiper	Grasshopper Warbler
Mute Swan	Black-headed Gull	Sedge warbler
Greylag Goose	Common Gull	Reed Warbler
Canada Goose	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Wren
Shelduck	Herring Gull	Starling
Wigeon	Great Black-backed Gull	Blackbird
Gadwall	Common Tern	Fieldfare
Teal	Stock Dove	Song Thrush
Mallard	Woodpigeon	Redwing
Shoveler	Collared Dove	Mistle Thrush
Pochard	Swift	Robin
Tufted Duck	Kingfisher	Stonechat
Goldeneye	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Dunnock
Sparrowhawk	Jay	House Sparrow
Buzzard	Magpie	Grey Wagtail
Kestrel	Jackdaw	Pied Wagtail
Peregrine	Carrion Crow	Meadow Pipit
Water Rail	Raven	Rock Pipit
Moorhen	Goldcrest	Chaffinch
Coot	Blue Tit	Brambling
Oystercatcher	Great Tit	Greenfinch
Little Ringed Plover	Coal Tit	Goldfinch
Dotterel	Sand Martin	Siskin
Golden Plover	Swallow	Linnet
Lapwing	House Martin	Lesser Redpoll
Snipe	Cetti's Warbler	Crossbill
Woodcock	Long-tailed Tit	Bullfinch
Black-tailed Godwit	Chiffchaff	Reed Bunting

The reserve was visited on 60 occasions during the year which turned out to be one of the best for some time. We hope that the Common Terns will return to breed in the near future and with the support of Tata Steel and the help of Steve Hughes and members of the Dee Wildfowlers and Wetlands Management Club we will continue to maintain the tern nesting islands. We thank all the individuals who contribute in so many ways to our work at Shotton.

## BIRD-RINGING AT FRODSHAM MARSH, 2011

Peter Coffey, David Norman

The area was much drier than usual, with one of the usual ringing sites and the wader pool completely dried out. The main reed beds were still extensive but growth was not as vigorous as in the previous few years and the area was unattractive to autumn waders.

David Norman managed to ring 13 chicks from six broods between May and July. Two Meadow Pipit broods of four chicks each were ringed in late May on the north side of bed No.3. Two Buzzard broods, each with just one chick, were ringed on 16<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> June. One nest was 5m high in a birch, the other 4.5m high in blackthorn hedge. A third nest at the junction of two trees, and hanging over a ditch, proved just too much of a health and safety risk! Two Marsh Harrier chicks were large enough to ring on 5<sup>th</sup> July and both fledged successfully. Although the ringing date was just three days later than last year, the eggs had obviously been laid about two weeks earlier – lending support to the idea that the parents were first-time breeders in 2010 – and the chicks were well-grown, making them a bit more of a handful but easy to sex as one female (weighing 725g) and one male (545g) with very obvious differences in thickness of legs, although they both take the same ring size (F). The last chick ringed was a very late Oystercatcher ringed on 29<sup>th</sup> July at the western end of the fishing pools. The latest record prior to this was an Oystercatcher at Gronant on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1996.

Peter Coffey visited Frodsham on 15 occasions between 27<sup>th</sup> July and 30<sup>th</sup> September. It was of little surprise that totals of birds caught were down (555 compared to 690 last year, excluding birds retrapped in the season) but perhaps a more accurate reflection of the smaller number of birds around are that he made two more visits this year than last and used an average of nine nets compared to five last year. The start date was only four days later than last year but reports of early breeding in 2011 means that many of the juveniles from early broods will have been missed and perhaps some adults had already completed two broods and moved on. Only four adults ringed in previous years were retrapped and three of those were tits!



The quality of the catch was still high – 70% warblers, 15% finches and buntings. Nine species of warbler were caught including a Grasshopper Warbler, three Lesser Whitethroats, and four Garden Warblers. Whitethroat numbers were very high (104 compared to 62 last year) and Blackcaps were also up on last year (36 compared to 27). A first-year female Redstart was a welcome sight on 24<sup>th</sup> August and on the last ringing session (30<sup>th</sup> September) a very small juvenile Garden Warbler (pictured) was caught that was off the bottom end of all the usual measurements. It was probably from a very late British brood.

An unexpected Goldcrest, a first-year female caught on 24<sup>th</sup> August, was a welcome visitor.

A catch of 54 Reed Buntings on 29<sup>th</sup> September was a bonus, bringing the total for that species to 74. Most of the birds were caught in one glade where an MP3 with a Reed Bunting call was playing.

One of the joys of ringing at Frodsham is that Marsh Harriers frequently put in appearances – this year the juvenile female was quartering very close to the ringing station and dropped into grasses less than 100m away. On another occasion attention was drawn by the harriers calling and three of them were seen rising to inspect a large bird gliding high towards Ince – it turned out to be a Crane.

### Summary of birds caught at Frodsham Marsh in 2011

Species	New Birds		Controls/ Retraps**	Totals
	Full-grown	Pullus		
Marsh Harrier		2		2
Buzzard		2		2
Oystercatcher		1		1
Jay	2			2
Goldcrest	1			1
Blue Tit	14		5	19
Great Tit	12		1	13
Swallow	1			1
Chiffchaff	57		1	58
Willow Warbler	23		1	24
Blackcap	36			36
Garden Warbler	4			4
Lesser Whitethroat	3			3
Whitethroat	104		3	107
Grasshopper Warbler	1			1
Sedge Warbler	51			51
Reed Warbler	106		6	112
Wren	30		5	35
Blackbird	3			3
Song Thrush	2			2
Robin	9			9
Redstart	1			1
Duncock	3			3
Meadow Pipit		8		8
Chaffinch	4			4
Goldfinch	9			9
Linnet	1			1
Reed Bunting	74			74
<b>Totals (28 species)</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>586</b>

### Acknowledgements

Access to and continued ringing at Frodsham marsh would not be possible without the support and cooperation of the Peel Group (Manchester Ship Canal), Frodsham and District Wildfowlers and Frodsham Marsh Farm. Thank you all.

## GROUP MEMBERS IN 2011

The Group continues to attract new members and promote the development of existing members. In 2011 the following joined as trainees: Jason Atkinson (joint with SMRG), Danny Norry, Jimmi Hill (for raptors and owls only), Keith Simcock (for a C permit for Barn Owls) and Anna Davies. Members receiving permit advancements include Zoe Houghton (C permit including a pullus endorsement for Swallow and nest box pulli), Lisa Warvill (C permit for nest box pulli and Swallows) and Andrew Duncalf (A permit and training endorsement for Kestrel and Barn, Tawny and Little Owls).

**MRG Patron:** Prof. Franz Barlein **MRG Officers:** Chairman – D Norman; Treasurer – P Coffey; Records Secretary – R Harris; Membership Secretary – K Foster ; Group Archivist – A Ormond; Health and Safety Advisor – A Hitchmough.

### List of members

<i>Full members</i>		C J Williams	Hoylake
S Binney	Higher Bebington	B W Wright	Broxton
J E Birch	Shotton		
J Blundell	Bolton	<i>Trainees</i>	
R P Cockbain	Hale	J Atkinson	Cheadle
P Coffey	Little Sutton	R Brumby	Chester
D P Cross	West Kirby	J Clarke	Warrington
A Davis	Atherton	A Davies	Salford
A Duncalf	Northwich	T Lowe	Liverpool
R Eades	Parkgate	J Hill	Chowley
N Edmonds	Pensby	H Rowland	Bebington
J Elliott	Heswall	K Simcock	Huntington
D Faulkner	Pantymwyn	M Whiteside	Burwardsley
K Foster	St Helens	L Williams	Liverpool
A Garner	Sandiway		
P Guest	Warrington	<i>Country Members</i>	
R Harris	Whixall, Shrops	C Batty	Poulton-le-Fylde
A Hitchmough	West Kirby	C Benson	Co. Galway, Eire
Z Houghton	Sandbach	D Bowman	Lymm
R Leigh	Higher Marston	T Bradshaw	Meols
A M McCreary	Littleton	T Cleeves	Huddersfield
K McNiffe	Eastham	P Fearon	Crosby
S Menzie	Liverpool	A Jones	St Albans
M R Miles	Alderley Edge	H Jones	Mellor, Lancs
D Norman	Sutton Weaver	C Lynch	Anglesey
A Ormond	Bidston	P Morgan	Cardiff
H Pulsford	Great Warford	B Murray	New Romney, Kent
M Rawlins	Oldham	D Okill	Shetland
R D Riley	Great Sankey	S Piner	Preston
A Robinson	Llwynmawr	J Stein	Norway
E Samuels	Bromborough	R Taylor	Huddersfield
P Slater	Speke	P Thompson	Wilmslow
M G Smith	Upton	T Westhead	Chorley
G E Thomason	Widnes	H Williams	Devon
P Triggs	Llanbedr DC	<i>Honorary Member</i>	
L Warvill	Liverpool	I G Main	Cheltenham

Merseyside Ringing Group maintained links with national organisations, including Bob Harris on BTO Council, David Norman on the Rare Breeding Birds Panel and Chris Batty on the British Birds Rarities Committee. Group members also contributed to local conservation organisations including Mersey Estuary Conservation Group, Woolston Eyes Conservation Group, Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Dee Estuary Conservation Group.