

# Bird Ringing at Oxmoor



**The first eight years  
2002-2009**

**Professor David Norman**

## Summary

Oxmoor is an officially-designated Local Nature Reserve, an oasis of wildlife amidst a largely developed landscape. From late-August 2002 to the end of 2009, I have ringed a total of 6,058 birds at the site, of 48 species. Its speciality is the density and variety of warblers, and 2,094 of the ringed birds, more than one-third of the total, were from this family; most visits were in the breeding season and post-breeding period when these species are present. For a small site, with no artificial feeding station, the number of birds ringed is exceptional. 2,159 of them, 36% of the total, have been species of conservation concern (red- or amber-listed) and their status is highlighted in the systematic list below. Many of these are birds of open, damp grassland and early-stage scrub succession; Oxmoor, with an appropriate management regime, provides excellent habitat for them.

This report, intended for non-specialists, briefly summarises some of the findings so far.

There have been three overseas movements of warblers (to France and Morocco), with ten long-distance movements (>100 km) of birds within Britain, most of them being caught by ringers elsewhere: these are listed in full and also depicted on a map. More locally, many of the recoveries have been interchanges with the Woolston Eyes SSSI, east of Warrington and 11 km inland along the Mersey Valley, as well as birds moving to and from other sites within Runcorn. 1,169 of the birds, nearly one-in-five of the total, have been handled on more than one date, providing useful information on site fidelity and longevity.

This report includes a brief breakdown of fat scores, showing how birds accumulate the fuel for their migratory journey. In collaboration with professional ornithologists I am analysing the species composition in relation to the local habitat and the surrounding area. I am especially interested in moult, and developing understanding of ageing and sexing characteristics. Many examples, from birds caught at Oxmoor, are published on the MRG website ([www.merseysiderg.org.uk](http://www.merseysiderg.org.uk)) and acclaimed by ringers elsewhere.

All the data are computerised and submitted to the national database maintained by the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) which organises the British and Irish ringing scheme. The national data are used for a wide variety of scientific and conservation purposes, including calculating longevity and annual survival/ mortality. Data from nests are also deposited with the BTO Nest Records Scheme.

Communication with members of the public is an important aspect of our work. As well as frequent informal conversations with other users of the site and visitors to the area, my annual ringing demonstrations, dubbed 'Lord of the Ringers', have been a popular feature of the Halton BC events programme.

---

**The cover image shows the author on 11 July 2009 with two recently-fledged Cetti's Warblers, the first time this species has been proven breeding in Cheshire, and so far their most northwesterly breeding record ever.**

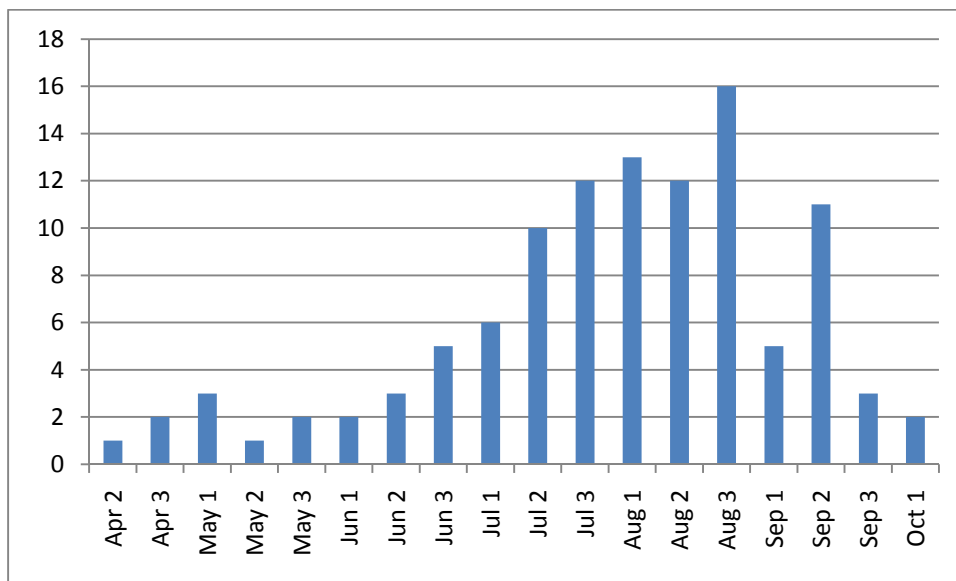
## Ringling Totals

	Full grown	Nestlings	Total
Kestrel	0	22	22
Moorhen	1	0	1
Lapwing	0	2	2
Woodpigeon	2	0	2
Kingfisher	39	0	39
Green Woodpecker	1	0	1
Great Spotted Woodpecker	12	0	12
Sand Martin	527	0	527
Swallow	451	0	451
House Martin	3	0	3
Meadow Pipit	126	0	126
Grey Wagtail	1	0	1
Pied Wagtail	2	0	2
Wren	188	0	188
Dunnock	129	0	129
Robin	189	0	189
Redstart	1	0	1
Wheatear	1	0	1
Blackbird	106	1	106
Song Thrush	65	1	66
Redwing	1	0	1
Cetti's Warbler	7	0	7
Grasshopper Warbler	51	6	57
Sedge Warbler	419	7	426
Reed Warbler	499	15	514
Lesser Whitethroat	5	0	5
Whitethroat	282	8	290
Garden Warbler	26	0	26
Blackcap	369	1	370
Chiffchaff	234	6	240
Willow Warbler	167	0	167
Goldcrest	7	0	7
Long-tailed Tit	120	0	120
Willow Tit	11	0	11
Coal Tit	5	0	5
Blue Tit	206	36	236
Great Tit	124	69	193
Treecreeper	12	0	12
Jay	13	0	13
Magpie	9	0	9
Chaffinch	17	0	17
Greenfinch	77	0	77
Goldfinch	1134	7	1141
Siskin	1	0	1
Linnet	10	6	16
Lesser Redpoll	11	0	11
Bullfinch	55	0	55
Reed Bunting	164	18	182
<b>Total</b>	<b>5880</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>6085</b>

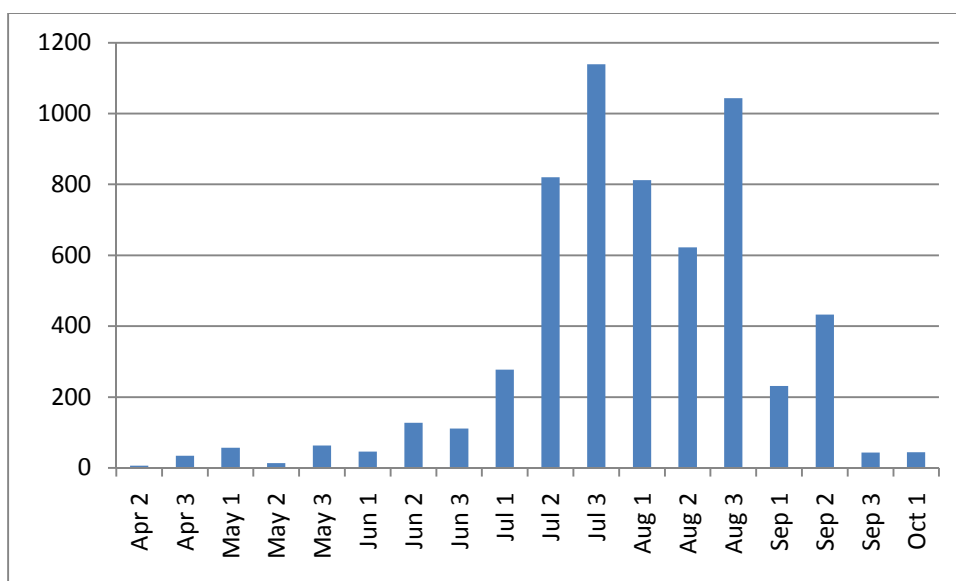
## Ringling effort

After a couple of exploratory visits in August 2002, I started in earnest in 2003 and have now made well over one hundred mist-netting visits to Oxmoor, many of them spanning an evening and the following morning, counted as just one session in the plot below. Apart from fitting around my other commitments, the main determinant of the ringling schedule has been the weather, avoiding rain and wind, with occasional enforced breaks when the site has been unsafe during occupation by trespassers.

Throughout this report it has to be borne in mind that my ringling effort has been unevenly spread and concentrated almost exclusively in the breeding season and, especially, the post-breeding period. One visit in February and two in November are omitted from these plots.



The number of mist-netting visits to Oxmoor LNR in each ten-day period, summed from 2002 to 2009



The total of birds ringed at Oxmoor LNR in each ten-day period, summed from 2002 to 2009

## Position of Oxmoor in its surroundings



The above satellite image, taken from Google Earth<sup>®</sup>, shows the heavily developed setting of the area, with Oxmoor LNR outlined in white in the centre of the image. The importance of the reserve to birds probably arises from its combination of desirable habitats and their position alongside the wildlife corridors of the Manchester Ship Canal and River Mersey.



The second image shows the layout of the site, with the white lines indicating where I have placed mist-nets. Only a few of the net-rides are used on any one visit. Most of the nets are sampling the damp grassland/ reed/ scrub areas, with some occasionally set in the woodland.

## Public ringing demonstrations



The Lord of the Ringers event on 25 July 2004 was held in wet weather, but this did not deter the interested visitors

I regard it as very important to engage members of the public with scientific study and nature conservation. Indeed, Merseyside Ringing Group (which I chair) is a registered charity (no. 700044), operating for the public benefit with its objects ‘to advance the study of ornithology and public education in ornithology and related matters in Merseyside and district’.

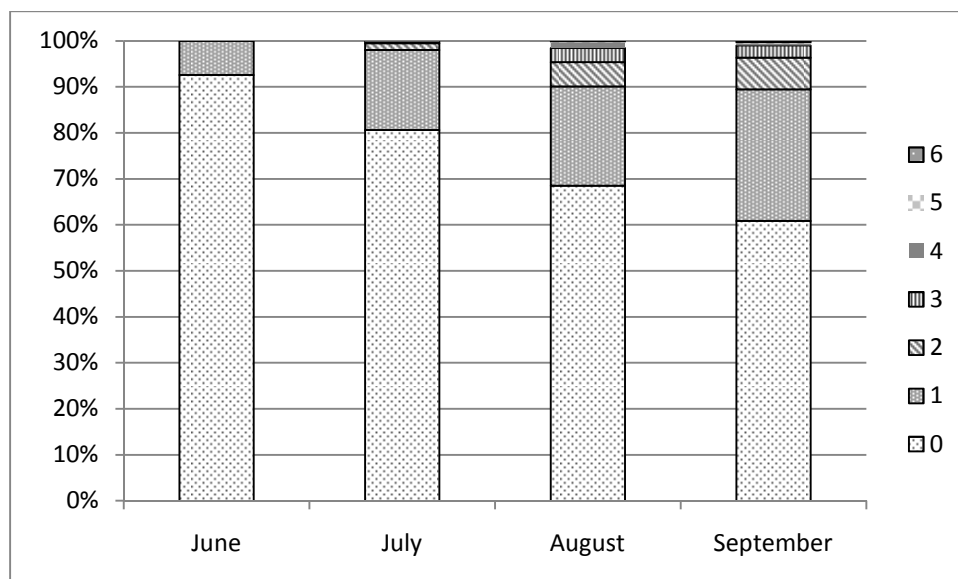
The annual ‘Lord of the Ringers’ event, usually held in July, has been a popular fixture in the Halton BC programme. I am able to assemble a strong team of experienced ringing colleagues to support the event and we usually, weather permitting, increase the number of nets used. As well as a good number, and variety, of warblers, including the skulking ones seldom seen by birdwatchers, the demonstrations have usually been blessed with some of the most spectacular species, such as Kingfisher and Great Spotted Woodpecker, and some of the scarcest birds including Redstart, Cetti’s Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat. The events have attracted repeat visitors and newcomers alike and have drawn many positive comments and good publicity.

## Migratory birds' fat scores/ weights

All birds store fat as their fuel. They have a daily cycle, accumulating some fat to burn overnight to keep themselves warm, so that birds in the evening weigh a few percent more than they do at dawn. But the main need for fat is to power the migratory journey. Some birds, such as Swallows, feed as they go and move relatively short distances each day. But warblers undertake their migration in several long hops, with most of the flying done at night.

In autumn, most migrant birds move gradually to the south coast of Britain and fatten up there before flying to France or Spain, from there crossing the Mediterranean and often the Sahara. So, we tend not to see birds carrying much fat in Cheshire. But some birds do fatten up here, especially if they have been held up by adverse (southerly) winds and later in the migration season when they have less time to undertake the journey.

Ringers assign a fat score to each bird based on a visual assessment of the subcutaneous fat, seen through the birds' semi-transparent skin, on a scale of 0-8. In June and July, most warblers have little fat, scoring 0 or 1. Then, as the season progresses into September, the proportion of fat birds increases as they switch to include a high proportion of energy-rich fruits in their diet, especially blackberries and elderberries. 50 birds were recorded with a fat score of 3 or more: 1 Grasshopper Warbler, 16 Sedge Warblers, 15 Reed Warblers, 8 Whitethroats, 2 Garden Warblers and 8 Blackcaps. The first five species winter south of the Sahara, with most Blackcaps wintering around the Mediterranean.



### Fat scores recorded for warblers at Oxmoor

The accumulation of fat obviously affects the birds' weight, and there are some spectacular examples from Oxmoor of weight gains amongst birds caught more than once. A (fat-free) Whitethroat weighing 13.2 g on 27 August 2009 had added 2.1 g when retrapped three days later. A Reed Warbler caught several times during the breeding season (June-July) at weights of 12.3 to 12.5 g had put on fat to reach 15.3 g on 19 August 2003. A Blackcap was 18.1 g on 13 August 2009, 20.5 g on 25 August 2009 and 21.7 g on 14 September 2009.

## Species accounts

The format of ringing recoveries is that the ringing details are on the first line, with finding information on the second line (and possibly a third line for birds caught more than twice). For the more distant movements, birds are listed in order from north to south.

The age when ringed and method of finding are coded as follows:

- 1 Pullus (nestling or chick)
- 3J Juvenile before post-juvenile moult
- 3 Hatched during calendar year of ringing
- 4 Hatched before the calendar year of ringing
- 5 Hatched during the previous calendar year
- 6 Hatched before the previous calendar year

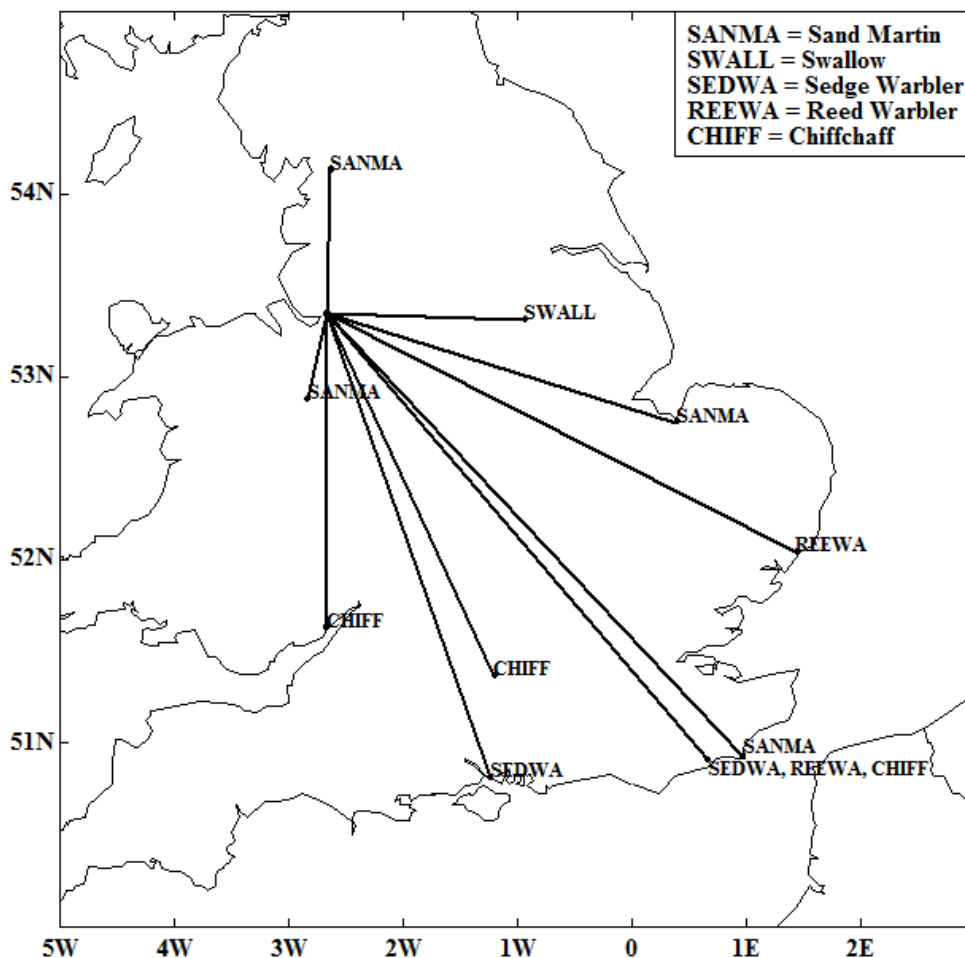
Sex, where determined at time of ringing or finding:

- M male
- F female

Circumstances of finding:

- R Caught and released by a ringer
- X Found dead
- XF Found freshly dead or dying

### UK movements (25 km or more)



Map showing all the longer distance movements of ringed birds to or from Oxmoor.



## **Kestrel**

**Amber-listed**

Kestrels have bred every year in the nest-box on the water pumping station, often visible to the whole world through the HBC webcam. It is quite unusual for a nest-site to be occupied continuously for such a long period.

The chicks were ringed in 2003 (4), 2004 (4), 2005 (4), 2008 (5) and 2009 (5); in 2006 they bred earlier than expected and I missed the suitable ringing date, and in 2007 there was a major shortage of voles, their main prey, and the Kestrels laid eggs but abandoned the breeding attempt.

Samples of their pellets have been collected and proved valuable in education sessions.

One of the fledglings was found dead locally in 2005, a month after leaving the nest.



The 2006 brood of four Kestrel chicks

## **Moorhen**

This species is present throughout the year, breeding in one or more of the waterbodies. In September 2003 one of the first-year birds flew into one of my nets.

## **Lapwing**

**Red-listed**

In 2005 a pair of Lapwings bred on the muddy margins of the newly-created reedbed area. I ringed two chicks but they disappeared before fledging.

## **Woodpigeon**

Woodpigeons are ever-present, but not often caught – they tend to climb out of mist-nets – and just two have been ringed, in July 2004 and August 2008.

## Kingfisher

**Amber-listed**

Kingfishers breed nearby, and in recent years they have become a speciality of the site, with 5 ringed in each of 2006, 2007 and 2008 then an amazing 19 in 2010. They have a nice habit of turning up in nets on the day of the public ringing demonstration.

On 10 May 2004, one of the ringed Kingfishers succumbed to traffic whilst flying across the road above the Bridgewater Canal near the Barge public house. This was the individual whose photograph featured on the front cover of the Oxmoor reserve leaflet. Its sad demise was covered in a press release and picked up by the local media.

More pleasantly, two Kingfishers caught at Oxmoor had been ringed at Woolston one or two months previously. Both sites are alongside the Manchester Ship Canal, their probable route between the sites, and this would have entailed a journey through Warrington Town Centre. Both were first-year birds and this is part of their normal post-juvenile dispersal.

SB12058	3	07.07.2003	Oxmoor	4km 181°
	XF	10.05.2004	Norton, Runcorn	
SB31784	3	25.06.2005	Woolston Eyes, Warrington	11km 250°
	R	23.08.2005	Oxmoor	
SB36565	3F	15.08.2009	Woolston Eyes, Warrington	11km 250°
	R	28.09.2009	Oxmoor	

## Green Woodpecker

**Amber-listed**

Green Woodpeckers probably breed in the adjacent woods and visit Oxmoor, especially Freund Meadow, to feed on ants. They are more often heard than seen, and very seldom caught. The adult male I caught on 8 November 2009 was only the second I have ever ringed, the first being at Woolston on 12 October 1980.

## Great Spotted Woodpecker

Just 12 have been ringed, 10 juveniles and two adults. Interestingly, none of the juveniles has been caught again, but both of the adults were retrapped in a subsequent year. One of these provided a remarkable anniversary record, being ringed at 8 a.m. on 22 August 2006 and netted again exactly three years later, at 8 a.m. on 22 August 2009, but never caught on any other date.



Green Woodpecker

## Sand Martin

**Amber-listed**

Hirundines (Sand Martins and Swallows) feed on flying insects over the damp areas of the reserve, and sometimes gather in large numbers to roost overnight in the *Phragmites* reedbeds, especially those along the Keckwick Brook. Particularly large catches of Sand Martins were made in 2009, with 130 on 24 July 2009, 157 on 25 July 2009 and 158 on 30 July 2009. Details are still awaited of a French-ringed adult bird caught on 25 July 2009.

Sand Martins may wander far and wide before they start their journey to winter in Senegal, such as the bird ringed in Norfolk two weeks before being caught at Oxmoor.

X092973	3J R	14.06.2009 24.07.2009	Near Arkholme, Lancashire Oxmoor	88km 183°
V217966	3J R	09.08.2007 17.08.2007	Oxmoor Woolston Eyes, Warrington	11km 70°
X308425	3J R	25.07.2009 02.08.2009	Oxmoor Woolston Eyes, Warrington	11km 70°
X308610	3J R	30.07.2009 02.08.2009	Oxmoor Woolston Eyes, Warrington	11km 70°
V852255	4 R=F	08.08.2008 25.07.2009	Woolston Eyes, Warrington Oxmoor	11km 250°
V849792	3J R	10.07.2009 24.07.2009	Woolston Eyes, Warrington Oxmoor	11km 250°

X627859	3J	10.07.2009	Near East Winch, King's Lynn, Norfolk	
	R	24.07.2009	Oxmoor	223km 289°
X308493	3J	25.07.2009	Oxmoor	
	R	02.08.2009	Wood Lane, Colemere, Shropshire	54km 194°
X308219	3J	24.07.2009	Oxmoor	
	R	03.08.2009	Dungeness, Kent	367km 138°



Part of the catch of Sand Martins and Swallows at dusk on 27 July 2009

## Swallow

**Amber-listed**

As with Sand Martin, Swallows sometimes roost overnight in the *Phragmites* along the Keckwick Brook. The largest catches of Swallows were made on 3 August 2003 (69 birds), 1 August 2007 (74 birds) and 9 August 2007 (102 birds).

They may also move in odd directions before embarking on their long journey to South Africa: one bird caught at Oxmoor had been ringed in Nottinghamshire two weeks previously.

R414861	3J	03.08.2003	Oxmoor	
	R	08.08.2003	Woolston Eyes, Warrington	11km 70°

X110294	3	08.08.2008	Retford, Nottingham	
	R	22.08.2008	Oxmoor	117km 272°
T276938	1	20.06.2009	Mersey Valley Golf Club, Bold Heath	
	R	25.07.2009	Oxmoor	6km 181°

### **House Martin**

**Amber-listed**

House Martins only occasionally come low enough to be caught, and roost on the wing. The three ringed birds, all juveniles, comprise one on 20 August 2007 and two on 24 July 2009, apparently attracted by the pre-roost gathering of Sand Martins and Swallows.

### **Meadow Pipit**

**Amber-listed**

Meadow Pipits are partial migrants, and a substantial proportion of their population moves south after breeding, from Scotland and northern England and, potentially, from Iceland. They often fly over Oxmoor in September on their southward passage. Ringers elsewhere can have considerable success in catching them by attracting birds with lures of their song, and I have occasionally tried this in recent years. The ringing totals of 3 in 2007, 16 in 2008 and 107 in 2009 reflect this increasing effort. 100 out of the 107 in 2009 were first-year birds.

[http://www.davidnorman.org.uk/MRG/Meadow Pipits.htm](http://www.davidnorman.org.uk/MRG/Meadow%20Pipits.htm)

### **Grey Wagtail**

**Amber-listed**

Grey Wagtails breed annually, somewhere within the sluice area of the pumping station. They are wary birds, and seldom caught, but one juvenile flew into one of my nets on 16 July 2006.

### **Pied Wagtail**

These are similarly difficult to catch, and just two are on the Oxmoor ringing list, juveniles on 4 August 2003 and 8 July 2007.

### **Wren**

These insectivorous residents are short-lived. Seven Wrens ringed as juveniles were retrapped one year later, with 2 retrapped 2 years after first ringing.

### **Dunnock**

**Amber-listed**

Oxmoor holds quite a large population of this declining species. Four Dunnocks ringed as adults were retrapped one year later, with 3 retrapped 2 years later and 2 retrapped 3 years after first ringing; 3 birds ringed as juveniles were retrapped one year later, with 2 retrapped 2 years after first ringing.

## Robin

The 189 Robins ringed have so far provided little information. One bird ringed as an adult was retrapped one year later, and one 2 years after first ringing, and 5 Robins ringed as juveniles were retrapped one year later, with one retrapped 2 years after first ringing

## Redstart

**Amber-listed**

Probably one of the biggest surprises of ringing at Oxmoor was to find a juvenile Redstart in one of my nets, on the day of the Lord of the Ringers event, 25 July 2004. This declining species breeds in upland woods and migrates to West Africa for our winter.



The juvenile Redstart ringed on 25 July 2004

## Wheatear

**Amber-listed**

Another unusual capture was a Wheatear on 29 August 2006, the only Wheatear that I have ever mist-netted anywhere. It was a large male of the race *leucorrhoea*, which breed in Greenland and winter in trans-Saharan Africa.

## Blackbird

The resident Blackbirds are quite good at avoiding, or climbing out of, mist-nets. Four birds ringed as adult males were retrapped one year later, with 2 retrapped 2 years later, one retrapped 3 years later and one retrapped 4 years after first ringing; two birds ringed as adult females were retrapped one year later, with one retrapped 2 years later, one retrapped 5 years later and one retrapped six years after first ringing. Three birds ringed as juveniles were retrapped one year later, one male and 2 females, and one (a male) was retrapped 2 years after first ringing. One bird had previously been ringed at Moore Nature Reserve:

RK02751	6M	31.01.2002	Moore, near Runcorn	
	R	14.07.2003	Oxmoor	2km 230°

## **Song Thrush**

**Red-listed**

In some years I have ringed more Song Thrushes than Blackbirds at Oxmoor, such as 2009, with 26 Song Thrushes and 23 Blackbirds. Nationally, the ratio is approximately 1:5, reflecting the relative scarcity of this red-listed species. There seems to be a reasonable population of snails at Oxmoor, the Song Thrush's favourite food. Two birds ringed as adults were retrapped one year later, and 2 retrapped 2 years after first ringing.

## **Redwing**

**Red-listed**

With my ringing concentrated in the spring-autumn periods, it is not surprising that only one example of this winter visitor has been caught, an adult on 9 November 2009. An attempt to catch roosting Redwings at Oxmoor on 17 February 2009 was unsuccessful: about twenty birds arrived but dropped vertically into the rhododendron scrub and avoided my nets.

## **Cetti's Warbler**

One ringed on 14 September 2008 was the first recorded in Halton, but this was eclipsed in 2009 by a pair that bred at Oxmoor, their first proven breeding in Cheshire and currently the species' most northwesterly breeding ever. Adult male and female were both ringed, with the proof of breeding coming from the capture of three recently-fledged juveniles on 11 July 2009. They were retrapped several times during July-September, with a different first-year female caught on 9 November 2009.

This species has been gradually extending its range to the northwest, probably as a result of climate change. It was first recorded in Cheshire in 1984 when I mist-netted one near Frodsham, but its first breeding has been slow to follow. It is a bird of damp scrubby areas and the habitat at Oxmoor fits the textbook.

## **Grasshopper Warbler**

**Red-listed**

Grasshopper Warbler is one of the specialities of Oxmoor. Up to three or four pairs breed in some years and the damp rough grassland is their favoured habitat. These skulking birds are seldom seen except in the hand. The total of 57 birds ringed comprises 18 adults and 39 juveniles, 6 of which had only recently left the nest and were still classed as nestlings. BTO records show that just 37 were ringed in Cheshire in the four years 2006-09 inclusive, 16 of them at Oxmoor.

Two adult males have been retrapped in the year after ringing, nice examples of site fidelity in this red-listed trans-Saharan migrant.



Grasshopper Warbler

## Sedge Warbler

Sedge Warblers breed in the rank undergrowth and gather on migration in reedbeds, especially feeding on plum-reed aphids *Hyalopterus pruni* on their sporadic outbreaks. There is a pleasing number of year-to-year records of this trans-Saharan migrant. Ten adult males have been retrapped one year later, with 2 retrapped 2 years later; two adult females were retrapped one year later; and two birds ringed as juveniles were retrapped the following year as adult males.

There are a couple of quite quick southerly movements of Oxmoor-ringed birds:

R414821	3J	03.08.2003	Oxmoor	
	R	09.08.2003	Frodsham Marsh, Cheshire	8km 225°
R414911	3J	04.08.2003	Oxmoor	
	R=M	19.06.2004	Woolston Eyes, Warrington	11km 70°
R035492	3J	27.08.2002	Oxmoor	
	R	04.09.2002	Titchfield Haven, Fareham, Hampshire	298km 161°
V638235	3	20.07.2008	Icklesham, Sussex	
	R=M	25.07.2009	Oxmoor	356km 320°
T832195	3J	18.07.2006	Oxmoor	
	R	06.08.2006	Trunvel 47°55'N 4°19'W Finistere France	615km 191°





Adult Sedge Warbler

## Reed Warbler

Most *phragmites* reedbeds in this area, and many elsewhere in Britain and Europe, are frequented by ringers, and Reed Warblers are amongst the longest-lived of the trans-Saharan migrants, so it is to be expected that we have the largest number of recorded movements for this species. The meta-population of the Mersey Valley is fluid: although adult birds tend to be faithful to their chosen breeding site, they may also visit other areas. Young birds often explore a variety of sites.

Many ringed birds have been caught again at Oxmoor in subsequent years. Amongst the adult birds, 13 males were retrapped one year later, 9 retrapped 2 years later, 5 retrapped 3 years later, and 2 retrapped 4 years later. Females tend to wander more, but 7 adult females were retrapped one year later, 5 retrapped 2 years later, 3 retrapped 3 years later, and 1 retrapped 4 years later.

Several young birds have returned in later years. 3 birds ringed as juveniles were retrapped as adult males one year later, with 3 retrapped 2 years later, 3 retrapped 3 years later, 3 retrapped 4 years later and one retrapped 5 years after first ringing. 2 birds ringed as juveniles were retrapped as adult females one year later, with 2 retrapped 2 years later.

R033916	3J R=F	27.07.2002 05.06.2004	Woolston Eyes, Warrington Oxmoor	11km 250°
R802769	3J R	19.07.2004 22.07.2004	Oxmoor Sankey Bridges SF, Warrington	5km 42°

R804963	4M R	23.07.2004 18.06.2005	Woolston Eyes, Warrington Oxmoor	11km 250°
T536029	4M R	13.07.2005 09.06.2006	Oxmoor Sankey Bridges SF, Warrington	5km 42°
N547077	1 R=M	02.07.1998 18.05.2003	Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire Oxmoor	20km 270°
R129181	1 R	01.08.2003 14.09.2003	Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire Oxmoor	20km 270°
R802862	3J R=F	25.07.2004 07.06.2006	Oxmoor Rostherne Mere, Knutsford	20km 91°
T275753	5M R	18.06.2005 24.06.2006	Oxmoor Tabley Mere, near Knutsford, Cheshire	20km 113°
T832449	3J R=F	03.08.2006 06.07.2007	Oxmoor Woolston Eyes, Warrington	11km 70°
T832726	3J R=F	29.08.2006 20.07.2007	Oxmoor Woolston Eyes, Warrington	11km 70°
V385118	4M R	23.07.2007 07.08.2008	Woolston Eyes, Warrington Oxmoor	11km 250°
V217989	3J R=F	11.08.2007 20.07.2008	Woolston Eyes, Warrington Oxmoor	11km 250°
T274045	1J R=F	09.07.2005 16.07.2009	Woolston Eyes, Warrington Oxmoor	11km 250°
V217648	3J R	15.07.2007 09.08.2007	Oxmoor Cauldwell Hall Farm, Hollesley, Suffolk	314km 118°
R267038	3 R=F R	13.09.2003 01.08.2004 08.08.2004	Icklesham, Sussex Oxmoor Oxmoor	356km 320°
T832490	3J R	06.08.2006 01.09.2006	Oxmoor Trunvel 47°55'N 4°19'W Finistere France	615km 191°

## Lesser Whitethroat

As a south-easterly species, wintering in East Africa rather than West Africa like most of our summer visitors, Lesser Whitethroat is scarce in northwest England. It is the rarest of the warblers recorded at Oxmoor, with an average of fewer than one ringed per year. Just five have been caught, all juveniles, one in 2005, one in 2007, one in 2008 and two in 2009. The

first ever recorded at the site was during the Lord of the Ringers event in 2005, with another at the same event in 2009. The one caught on 28 September 2009 was the latest recorded anywhere in Cheshire since 1999.

## **Whitethroat**

**Amber-listed**

There is a significant population of breeding Whitethroats, with even more moving through on autumn passage when they shift their insectivorous diet and feed largely on fruit. There are relatively few retraps in subsequent years but I suspect that is because they are difficult to catch in autumn as the adults moult here before migrating (unlike Grasshopper, Sedge and Reed Warblers) and they do not fly around much when their manoeuvrability is compromised during moult. Five adult Whitethroats were retrapped one year later, and one bird ringed as a juvenile was retrapped the year after ringing. They winter in the Sahel region just south of the Sahara Desert.



Whitethroat juvenile (above) and adult (below) showing the difference in plumage and iris colour. 15 August 2004.

## **Garden Warbler**

Garden Warbler has increased its frequency at Oxmoor: it used to be too scarce to be included on the 'warblers' information board. 26 have been ringed in total, 1 in 2002, 3 in 2004, 7 in 2006, 2 in 2007, 3 in 2008 and 10 in 2009. Most were juveniles but there were 3 adults in 2006, one in 2007 and another three in 2009. None of them has ever been retrapped.

The increasing numbers may be related to local breeding. One or two have sung near the reserve from 2006 onwards, and in 2009 I found a nest.

## Blackcap

This species has provided the most distant record so far of an Oxmoor-ringed bird, with one found dead on the edge of the Atlas mountains in Morocco, in their normal wintering area around the Mediterranean.

T888483	3J	08.07.2006	Sankey Bridges SF, Warrington	
	R	16.07.2006	Oxmoor	5km 222°
T536603	3JM	23.08.2005	Oxmoor	
	R	13.05.2006	Woolston Eyes, Warrington	11km 70°
R675625	4F	14.04.2004	Woolston Eyes, Warrington	
	R	15.07.2007	Oxmoor	11km 250°
V217593	3J	08.07.2007	Oxmoor	
	X	28.02.2009	Afourer 32°20'N 6°20'W Morocco	2354km 188°

One bird ringed as a juvenile was retrapped the year after ringing, with two 2 years after ringing, one after 3 years and another five years after being ringed.

## Chiffchaff



Chiffchaff 3 April 2010

Although we have been fortunate to receive three records of Chiffchaffs caught or found dead on their September migration through southern Britain, there is very little information from Oxmoor-ringed birds retrapped at the site in a subsequent year. There are just three records of birds ringed as adult males being retrapped one, 2 and 3 years after ringing. With nearly half of the Oxmoor grand total ringed in 2009, however, the picture of Chiffchaffs' recurrence and site-fidelity should become clearer in years to come.

AYD629	3JM	30.07.2006	Oxmoor	
	R	26.08.2006	Wigg Island, near Runcorn	2km 260°

AAC294	3F X	26.08.2002 06.05.2003	Oxmoor Kingsley, Frodsham, Cheshire	12km 188°
BHK051	3JM XF	15.07.2007 22.09.2007	Oxmoor Chepstow, Gwent	191km 181°
CHP580	3J R	16.07.2009 20.09.2009	Oxmoor Brimpton Gravel Pit, Berkshire	242km 156°
CHP547	3JM R	16.06.2009 28.09.2009	Oxmoor Icklesham, Sussex	356km 140°

## Willow Warbler

**Amber-listed**

This amber-listed species of conservation concern has been declining rapidly but favours the open scrubby areas which Oxmoor provides. It is unlucky that no Willow Warbler from Oxmoor has yet been reported elsewhere. Three adults have returned to be retrapped in the year after ringing, and one two years later. Two ringed juveniles have been retrapped in later years, one in the year after ringing and one two years later.

## Goldcrest

Goldcrests are really birds of woodland, especially conifers, but odd ones move around with the warblers in late autumn, and on average, one a year is ringed at Oxmoor.

## Long-tailed Tit

These small but noisy birds usually travel around in family parties and often, when one bird gets caught in a mist-net, the rest of its companions turn around and join it. It is not surprising that there are lots of retraps of Long-tailed Tits, and they are quite long-lived for a small, mainly insectivorous, bird. I have 16 records of Oxmoor-ringed birds retrapped one year after ringing, with 5 retrapped two years later, and single birds caught again 4 and 5 years after ringing.

## Willow Tit

**Red-listed**

My recent book *Birds in Cheshire and Wirral: a breeding and wintering atlas* confirms that the Mersey valley is the only area in the county where this red-listed species of conservation concern can be found breeding; indeed this is one of their national strongholds. They excavate their own nesting hole in decaying wood and it is important that some old dead or dying trees are left for it. There is a small breeding population, maybe only one or two pairs, in the vicinity of Oxmoor, and a total of 11 birds has been ringed over the years: 3 in 2003, 2 in 2004, 1 in 2005, 2 in 2006 then 3 in 2009. There are retrap records of two birds, both originally ringed as juveniles, one of them caught in the following year and the other bird caught one, 2 and 3 years later.

## Coal Tit

Similar comments to those made for Goldcrest also apply to Coal Tit. Five have been ringed, amongst them a real oddity, a recently-fledged juvenile on 13 June 2009.

## Blue Tit

Blue Tits breed in the woodland at Oxmoor, and also disperse from breeding sites nearby. They move around within a local area, as shown by three records:

T275763	3J	18.06.2005	Oxmoor	
	R	26.04.2006	Sankey Bridges, Warrington	
	R	30.01.2007	Sankey Bridges, Warrington	5km 42°
T654883	6F	24.06.2006	Oxmoor	
	R	30.01.2007	Sankey Bridges, Warrington	5km 42°

These two birds were caught together on the latter date, probably part of a roaming flock.

X064490	3M	30.10.2008	Norton Priory, Runcorn	
	R	06.09.2009	Oxmoor	

## Great Tit

As with Blue Tit, Great Tits breed in the woodland at Oxmoor. They also disperse within a local area, as shown by two records of birds ringed as chicks in the Oxmoor nest-boxes:

TA62043	1	02.06.2003	Oxmoor	
	R=M	17.01.2004	Near Higher Walton, Warrington	5km 68°
TC15478	1	27.05.2005	Oxmoor	
	R=M	05.03.2006	Norton Priory, Runcorn	

I caught this second bird during a public ringing demonstration at Norton Priory.

## Treecreeper

Twelve Treecreepers have been ringed, all of them juvenile birds. In July 2003, five were caught, all in the same line of nets but a different bird each time on five different dates.

## Jay

The ringing total of 13 Jays belies their true status at Oxmoor, as four of them were ringed from 2003 to 2006, then nine birds (eight juveniles and one adult) in 2009. An adult male ringed in 2005 was also caught in 2006 and 2007.

## Magpie

As with Jay, this species' occurrence at Oxmoor is sporadic. Two were ringed in 2004, one in 2005, two in 2006 then four in 2009. All nine ringed Magpies were juvenile birds.

## Chaffinch

An average of two Chaffinches a year is ringed. An adult male ringed in 2003 was caught again in 2005.

## Greenfinch

Most of the total of 77 Greenfinches were ringed in July-August 2008 (54 birds) when flocks fed on seed provided in feeders on the bund. Birds ringed in earlier years provided two local movements, both being caught by me at other ringing sites:

TB81604	3JF	15.08.2004	Oxmoor	
	R	13.03.2005	Aston, Frodsham, Cheshire	6km 169°
TA62070	6M	07.07.2003	Oxmoor	
	R	02.12.2004	Norton Priory, Runcorn	

## Goldfinch

In the July-September period very large flocks of Goldfinches – perhaps 500 or more birds – gather at Oxmoor to feed on the seeds from knapweed and thistles, leading to this being the most-ringed species with a total of 1141.



Juvenile Goldfinches are drab birds, without the red and white on an adult's head. 15 August 2006

These flocks are overwhelmingly composed of juvenile birds: just 67 of the total were adults. The proportion of adults has decreased year on year, for reasons that I cannot explain. It is well known that adults tend to feed in safer places, close to cover and less vulnerable to

predation by Sparrowhawks and the like, forcing the young birds into more exposed sites, but I do not consider that the danger at this site has changed over the years.

Year	2002-05	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total Goldfinches ringed	184	122	336	284	215
% of juveniles	13.0	5.7	6.5	3.1	2.3

We have had disappointingly little return from ringing these Goldfinches. Nine of them, all ringed as juveniles at Oxmoor, have subsequently been retrapped coming to niger seed in my garden during the winter, 4.5 km away. There have been no long-distance movements and just the following three individuals found dead locally.

T156344	3J	19.08.2004	Oxmoor	
	X	16.05.2005	Ashton-in-Makerfield, Gtr Manchester	15km 9°
X572179	3J	27.08.2009	Oxmoor	
	XF	20.11.2009	Murdishaw, Runcorn	4km 164°
X572348	3JF	10.09.2009	Oxmoor	
	XF	11.12.2009	Runcorn, Cheshire	3km 231°

## Siskin

One Siskin has been ringed, on 20 September 2008, feeding with the few Goldfinches remaining by that date.

## Linnet

**Red-listed**

Linnets only rarely seem to be present at Oxmoor. On 18 June 2005 I caught a pair of Linnets and a recently-fledged juvenile, and later found what might have been the second nest of that pair, in an unusual situation, near the ground in a tussock of sedge: the four chicks were ringed on 13 July and duly fledged.

Five were mist-netted on 8/ 9 November 2009. I had never previously ringed at Oxmoor in November and perhaps Linnet flocks are regular at that time of year.

## Lesser Redpoll

**Red-listed**

Lesser Redpolls have only been caught on three occasions at Oxmoor, single birds on 14 July 2003 and 6 September 2009, then a flock of nine together on 9 November 2009.



## Bullfinch

**Amber-listed**

Pleasingly for a species of conservation concern, the local Bullfinch population appears to have increased recently: of the total of 55 ringed, 32 of them were in the last two years, 2008 and 2009. Unusually for a passerine, Bullfinches often stay together as a pair throughout the year, and they often fly around together. My records show 37 handlings of adult Bullfinches at Oxmoor (including birds already ringed previously): on ten occasions a male and female were caught together, accounting for 20 of these 37 birds. An adult male ringed in 2005 was caught again in 2008.



Male and female Bullfinches

## Reed Bunting

**Amber-listed**

This is one of the characteristic birds of Oxmoor, with several pairs breeding in the rank vegetation of the settling lagoon, and the species appears as a logo on the interpretative board at the reserve entrance. I have invested some effort over the years in finding nests, resulting in 18 chicks ringed and records of a number of other nests that failed. The most fascinating record of Reed Bunting is a bird I ringed as a chick in a nest in 2004 at a pond on the other side of Sandymoor, caught nine weeks later at Oxmoor, just over 1 km away.

Many Reed Buntings, especially the females, who are smaller and less hardy, move farther south in Britain for the winter but the 182 birds ringed at Oxmoor have not so far yielded any movements elsewhere.

Amongst the retraps, three birds ringed as adults have been caught in the year after ringing, with two 2 years after ringing, and another four years after being ringed. Three ringed as juveniles have been caught in the following year.

T464925	5M	14.01.2006	Moore, Cheshire	
	R	08.07.2007	Oxmoor	3km 75°
R802496	1	26.05.2004	Near Bog Wood, Sandymoor	
	R=M	01.08.2004	Oxmoor	



Adult male Reed Bunting 4 June 2009

---

## Acknowledgments

Above all, I must thank Jeff Clarke and other members of Halton Borough Council for permission to ring at the site and for organising the Lord of the Ringers events. Members of the Halton Natural Environment Round Table have also shown interest in the bird ringing as part of their support for biological recording in Halton.

I am grateful to my colleagues in Merseyside Ringing Group, especially for help with the public ringing demonstrations.

Finally, I acknowledge the numerous dog-walkers, unknown to me by name, who have shown an interest in my work and usually have diverted their route to avoid my nets.