



**MERSEYSIDE
RINGING
GROUP**



**Annual Report
2012**

MERSEYSIDE RINGING GROUP

Registered Charity No 700044

www.merseysiderg.org.uk

Report Editor: Peter Coffey



Cover photo: The first-ever Cetti's Warbler nest found in Cheshire, photographed under a Schedule 1 Licence by Richard Castell ©.

Ringling pulli is a very important part of MRG's activities. This is just one of the 964 nests for which nest record data was submitted by MRG to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), making MRG one of the biggest contributors to the scheme. Records from open-nesting passerines such as the Cetti's Warbler are particularly encouraged.

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: All pages except the cover are in black-and-white. A number of articles contain photographs that would be much better viewed in colour and would help the appreciation of the articles (eg. Quail and Chiffchaff articles). This report will be available in full-colour on the MRG website from mid-November 2013.

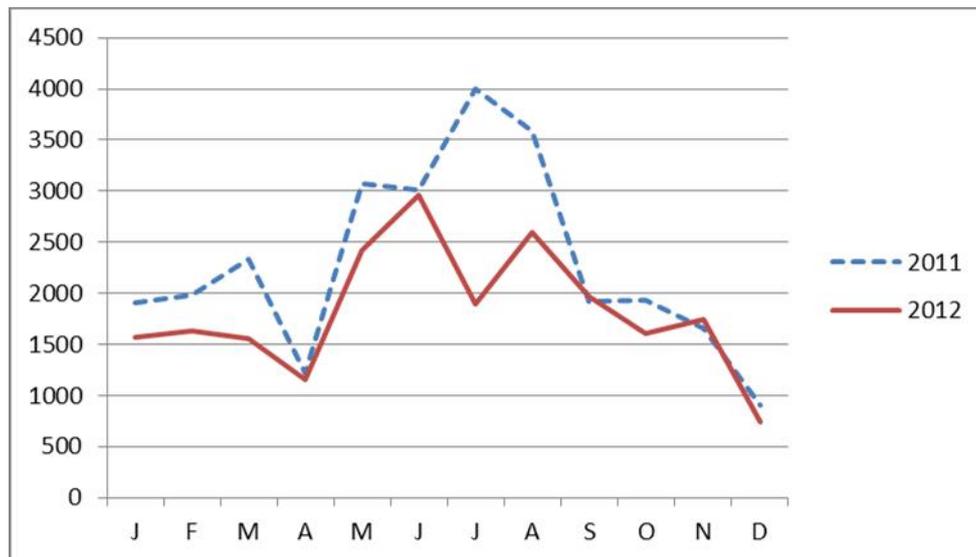
RECORDS SECRETARY'S REPORT

Bob Harris

One hundred and ninety-nine and counting – the Group is just short of 200 species ringed with Quail being added as a new species this year (from Rixton Moss, Cheshire in July). Whatever the origins of some of these species, including historical trips outside of our current ringing area, they are all still part of the Group's history. One wonders what species the 200th will be?

This year will also be memorable for other reasons, in particular the weather, which reduced our ringing totals to levels last seen in 2007 and 2008, and before that 2002. March was the warmest since 1957, April the coldest since 1989 and, more appreciably, the wettest on record, with rainfall being 176% of normal. In May rainfall was near average and, towards the end of the month, sunshine levels were 10-20% above normal. The worst was still to come – June was the wettest across England since 1766 and July had rainfall 150% above normal. Autumn (Sept-Nov) was also the wettest since 2000. All of this together conspired to make ringing, and even the planning for ringing, an extremely frustrating activity.

A quick analysis via IPMR shows that the group still ringed birds on approximately the same number of days in 2012 as it did in 2011 – so we were still getting out. But a comparison of monthly totals shows that in only five months did 2012 totals reach similar numbers to 2011 with the others all showing reduced returns on birds processed for 2012. The difference of 2000 birds ringed in July is particularly striking.



Further analysis by age indicated that, for pullus, we ringed 8.5% less birds in 2012 than 2011, something that could be written off as seasonal variation. For free-flying birds, we ringed 25.3% less. Whether this indicates less birds about or we just weren't catching them because of the weather only time will tell.

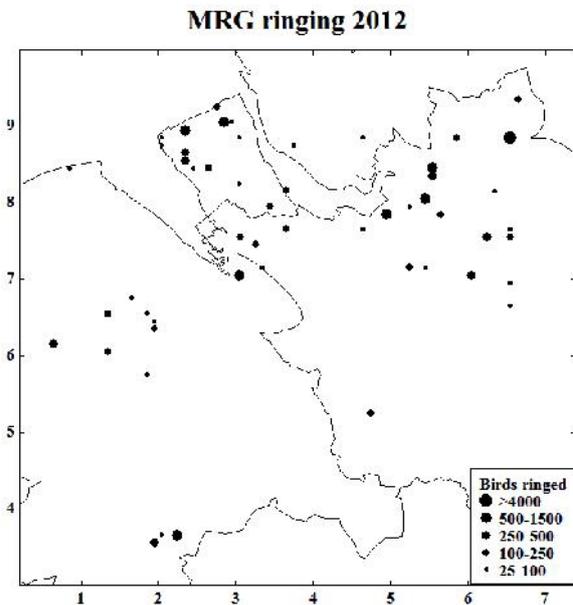
Looking at the annual totals in more detail some species made welcome returns to the annual list. Three Bar-tailed Godwits are worth a particular mention; all three were caught at the same event at Hoylake in October and were last caught by the Group in 2004. Other returns were Yellow-browed Warbler (last ringed in 2007), Black-headed Gull (2009) and both Dipper and Tree Pipit (2010).

Explanation for any decreases in ringing totals is difficult as it could be due to any one of a number of variables e.g. effort, weather etc. Of interest though are the apparent increases – particularly of Goldcrest and Barn owl. This year we ringed 643 Goldcrest, with the peaks being March (104), October (193) and November (224). In 2010 and 2011 totals were only 318 and 326 respectively, with 142 in 2009 and another 655 in 2008. March, October and November are always the peak catching months – clearly our weather here did not affect their breeding elsewhere. More perplexing is the pullus results for Barn Owl – the specialists managed to ring over 400 pulli (almost 50% more than in 2011) *even* in the presence of our atypical weather.

Ten species reached nominal thresholds this year. At the lower end 200 Little Owl have now been ringed, as well as 700 Lesser Whitethroat. At the other end of the scale Chaffinch broached 27000 now ringed, with Long-tailed Tit at 11000 and Chiffchaff at 10000. Others were Sparrowhawk and Lesser Redpoll at 1500, Barn Owl 3000, Goldcrest 7000 and Siskin 8000.

Siskin dropped out of the annual Top Ten, replaced by Goldcrest which last appeared in the Top Ten in 2008. As is the norm, Blue Tit and Great Tit were at one and two, with the finches Green, Gold and Chaff at three, four and six, the first two having moved up three places and Chaffinch two places on last year. To make room Blackcap (one place) and Reed Warbler (two places) both fell.

One hundred selected controls and recoveries are presented this year covering 33 species. They report fifteen MRG-ringed birds controlled overseas and five foreign-ringed birds recorded or controlled here. Some of these birds recorded other events – the 10th ever BTO-ringed Grey Heron to Spain and the second BTO-ringed Kingfisher to the Netherlands. An Oystercatcher, controlled within the UK, proved to be MRG’s oldest record for this species.



Thirty-one members hold ‘ring-sets’(with 1247 active ring-strings) and are actively ringing. Omitting Barn Owl ringing, and single records for pulli at individual locations, these members undertook ringing at 104 sites this year, similar to 2011. Last year six sites returned greater than 1000 new birds ringed. This year, because of the weather, only three sites reached this threshold – Woolston (Bed No 1 (1643) and Bed No 3(2625)) and Oxmoor Wood (1472). Elsewhere the following sites returned more than 500 new birds ringed – Meols (942), Llwynmawr (802), Bidston (668), Sutton Weaver (661), Shotton (620) and Frodsham (583).

Finally, the group again contributed records to the Nest Record scheme and submitted two sets of RAS data (both Pied Flycatcher at Glyn Arthur and Prion). Group records were also sent to CAWOS, Lancashire & Cheshire Fauna Society, rECOrd and Merseyside Biobank, the latter two as part of the National Biodiversity Network.

GRAND TOTALS 2012

<u>Species</u>	<u>Adult</u>	<u>Pullus</u>	<u>Total</u>
92	14060	3067	17127

GRAND TOTALS SINCE 1954

<u>Species</u>	<u>Total</u>
199	748339

NEW SPECIES IN 2012

Quail

TOP TEN SPECIES RINGED IN 2012

Species	Number ringed	% of yearly total
Blue Tit	2464	14.4
Great Tit	1589	9.30
Greenfinch	944	5.50
Goldfinch	784	4.60
Blackcap	770	4.48
Chaffinch	766	4.46
Reed Warbler	691	4.03
Swallow	662	3.86
Goldcrest	643	3.74
Chiffchaff	639	3.73
Totals	9952	58.1

Ringing Totals 2012

Taxonomic order and nomenclature based on BTO Ringing reports

Species	Adult	Pullus	Total	Total since 1954
Mute Swan				762
Whooper Swan				1
Greylag Goose				1
Canada Goose				162
Shelduck				75
Mandarin Duck				10
Gadwall				7
Teal				1627
Mallard	13	3	16	1182
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	1693
Little Grebe				17
Great Crested Grebe				3
Marsh Harrier				5
Hen Harrier				1
Goshawk				3
Sparrowhawk	15	4	19	1512
Buzzard		1	1	209
Rough-legged Buzzard				1
Kestrel	3	71	74	1382
Merlin				12
Hobby				2
Peregrine		4	4	74
Quail	1		1	1
Water Rail	4		4	156
Spotted Crake				4
Corncrake				1
Moorhen	11		11	938
Coot	3		3	64
Oystercatcher	4	3	7	2684
Avocet				6
Little Ringed Plover		4	4	175
Ringed Plover		9	9	1307
Golden Plover				186
Grey Plover	1		1	31
Lapwing		16	16	2857
Knot	68		68	5360

Species	Adult	Pullus	Total	Total since 1954
Sanderling				3967
Little Stint				111
Pectoral Sandpiper				4
Curlew Sandpiper				44
Purple Sandpiper				1
Dunlin	3		3	22522
Buff-breasted Sandpiper				1
Ruff				77
Jack Snipe				108
Snipe	3		3	635
Woodcock				11
Black-tailed Godwit				19
Bar-tailed Godwit	3		3	193
Whimbrel				6
Curlew				351
Common Sandpiper				126
Green Sandpiper				9
Spotted Redshank				1
Greenshank				13
Wood Sandpiper				7
Redshank	3		3	4123
Turnstone				1125
Kittiwake				276
Black-headed Gull	2		2	6179
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		36	36	1057
Black Tern				3
Sandwich Tern				37
Common Tern				17472
Roseate Tern				1376
Arctic Tern				1583
Guillemot				242
Razorbill				57
Puffin				42
Stock Dove	4	20	24	341
Woodpigeon	24	111	135	2853
Collared Dove	16	1	17	956
Turtle Dove				13
Cuckoo				37
Barn Owl	42	417	459	3001
Little Owl	3	10	13	203
Tawny Owl	2	14	16	396
Long-eared Owl				53
Short-eared Owl				8
Nightjar				5
Swift	34		34	7746

Species	Adult	Pullus	Total	Total since 1954
Kingfisher	4		4	239
Hoopoe				1
Green Woodpecker				44
Great Spotted Woodpecker	58		58	1185
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker				21
Woodchat Shrike				1
Magpie	16	5	21	1124
Jay	44	2	46	887
Jackdaw	4	28	32	369
Rook	1		1	613
Carrion Crow	2	20	22	426
Raven				31
Goldcrest	643		643	7605
Firecrest	11		11	83
Blue Tit	1674	790	2464	82893
Great Tit	1103	486	1589	44276
Coal Tit	242	11	253	6409
Willow Tit	41		41	1345
Marsh Tit				174
Bearded Tit				42
Woodlark				1
Skylark				831
Shore /Horned Lark				1
Sand Martin	67		67	18893
Swallow	437	225	662	76383
House Martin	13		13	2731
Cetti's Warbler	1		1	31
Long-tailed Tit	481	15	496	11450
Arctic Warbler				1
Pallas's Leaf Warbler				2
Yellow-browed Warbler	1		1	7
Bonelli's Warbler				1
Wood Warbler	1		1	460
Chiffchaff	610	29	639	10272
Willow Warbler	337		337	17980
Blackcap	759	11	770	13657
Garden Warbler	53		53	1418
Barred Warbler				1
Lesser Whitethroat	7		7	704
Whitethroat	238	6	244	8356
Grasshopper Warbler	13	1	14	569
Icterine Warbler				1
Aquatic Warbler				3
Sedge Warbler	155	3	158	13370
Blyth's Reed Warbler				1
Marsh Warbler				5
Reed Warbler	677	14	691	17640
Waxwing	7		7	53
Nuthatch	48	21	69	1975
Treecreeper	33	6	39	1071
Wren	328	10	338	11959
Starling	161		161	17521

Species	Adult	Pullus	Total	Total since 1954
Dipper		6	6	511
Ring Ouzel				53
Blackbird	551	51	602	29955
Fieldfare	1		1	1521
Song Thrush	104	7	111	6771
Redwing	55		55	5705
Mistle Thrush				860
Spotted Flycatcher	1		1	554
Robin	510	16	526	14775
Nightingale				2
Bluethroat				3
Red-breasted Flycatcher				2
Pied Flycatcher	87	407	494	22621
Black Redstart				1
Redstart	4	28	32	1224
Whinchat				1695
Stonechat				293
Wheatear	1		1	1696
Duncock	293	10	303	12961
House Sparrow	56	17	73	3298
Tree Sparrow	1	67	68	6184
Yellow Wagtail				1877
Grey Wagtail	3	7	10	950
Pied/White Wagtail	2	14	16	2552
Tree Pipit	5		5	121
Meadow Pipit	32		32	2400
Rock Pipit				116
Water Pipit				1
Chaffinch	759	7	766	27265
Brambling	49		49	7688
Greenfinch	944		944	48691
Serin				1
Goldfinch	780	4	784	10847
Siskin	509		509	8344
Linnet	16	4	20	11931
Twite				86
Lesser Redpoll	221		221	1510
Common Redpoll	1		1	2
Redpoll sp.	6		6	3406
Common Crossbill				36
Bullfinch	309	2	311	5595
Hawfinch				1
Snow Bunting				37
Yellowhammer	1		1	1256
Little Bunting				1
Reed Bunting	227	11	238	19285
Corn Bunting				304
Totals	14060	3067	17127	748339

SELECTED CONTROLS AND RECOVERIES 2012

Peter Coffey

A selection of 100 records from 33 species is shown below. Fifteen MRG-ringed birds were recorded from five European countries (Iceland, Finland, The Netherlands, France, and Spain) and five foreign-ringed birds (one each from Norway, Lithuania, Germany, Belgium and France) were recorded or controlled here. Seven old records notified to the Group in the last twelve months are included. Two are very old (a Sand Martin from 1996 and a French-ringed Reed Warbler from 2002), one is from 2010 and four are from 2011.

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

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:

BLB Belgium, Brussels DEW Germany, Wilhelmshaven FPR France, Paris
LIK Lithuania, Kaunas NOS Norway, Stavanger

Grey Heron

1296576 1 (2/2) 26.04.2009 Keckwick, Runcorn, Cheshire
XL 24.02.2012 Carral 43°13'N 8°21'W La Coruna
SPAIN 1200km 201°

Skeleton only found. This is MRG's fourth overseas Grey Heron recovery after others to Iceland, Denmark and Ireland, and is the 10th ever BTO-ringed Grey Heron found in Spain.

Sparrowhawk

DK83238	1M (6/6)	06.07.2006	Allerton, Liverpool, Merseyside	
	XF	27.09.2012	Hunts Cross, Speke, Liverpool, Merseyside	3km 91°

Kestrel

EG82336	1 (6/6)	19.06.2012	Near Chester Business Park, Cheshire	
	XF	16.08.2012	Lowton, Warrington (Killed by cat)	43km 34°

Oystercatcher

FV08658	3	23.09.1979	Point of Ayr, Flintshire	(11864 days)
	XF	17.03.2012	Silecroft Beach, Cumbria	95km 360°

This is the oldest MRG record for Oystercatcher: 32 years, 5 months, 23 days. The BTO longevity record is currently one ringed as a pullus on the Wash in 1970 and retrapped there in 2010, after 40 years, 1 month, 2 days.

FP41767	1	18.05.2012	Stanlow, Cheshire	
	R	13.10.2012	Llanfairfechan, Conwy	76km 268°

Redshank

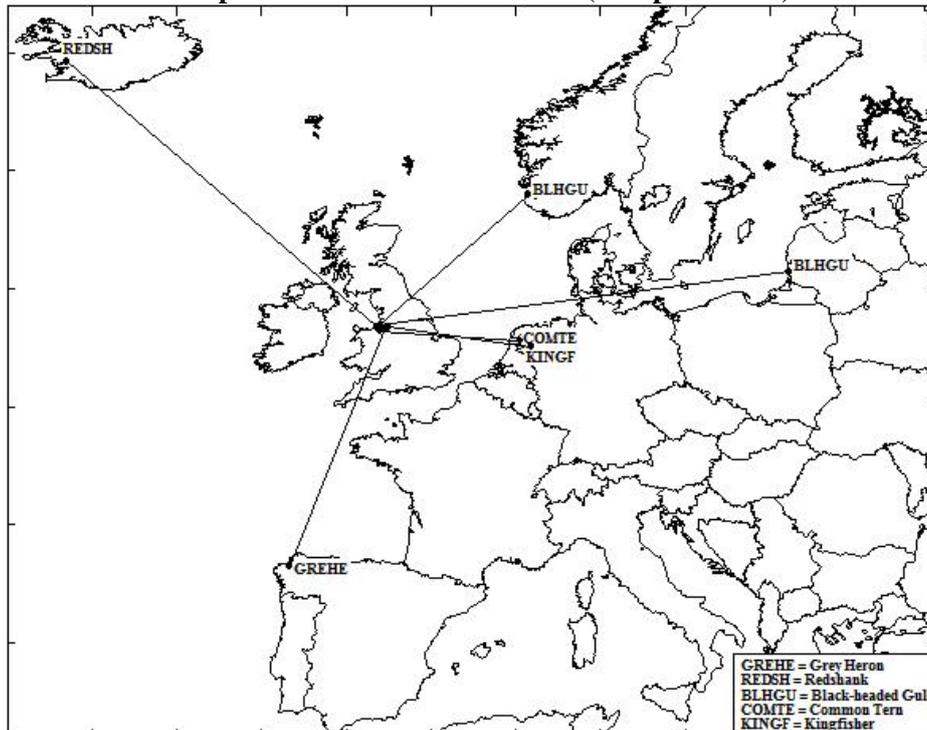
DN26967	4	09.09.1999	Hoylake, Wirral, Merseyside	(4674 days)
	XF	26.06.2012	Borganes 64°39'N 21°30'W Mýrasýsla ICELAND (caught in a fishing trap)	1625km 321°

Black-headed Gull

ES26819	6	11.03.1995	Moss Side Farm, Risley, Warrington	(6281 days)
	X	21.05.2012	Salt End, Kingston upon Hull, East Yorks	154km 78°

NOS 6227790	8M	10.07.2012	Breiavatnet, Stavanger 58°58'N 5°44'E Rogaland, NORWAY	
	RR	16.12.2012	Ashton Park, West Kirby, Wirral	831km 222°

LIK HA13171	8M	31.03.2010	Klaipeda-Siaure 55°43'N 21°08'E, LITHUANIA	
	RR	05.12.2012	New Brighton, Wirral, Merseyside	1577km 261°

European recoveries and controls (non-passerines)

Common Tern

SR24984	1	10.07.2005	Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire	
	R	21.07.2012	Wervershoof, De Kreupel 52°47'N 5°13'E	555km 95°
SR65423	1	29.06.2008	Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire	
	RR	30.06.2012	Preston Dock, Preston, Lancashire	63km 19°
SR50686	1	24.06.2007	Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire	
	V	04.06.2012	Preston Dock, Lancashire	63km 19°

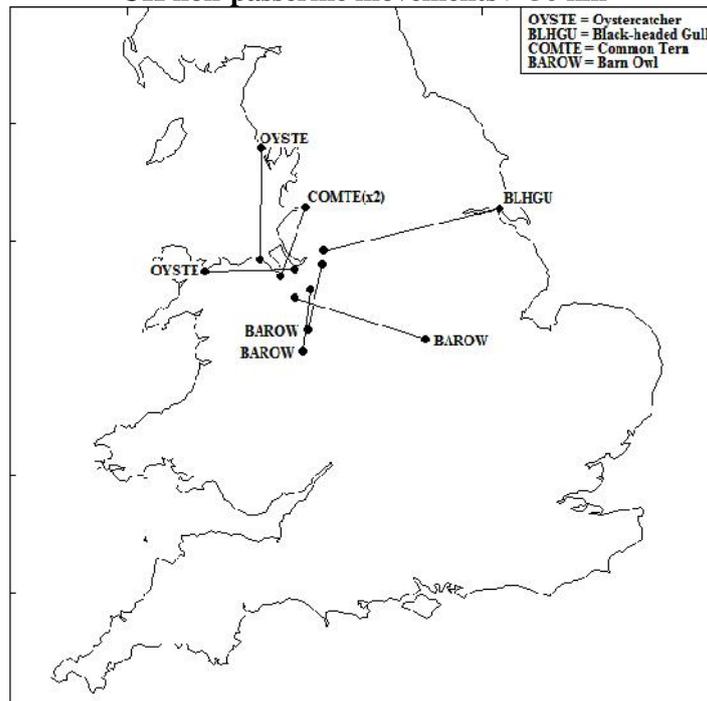
The Preston Dock colony has expanded in recent years, perhaps as part of the displacement of breeding terns from Shotton. Breeding was first attempted in 2009 by two pairs (one successful) and this increased to 30 pairs in 2012.

Barn Owl

GF20797	1 (3/3)	19.06.2004	Childer Thornton, Cheshire SJ3677	
	XF (=F)	14.09.2012	Parkgate Road, Burton, Cheshire SJ3377	3km 270°
GC78505	1F (3/3)	16.07.2009	Caldecott Farm, Caldecott, Cheshire	
	XF	24.05.2012	Exact location unknown, Leicestershire	c120km 108°
Railway casualty – found on the front of a train				
GC51815	1F (2/2)	22.06.2009	Hall Farmhouse, Ince, Cheshire	
	SR	26.11.2012	near Berkeley Towers, Cheshire	36km 134°
This owl was eventually released after 20 days convalescence on 15.12.2012.				
GC78986	1 (4/4)	12.06.2011	near Bunbury Heath, Cheshire	
	XF	24.06.2012	Condover, near Shrewsbury, Shropshire	53km 187°
GC78946	1M (3/3)	04.07.2011	Mickley Hall Farm, Broomhall, Cheshire	
	R	07.05.2012	Tan House Farm, Cheshire	31km 344°
GR25578	1 (3/3)	01.06.2012	Pools Platt Farm, Cheshire	
	XF	21.12.2012	Preston Brockhurst, Shropshire	57km 192°

Bird found in dry water trough in shed.

UK non-passerine movements > 50 km



Kingfisher

SB36918	3	24.06.2011	No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	
	R	12.05.2012	Wilsum, Kampen, 52°32'N 5°56'E, Overijssel, THE NETHERLANDS	575km 96°

Kingfishers rarely travel far with most movements being local. Occasionally reports are received of birds that have crossed the sea and this is only the second BTO Kingfisher to be reported from The Netherlands.

Carrion Crow

FH27313	1 (5/5)	19.05.2011	Halewood, Merseyside	
	+F	31.03.2012	Alvanley, Cheshire	12km 159°

Goldcrest

DTP586	3M	22.10.2012	Filey, North Yorkshire	
	R	18.11.2012	Norton Priory, Runcorn, Cheshire	185km 238°

DJV194	3F	18.10.2011	Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	
	XF	19.11.2012	near Mold, Flintshire	27km 203°

EBH984	3M	03.11.2012	Norton Priory, Runcorn, Cheshire	
	R	17.11.2012	Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	28km 286°

Blue Tit

T275237	6M	28.01.2005	Norton Priory, Runcorn, Cheshire	2616 days
	XF	27.03.2012	Runcorn, Cheshire	0km

Sand Martin

F388059	4M	02.06.1989	Newchurch Common, Cheshire	2557 days
	R	02.06.1996	Cookson Green, Cheshire	7km 330°

We occasionally receive "old" records and this one hasn't appeared in MRG reports before. From 1,194,170 BTO-ringed Sand Martins F388059 has the fourth-longest period between ringing and recapture/recovery, and is actually the oldest bird as the other three were ringed as first-years.

X931923	3J	08.08.2010	Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire	
	R	17.04.2011	Estanca Escoron, Ejea de Los Caballeros, 42°02'N 1°12'W, Zaragoza, SPAIN	1263km 175°

Swallow

Y380913	1 (6/6)	17.06.2012	New Pale, Manley, Cheshire	
	R	18.08.2012	Betley Mere, Betley, Staffordshire	33km 138°

Cetti's Warbler

L408874	2F	20.11.2010	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	
	R (=3)	21.10.2012	Rye Meads, Hertfordshire	249km 137°
	R (=3)	03.11.2012	Rye Meads, Hertfordshire	249km 137°

The article on this species in the MRG Annual Report 2009 commented that aging can be quite tricky. The recapture details for this bird proves the point; at least two years old at recapture, it was aged as a first-year.

Long-tailed Tit

DJT379	3J	01.06.2011	Meols, Wirral, Merseyside	
	R	13.11.2012	Deeside Industrial Park, Flintshire	20km 150°

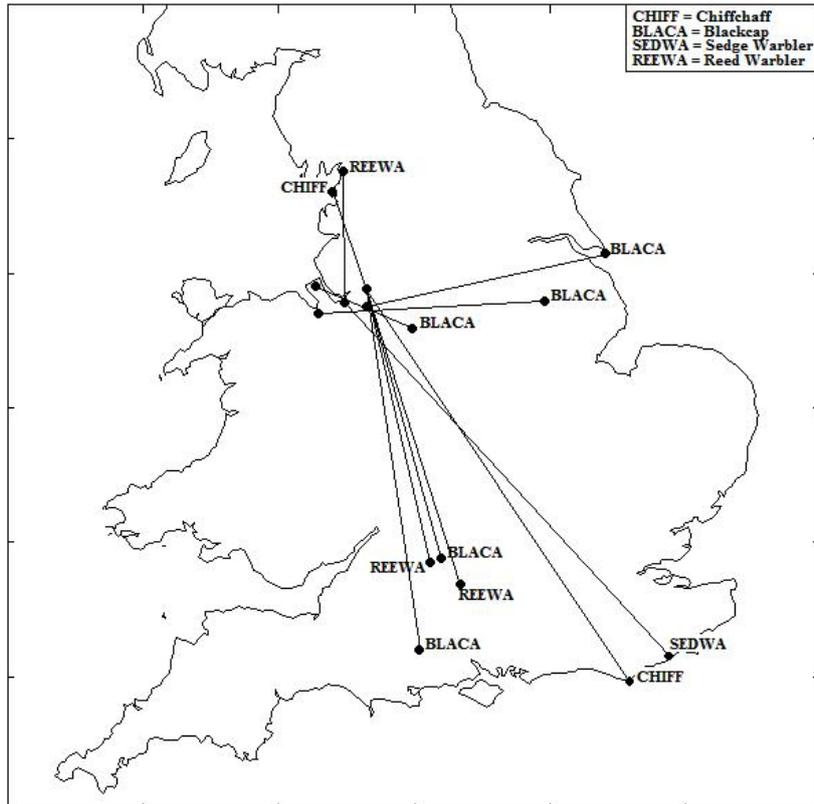
CHT003	2	19.09.2010	Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire	
	R	02.04.2012	Meols, Wirral, Merseyside	20km 341°

Chiffchaff

DJV284	3	17.09.2011	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	
	X	03.05.2012	West Kirby, Wirral, Merseyside	44km 268°

DJV360	4 R (=M)	31.03.2012 10.06.2012	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington Heysham Harbour, Lancashire	77km 341°
DJP295	2 R (=F)	16.09.2010 25.07.2012	Beachy Head, East Sussex No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	351km 328°
CHN177	3J R	04.07.2009 07.04.2010	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington Aduard, Zuidhom, 53°15'N 6°26' E Groningen, THE NETHERLANDS	596km 92°

UK warbler movements > 70km

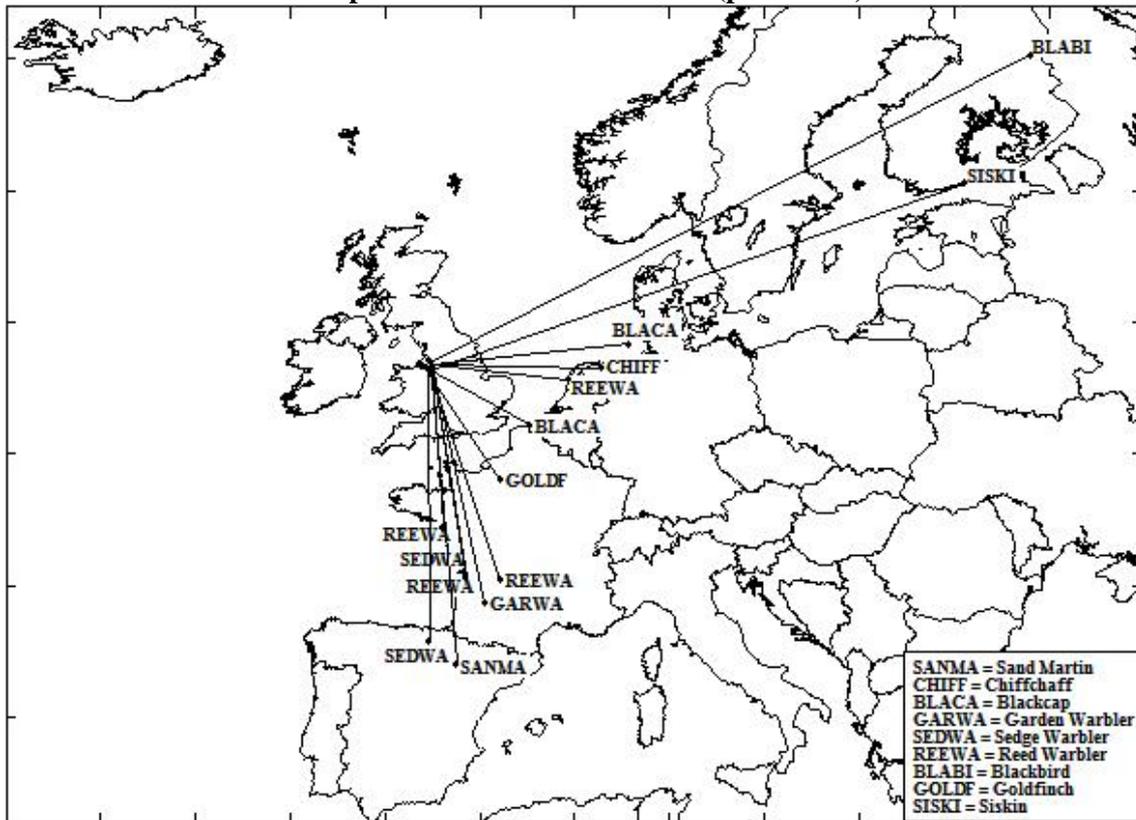


Blackcap

Y373779	3M R	20.10.2011 28.07.2012	Kilnsea Clays, East Riding of Yorkshire Anderton NP, Northwich, Cheshire	180km 259°
L867378	3 X	30.07.2011 14.05.2012	Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire RAF Scampton, Lincolnshire	166km 87°
Y382227	4F R	07.05.2012 16.05.2012	Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside Tittesworth Reservoir, Staffordshire	(9 days) 77km 113°
L408016	3M R	28.08.2010 12.04.2012	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington Nr South Marston, Swindon, Wiltshire	208km 165°
Y616697	3J R(M)	05.07.2012 01.09.2012	Martin Down, Hampshire No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	270km 352°
DEW 90145832	5F R	13.04.2012 13.10.2012	Helgoland 54°10'N 7°55'E, GERMANY No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	692km 263°

BLB 12170106 (re-ringed L636998) R	3M	11.09.2011	Koksijde 51°06'N 2°39'E West-Vlaanderen, BELGIUM	
		13.05.2012	Meols, Wirral, Merseyside	469km 303°
Garden Warbler				
Y384269	3J	04.08.2012	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	(17 days)
	R	21.08.2012	La Maziere, Villeton 44°21'N 0°16'E Lot-et-Garonne, FRANCE	1025km 169°
Sedge Warbler				
Y004226	3	08.08.2011	Icklesham, East Sussex	
	R	26.07.2012	Frodsham Marsh, Cheshire	355km 319°
V849204	3J	26.07.2008	No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	
	R	21.08.2011	Conchemarche, Mortagne-sur-Gironde, 45°29'N 0°47'W Charente-Maritime, FRANCE	887km 172°
L406419	4	08.08.2010	Frodsham Marsh, Cheshire	
	R(F)	29.08.2011	Salburua, Vitoria-Gasteiz 42°51'N 2°38'W Alava, SPAIN	1162km 180°
Reed Warbler				
L850033	3J	28.06.2011	Myerscough, Lancashire	
	R	19.05.2012	Meols, Wirral, Merseyside	57km 207°
Y763712	3	07.08.2012	Leighton Moss, near Silverdale, Lancashire	
	R	26.08.2012	Frodsham Marsh, Cheshire	97km 179°
Y112185	3	21.08.2011	Betley Mere, Betley, Staffordshire	
	R (=F)	14.07.2012	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	42km 47°
Y384935	3	22.09.2012	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	
	R	06.10.2012	Sewage T'ment Wks, Swindon, Wiltshire	208km 167°
L115169	3J	30.07.2010	No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	
	R	11.05.2012	Harvey's Meadow, nr Hungerford, West Berkshire	230km 163°
Y155306	3J	19.08.2011	No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	
	R	07.07.2012	Zwanenwater, Sint Maartensvlotbrug 52°48'N 4°41'E Noord-Holland THE NETHERLANDS	486km 982°
7th July is the heart of the breeding season for Reed Warblers and it is tempting to think that this British-bred bird has switched countries.				
FRP 4332907	3	18.09.1998	Le Massereau, Frossay 47°14'N 1°55'W Loire- Atlantique, FRANCE	
	R	31.08.2002	Woolston Eyes, Warrington, Cheshire	685km 357°
V381975	3J	01.08.2009	No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	
	R	22.08.2012	Braud et Saint Louis 45°16'N 0°41'W Gironde, FRANCE	912km 172°
L871920	4	03.08.2011	Frodsham Marsh, Cheshire	
	R	18.08.2012	Reserve Naturelle National de Hourtin 45°13'N 1°06'E Dordogne, FRANCE	941km 163°

European recoveries and controls (passerines)



Starling

LB92926	3J	27.05.2011	Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire	
	XF	02.02.2012	Solva, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire	235km 227°
LC95296	3J	11.06.2012	Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire	
	XF	18.07.2012	Shevington, Wigan, Greater Manchester	28km 358°

Blackbird

CT63928	6F	09.03.2012	Brimstage, Wirral, Merseyside	
	XF	13.05.2012	Kiannanniemi, Suomussalmi, 65°09'N 29°03'E Oulu, FINLAND	2230km 54°

Robin

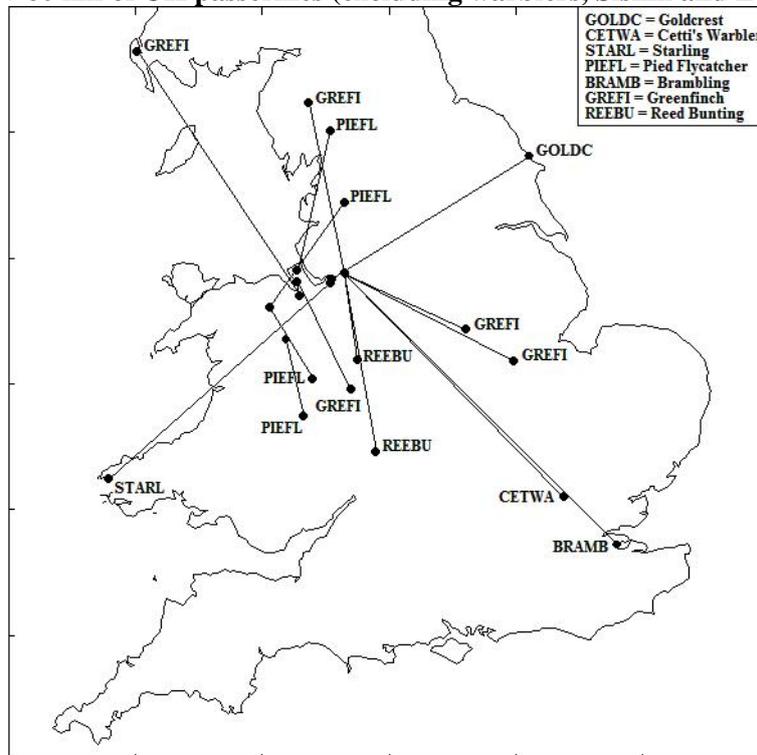
X305308	5	26.02.2009	Birchwood, Warrington, Cheshire	
	R	19.10.2012	Meols, Wirral, Merseyside	43km 263°

Pied Flycatcher

X932417	1 (8/8)	04.06.2010	Llewesog Hall, Prion, Denbighshire	
	R (=F)	19.05.2012	Lees, near Chipping, Lancashire	102km 35°
L309645	1 (7/7)	09.06.2010	Forest Hall, Selside, Cumbria	
	R(=M)	10.04.2012	Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	114km 193°
L867892	4F	14.05.2011	Llwynmawr, Wrexham	
	B	11.06.2012	The Wrekin, Telford and Wrekin	50km 124°
Y112064	1 (7/7)	26.05.2011	Earl's Hill, Shropshire	
	B(=M)	27.06.2012	Llewesog Hall, Prion, Denbighshire	66km 329°

L328515 1 (8/8) 07.06.2010 Bucknell Wood, Shropshire
 B (=F) 26.05.2012 Pandy, near Glyn Ceiriog, Wrexham 63km 347°
 There were also three Pied Flycatchers with movements of <25km

Movements >60 km of UK passerines (excluding warblers, Siskin and Lesser redpoll)



Note: Cetti's Warbler is shown here to reflect its current taxonomic status.

Chaffinch

X570849 3M 12.09.2009 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington
 R 12.02.2010 Aston, Runcorn, Cheshire ® 13km 224°
 R 30.11.2012 Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire 13km 234°

This local Chaffinch has been caught on three occasions, each at a different site.

Brambling

Y202676 3M 30.10.2012 Kingsnorth PS, Hoo St Werburgh, Medway
 R(F) 02.12.2012 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington 304km 316°

Greenfinch

TP08948 3M 04.12.2011 Shotton Steel Works, Flintshire
 R 06.04.2012 Leswalt, Dumfries and Galloway 233km 326°
 TR05280 4M 22.10.2011 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington
 XF 15.11.2012 Carlisle, Cumbria 139km 349°
 TT06953 3M 22.09.2012 Clow Bridge, Lancashire
 R 21.10.2012 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington 45km 204°
 TR05757 3F 27.12.2011 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington
 XF 30.07.2012 Gedling, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire 106km 115°
 TR06709 6M 25.02.2012 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington
 XF 18.08.2012 Castle Bytham, Grantham, Lincolnshire 150km 118°

TS79264	3F	14.10.2011	The Rea, Upton Magna, Shrewsbury, Shropshire	
	R	03.07.2012	Sandiway, Cheshire	58km 4°

TS17713	4F	12.11.2011	Cross Lane Head, Bridgnorth, Shropshire	
	XF	13.08.2012	Heswall, Wirral, Merseyside	96km 334°

Four Greenfinch movements of <35 km were also recorded.

Goldfinch

X930547	5M	17.07.2011	Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	
	XF	28.01.2012	Aviron 49°02'N 1°07'E Eure FRANCE	567km 149°

Siskin

L640693	6M	06.03.2011	Sandiway, Cheshire	
	XF	23.03.2012	Orrby, Porvoo, 60°16'N 25°37'E Uusimaa, FINLAND	1884km 66°

(Now preserved as a museum specimen!)

L869163	3J	07.06.2011	Llwynmawr, Wrexham	
	R (=F)	17.05.2012	Shebster, Highland	627km 357°

L869236	3J	11.06.2011	Llwynmawr, Wrexham	
	R (=F)	19.04.2012	Shebster, Highland	627km 357°
	R (=F)	18.05.2012	Shebster, Highland	627km 357°

Y382192	5M	18.04.2012	Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	
	R	21.09.2012	Balnain, Glenurquhart, Highland	448km 348°

Y382054	6M	20.03.2012	Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	
	R	02.06.2012	Fersit, Highland	399km 346°

L869456	3J	03.07.2011	Llwynmawr, Wrexham	
	XF	27.04.2012	Ardrross, Highland	540km 353°

X514295	5M	18.04.2009	Gosforth, Cumbria	
	R	17.02.2012	Birchwood, Warrington	125km 152°

X065904	5M	23.04.2009	Llwynmawr, Wrexham	
	R	03.04.2011	Gisburn Forest, Slaidburn, Lancashire	131km 23°

L869279	3J	16.06.2011	Llwynmawr, Wrexham	
	R(=6F)	23.02.2012	Bryn Teg, Glanrafon Hill, Gwynedd	73km 298°

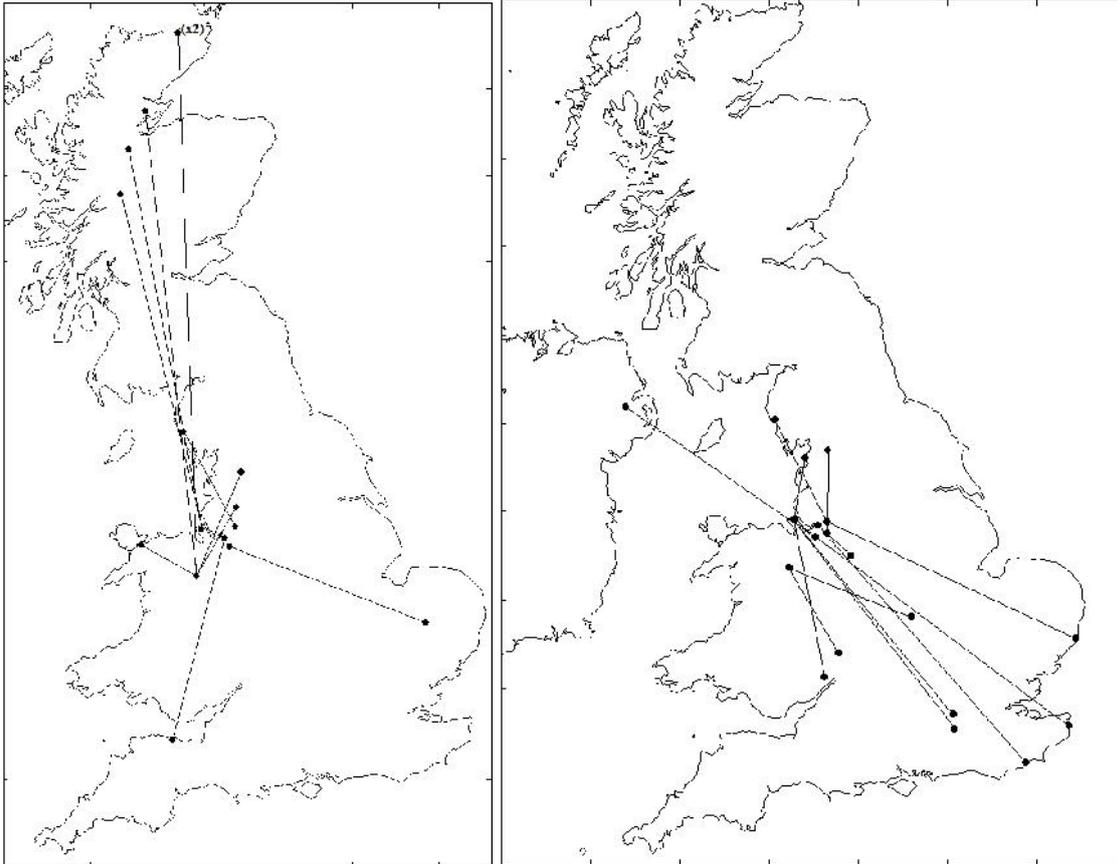
Y706017	3JF	09.05.2012	Thetford, Norfolk	
	R	08.07.2012	Sandiway, Cheshire	241km 293°

L639980	5M	15.03.2011	Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire	
	R	10.10.2012	Bratton, near Minehead, Somerset	242km 194°

Lesser Redpoll

X067538	6M	05.04.2009	Fox Howl, Delamere Forest, Cheshire	
	R	31.12.2011	Dunmurry, Antrim, N Ireland	
	R	06.01.2012	Dunmurry, Antrim, N Ireland	261km 305°

UK movements >70 km of Siskin (left) and Lesser Redpoll (right)



L408607	3 R(=M)	02.10.2010 09.06.2012	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington Gosforth, Cumbria	130km 333°
L636070	4F XF	07.11.2010 27.04.2012	Anderton Nature Park, Northwich, Cheshire High Bentham, North Yorkshire	95km 0°
Y470740	5 R(=M)	01.04.2012 07.04.2012	Heysham Harbour, Heysham, Lancashire Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	(6 days) 72km 189°
L405525	3JF R	22.10.2010 16.03.2012	Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire Light Oaks, Staffordshire	51km 132°
Y244775	3 R	05.11.2011 10.04.2012	Stanford Reservoir, Northamptonshire Llwynmawr, Wrexham	49km 292°
Y493788	3M R(=M)	13.11.2011 14.04.2012	Castlemorton Common, Worcestershire Llwynmawr, Wrexham	113km 330°
Y680057	5 R(=M)	03.02.2012 23.03.2012	Woorgreen Lake, Gloucestershire Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	182km 349°
Y443999	4F R	29.10.2011 23.03.2012	Queen Mary Reservoir, Surrey Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	283km 322°
Y312993	5 R(=F)	14.01.2012 25.03.2012	West Horsley, Surrey Newton, Wirral, Merseyside	297km 322°

Y435539	3 R(=F)	15.04.2011 01.04.2012	Icklesham, East Sussex Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire	356km 320°
L459979	3 R(=M)	13.11.2011 06.05.2012	Sandwich Bay Estate, Kent Bidston, Wirral, Merseyside	385km 309°
Y617106	5 R(=M)	28.01.2012 10.10.2012	Iken Marsh, near Iken, Suffolk No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	308km 297°
Bullfinch				
V070943	3F R	26.09.2011 10.03.2012	Longshaw, near Orrell, Greater Manchester No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	20km 141°
Reed Bunting				
V216479	3F R	29.10.2006 21.03.2012	No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington Newport, Telford and Wrekin	70km 171°
Y493881	4M R	19.11.2011 25.07.2012	New Farm, Besford, Worcestershire No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington	144km 350°

SELECTED RETRAPS 2012

Peter Coffey

Three themes have been examined for this year's selected retraps: same-year retraps, welcome retraps from species that seldom provide them, and longevity.

Same-year retraps

Six birds feature in this section, each offering an interesting insight into the life of the bird.

Barn Owl

GR25505	5F	20.07.11	Vale Farm, nr Earnslow Grange, Cheshire	
	B	21.05.12	Gorstage Hall (2.25 km)	
		30.06.12	Abbotsmoss Hall (4.75 km)	346 days

(Time between 1st and 2nd retrap 40 days)

This female was ringed by Andrew Duncalf with a solitary male owlet, GR25504, on 20.07.2011. She was retrapped at Gorstage Hall where she was breeding (3 eggs) with a male (GC51958) that had been ringed at Kingsley, 7.75 km away, in 2009. Sadly on 25th May 2012 the male was found injured at the roadside in Sandiway and subsequently died of his injuries. An attempt at supplementary feeding for the female failed and she deserted her clutch of three eggs. But on 30th June, Andrew found her at Abbotsmoss Hall sitting on a clutch of 5 eggs with a new partner which Andrew ringed. Unfortunately this clutch also failed later in the year when the wet weather set in. She expended enormous energy laying 8 eggs in the season and not a single chick fledged.

Whilst at Abbotsmoss Hall Andrew checked his second box (approximately 500m from the first); he found a nest with a solitary male chick – and the male bird was GR25504. I wonder if he knew his mum was next door?

GC31019	9F	01.04.12	Little Moss Farm, Cheshire	
		03.07.12	Pinfold Stables, Cheshire (3 km)	93 days

The movement of GC31019 was typical of several birds last year that attempted to move on in the wet weather and find habitat suitable for breeding or to make a subsequent breeding attempt following an earlier failure. GC31019 successfully reared a solitary male bird.

Chiffchaff

BHJ952	1	21.05.12	Oxmoor Wood, nr Runcorn	
	3M	16.09.12		118 days

This retrap demonstrates how long some pulli stay around their natal area. It was ringed as a pullus by Mike Smith and almost four months later it was still at Oxmoor Wood and retrapped by David Norman. When retrapped it had a wing of 61.5mm and weighed 7.6g.

Redwing

RF26956	6	11.02.12	Norton Priory, Runcorn	
		18.11.12		281 days

It's not often we have retraps of Redwing after a migration to summer breeding quarters. It is more likely that the bird will be caught in Italy, France or Spain (10 MRG recoveries from these countries) as they wander across Europe in search of that season's food crop. So this is a nice retrap at the same roost site after the bird had migrated to its summer breeding quarters and then returned.

Brambling

Y383127 5M 23.03.2012 Sandiway, Cheshire
 R 24.11.2012 Saltersford Locks, near Barnton, 6km 245 days

Brambling is another continental breeder that wanders across Europe searching for winter food supplies. Like the Redwing above, after migration to summer breeding grounds this bird returned very close to the site where it was original ringed.

Greenfinch

TL06696 24.11.12 Woolston No. 1 Bed (10.05 am)
 24.11.12 Woolston No. 3 Bed (11.10 am) 0 days

An article by Michael Miles and David Norman in the MRG Annual Report 2010 explained that movements between beds at Woolston were not that common and that in general birds were 28 times more likely to be retrapped on the same bed than to have moved between beds. There are exceptions and Greenfinch provides the most numerous examples of inter-bed movement. TL06696 is the third, and fastest, Greenfinch to be caught within one day – 65 minutes compared to 180 and 210 minutes of previous records.

Welcome retraps

Some species generate few retraps at the present time for MRG, so they are always welcome.

Sand Martin

X931545 3J 17.07.10 Oxmoor Wood, nr Runcorn
 23.08.12 2 yrs 37 days

When MRG was actively working Sand Martin colonies, multiple retraps were received each year. Now we get few retraps; this bird was retrapped at the same roost site two years after being ringed.

Cetti's Warbler

L868041 5M 10.04.11 Clifton, nr Frodsham (wing 61.5mm; weight 16.1 g)
 19.09.11 (wing 65mm; weight 15.6g)
 21.04.12 (wing 65.5mm; weight 16.7g) 1 yr 11 days

If Cetti's Warbler continues to establish a foothold in north Cheshire we can hope for more such retraps in years to come.

Garden Warbler

X067940 4M 04.07.09 Oxmoor Wood, nr Runcorn
 13.05.12 2 yrs 314 days

Grasshopper Warbler

L868286 3J 11.06.11 Oxmoor Wood, nr Runcorn
 10.08.12 (also on 10.06.12) 1 yr 60 days

Garden Warbler and Grasshopper Warbler provide limited numbers of retraps other than in the same season. In 2012 each species had only one retrap from earlier years.

Song Thrush

RT60397 3J 31.07.09 Oxmoor Wood, nr Runcorn
 6F 28.04.12 2 yrs 272 days

There were only three retraps from earlier years for Song Thrush including two ringed in 2011.

Siskin

X065855 5M 11.04.09 Llwynmawr, Wrexham (also 13.06.09)
 11.02.11
 02.05.12 3 yrs 21 days

MRG receives lots of recoveries of Siskins from the far-flung corners of the UK but remarkably few retraps from earlier years. In 2012 there were 45 such retraps, all at Llwynmawr; 41 were birds ringed in 2011 and two each for birds ringed in 2010 and 2009. X065855 has been retrapped in two separate years.

Longevity

To qualify for inclusion in this report, the bird must have been ringed for a longer period than any other MRG-ringed bird of that species retrapped between 2007 – 2012. Only five birds passed that test:

Buzzard

HT61999	1	20.07.08	Brimstage, Wirral	
	RR	12.12.12		4 yrs 145 days

Tawny Owl

GC00486	1	12.08.06	Willow Hill Fm, Burwardsley, Cheshire	
	(F)	14.04.12	Nr Aqueduct Cottages, Burwardsley (2km)	5y 246 d

Neither HT61999 nor GC00486 is particularly old but the Group has very few records. Both these birds were ringed as pulli so it is nice to see their survival.

Great Tit

T156671	3M	17.10.04	Delamere Forest, Cheshire	
		28.12.09		
		22.02.11		
		02.12.12		8 yrs 46 days

Starling

CW48480	5F	09.06.07	Sutton Weaver, nr Runcorn	
		26.05.08		
		20.05.09		
		28.02.11		
		25.05.12		4 yrs 352 days

This might not be the oldest Starling MRG has ever retrapped but in the context of a diminishing population, it is the oldest in recent times. CW48480 obviously appreciates the regular supply of food being provided at Sutton Weaver, particularly during the breeding season.

House Sparrow

TC51609	2M	16.10.05	Sutton Weaver, nr Runcorn	
		15.11.07		
		19.10.12		7 yrs 3 days

This species are renowned for their ability to avoid recapture and TC51609 went for almost five years before being retrapped a second time in 2012.

NEST RECORDS 2012

David Norman

With a total of 964 submitted records this year, MRG continues as one of the biggest contributors of Nest Records to the BTO. Our records came from 17 members and covered 61 species, with a great year for Barn Owls propelling the species to first place, making our top five the same as usual but in a different order: Barn Owl, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Pied Flycatcher, Swallow.

Over half (52%) of our total of nest records was from species considered to be Birds of Conservation Concern, 67 on the **Red List** and 437 on the *Amber List*. Of our total 380 were cavity-nesting passerines and 261 open-nesting passerines, the latter a category for which the Nest Record Scheme is keen to encourage more records.

The highlight of this year's nest-finding was when Richard Castell, with Pete Burton and David Norman (and DN's Schedule 1 licence), found a Cetti's Warbler nest on 14 May, the first ever seen in Cheshire. Unfortunately it had been predated a day or two beforehand, perhaps by a mouse or rat. That seemed to spur Richard to further attempts so they met again and on 28 May he found a rudimentary platform (80 metres away from the first) that he thought might be the start of another Cetti's Warbler nest, then went to Spain for ten days' nest-photography (of course).



Cetti's Warbler nest (Photo: R Castell©)

On 4 June David returned to the site to find a fully-built nest containing 2 red eggs, the first ever seen in Cheshire. She laid another two eggs and incubated for 17 days, the four chicks hatching on 23 June. The story does not have the perfect outcome, however: after another week of persistent rain David visited on 2 July to find an empty, sodden nest.

The team had not just visited on the off-chance, of course. A male had been singing in March and April: when caught on 21 April – in a net set within a couple of metres of where the photographed-nest was later built – this proved to be the same bird that had been ringed on 10 April 2011 and retrapped on 19 September 2011. There is even more to the story. Whilst Richard found the first nest, with the male singing next to him, David was in a different part of the site and also had a male singing. So, he returned five days later and caught it, to prove that there were two males within 250 metres of each other. Nest-searches in this second territory proved fruitless, however. Despite all of this attention, no female was ever seen or heard.

Nest record cards submitted in 2012

Grey Heron	5	Tawny Owl	9	Treecreeper	3
Mute Swan	2	<i>Barn Owl</i>	144	Wren	6
Great Crested Grebe	3	Little Owl	5	Dipper	3
Pheasant	2	<i>Swallow</i>	88	Blackbird	61
Canada Goose	4	<i>House Martin</i>	1	Song Thrush	12
Goshawk	7	Cetti's Warbler	1	Robin	8
Sparrowhawk	1	Long-tailed Tit	9	<i>Pied Flycatcher</i>	93
Buzzard	21	Jay	1	<i>Redstart</i>	8
<i>Kestrel</i>	26	Jackdaw	13	<i>Dunnock</i>	9
Coot	2	Carrion Crow	1	House Sparrow	8
<i>Oystercatcher</i>	4	Raven	1	Tree Sparrow	28
Lapwing	15	Blue Tit	123	<i>Grey Wagtail</i>	2
Little Ringed Plover	1	Great Tit	111	Pied Wagtail	2
<i>Ringed Plover</i>	6	Coal Tit	2	Chaffinch	5
<i>Black-headed Gull</i>	8	Chiffchaff	8	Greenfinch	2
<i>Lesser Black-backed Gull</i>	4	<i>Willow Warbler</i>	1	Goldfinch	3
Herring Gull	3	<i>Whitethroat</i>	2	Linnet	2
<i>Little Tern</i>	13	Blackcap	4	<i>Bullfinch</i>	5
<i>Stock Dove</i>	25	Wood Warbler	2	<i>Reed Bunting</i>	3
Woodpigeon	6	Reed Warbler	7		
Collared Dove	5	Nuthatch	4	TOTAL	964

QUAIL: A FIRST FOR MRG

Kieran Foster

Having read a couple of emails to the BTO ringers forum, and an article on Quail in the BTO Ringers Bulletin (volume 12, number 11, Spring 2012) by Lyndon Keasley, I felt that Quail was a species that was worth studying. Very few have been ringed by the BTO (91 to the end of 2012), so even a small number of birds could add something to our knowledge of this species. There is a good chance of getting recoveries, as so many are hunted around the Mediterranean. They appeared to be relatively easy to catch (according to the articles) and there are sites fairly locally that get Quail regularly. It would also give me something to add to my summer ringing at Woolston and the trips to Anglesey for Storm Petrels and Manx Shearwater. I applied for permission to tape-lure Quail in the breeding season, which I got without any problems.

Unfortunately Quail were very thin on the ground in 2012. For the first time in years, no birds were found on the Fylde (which was going to be one of the study areas due to historically large numbers and many of the sites being close to Chris Batty and Stuart Piner). One was found on Anglesey on 1st May, one was at Winwick, Cheshire on 23rd – 24th May (I didn't see or hear this bird despite trying several times), one was at Holt, Wrexham on the 25th May, another at Great Ormes Head on 27th May, and three plus birds were at Holt on 2nd June.



One month later, on 1st July, one was found on Rixton Moss, Cheshire. This could be my chance: it is local, it is within spitting distance of an MRG ringing site, the land owner is known to one of the Woolston regulars, and I had heard the bird. On the 6th July I had my first attempt in the evening, but the bird wasn't heard or seen. I was advised to play the lure of the female call, quietly. I decided to have another try on the 7th first thing in the morning. When I arrived I could hear the bird calling from a field c300 yards from the field I had permission to ring in. I

set a V of 12m nets, set the CD lure (this time playing the call, much louder) and crouched towards the back of the V in case the bird dropped into the V, so that I could flush it towards the net. Within a minute I could see the bird flying straight towards the net, low over the crop, over the path and into the bottom shelf of the net. Success! It was as easy as I had been told and had seen on YouTube.



The bird was aged and sexed as a 4 male based on the colouration of the throat and wear on the primaries. It was much smaller in the hand than expected.



Just six Quail were ringed in Britain in 2012. I'm determined that this isn't going to be the last Quail for MRG and look forward to more in 2013.

Thanks to David and Janice Mawdsley, the farmers, who were very helpful and allowed me to set my nets on their fields.

***ABIETINUS/TRISTIS* CHIFFCHAFFS AT WOOLSTON IN 2012**

Dave Riley

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* is a common sight at Woolston with more than 5800 caught and ringed there over the years. In 2012 two Chiffchaffs appeared to be a little bit different and their details are set out in this report.

***Tristis* Chiffchaff, 7th April 2012, No.3 Bed.**

On 7th April 2012, Kieran Foster approached a mist net on Woolston Eyes No.3 bed. There was a Chiffchaff in the net, but it was clearly not a typical Chiffchaff. It was very pale grey-brown above showing no green on head or mantle. The underparts also were paler than any Chiffchaff he had seen in the hand. As he extracted the bird, he said to Lisa Warvill “this is a Siberian Chiffchaff”. The bird was ringed and measured and was retained for a few minutes so that the other ringers present could see the bird. Jason Atkinson and Mike Miles both agreed, on seeing the bird, that it wasn’t a typical Chiffchaff and was probably a “*tristis*”.

Measurements included: wing formula E = 6, longest 4/3, 2nd primary = 8, wing length 57mm

Key features:

Head: pale grey-brown (no green). Supercilium pale cream, appeared longer than on Chiffchaff, still obvious as far behind the eye as in front of the eye. (See photos 1 and 2)

Mantle: pale grey-brown (no green).

Rump and upper tail coverts: green/olive tones, contrasting with the head and mantle.



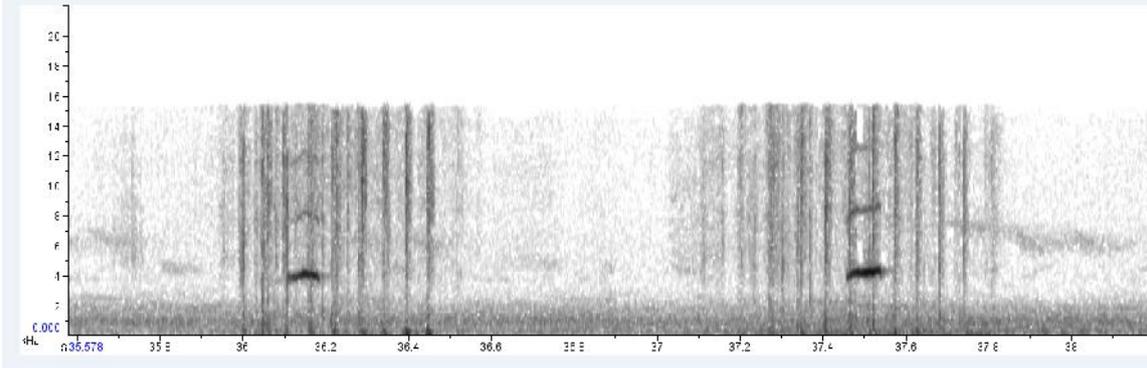
Photo 1 compares a Chiffchaff and a 'tristis' Chiffchaff.

Photo 2 shows the pale yellow underwing coverts of a 'tristis' Chiffchaff

(Both photos taken by Kieran Foster)

Wings: similar to Chiffchaff in having green edges to the secondaries. Pale grey-brown edges to greater coverts, distinctly lacking green.
Underparts: pale cream, throat clearly paler than Chiffchaff.
Underwing coverts show pale yellow.

The bird was calling regularly whilst in the hand and it was very different to the calls that Chiffchaffs occasionally make during handling. Jason Atkinson had the presence of mind to record the call using his iPhone and emailed the calls to his friend (Dougie Preston) on Shetland who makes sonograms and has made sonograms of *tristis* Chiffchaff on Shetland. DP later confirmed that “this is the best example of *tristis* Chiffchaff he has done sonograms for”. The sound recording can be found on Jason Atkinson’s blog, www.AT2H.Blogspot.com



Sonogram of *tristis* Chiffchaff prepared by Dougie Preston

***Abietinus/tristis* Chiffchaff, 24th November 2012, No.1 Bed**

On 24th November 2012, I was joined by Sam Bailey, a visiting ringer from West Sussex, on No1 bed at Woolston Eyes Nature Reserve for a ringing session. We had caught 45 birds and at 11.15am we checked the few nets we had open and from the first one Sam extracted a pale, brownish-looking *phylloscopus* warbler with a very noticeable eyestripe, which appeared longer than the typical Chiffchaff.

In the hand it looked quite different to the usual Chiffchaffs we catch, again appearing to be quite pale. We took full biometrics and concluded it was an eastern race bird (*abietinus/tristis*). Unfortunately, the bird did not call while in the hand or upon release.

Measurements included: wing formula E = 6, 2nd primary = 8, wing length 58mm, weight 6.8g

Photos 3 and 4 show the *abietinus/tristis* Chiffchaff



SURVEY OF COMMON TERNS IN THE DEE ESTUARY MAY- JUNE 2012

Peter Coffey

1. 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 became a cause for concern and in 2011 a multi-agency working group convened by Merseyside Ringing Group (MRG) examined available information on factors that might affect Common Tern activity.

MRG, supported by Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), 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 boat-based surveys and land observations in the estuary and at Shotton reserve. CCW also commissioned work from British Trust for Ornithology to review Wetland Bird Survey counts (WeBS) in the Dee estuary between 2006-10 and to conduct additional high-water and low-water counts in 2011.

The breeding colony failed again in 2011. Evidence from the surveys provided useful insights into Common Tern activity but did not provide an answer as to why the Shotton colony failed. The multi-agency working group reviewed the findings of the 2011 surveys and agreed the following actions for 2012:

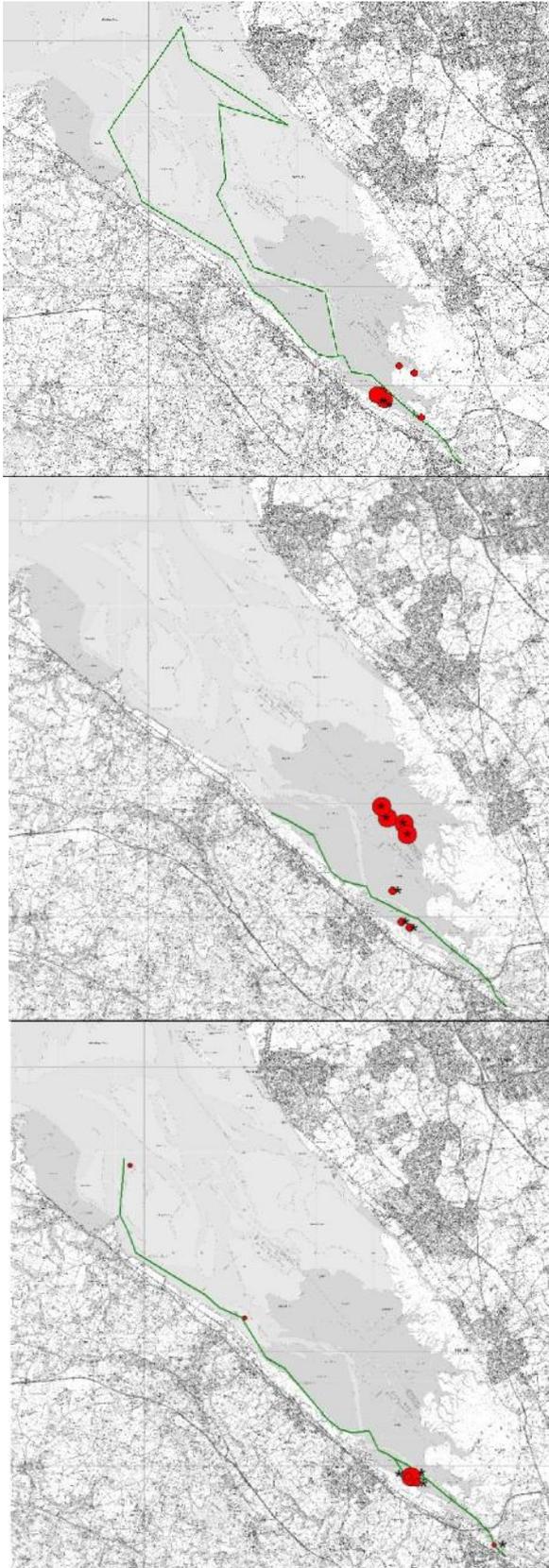
- preparation of the nesting islands at Shotton to ensure they are fit for use by Common Terns. Much of this work was carried out in 2011 but additional weeding was required.
- preparation of an alternative nesting site at the site of the former Point of Air colliery. Environment Agency Wales undertook site management works that enlarged an existing lagoon and created an island that potentially would be suitable for breeding birds. The work was completed by the end of March 2012.
- additional boat surveys funded by CCW and coordinated by MRG.
- purchase of cameras to be located on the breeding islands at Shotton to record daytime and night-time activity. MRG volunteered to purchase the cameras and be responsible for camera installation/maintenance and analysis of video images.

This report focuses on the last two actions listed.

2. Boat surveys in the Dee estuary

Three surveys were made. A summary of each survey is presented below and sightings of Common Terns recorded on each trip are shown on the maps. The route of the boat is shown by a line; concentrations of Common Terns are shown by circles, large circles indicating >50 birds, smaller circles 10-20 birds and dots <5 birds; and areas where Common Terns were observed fishing shown by *.

The first, on 8th May, set off from Connah's Quay moving along the channel on the Welsh coast past Bettisfield and Mostyn to the former POA colliery site, then traversed eastwards to Hilbre before turning back upstream towards Thurstaston and Heswall and then moving back to the main channel to return via Flint to Connah's Quay. For most of the journey no Common Terns



were seen or heard – there were very few birds of any description – and it was not until the boat was returning to the upper estuary that the first terns were encountered. Then they came with a rush with up to 200+ birds observed moving into the area offshore from Oakenholt. Some terns were flying in from across Parkgate marshes, others appeared to be flying downstream into the area from the direction of the road bridge whilst others were already roosting on the bank at Oakenholt. Feeding and display activity was observed.

The second trip, on 16th May, was in showery weather with a moderate north-westerly wind blowing straight up the estuary. Seas were too rough to take the boat further than Bagillt and the falling tide restricted movement towards the Wirral shore. Nevertheless visibility was good. Up to 200 Common Terns were sighted mid-estuary feeding in shallow water close to sandbanks emerging after high tide – dives were frequent but from the distance it was impossible to confirm if they were successful or not. Several birds carrying fish were observed. Smaller groups of Common Terns (5-10) were later observed feeding offshore from Oakenholt/Flint castle.

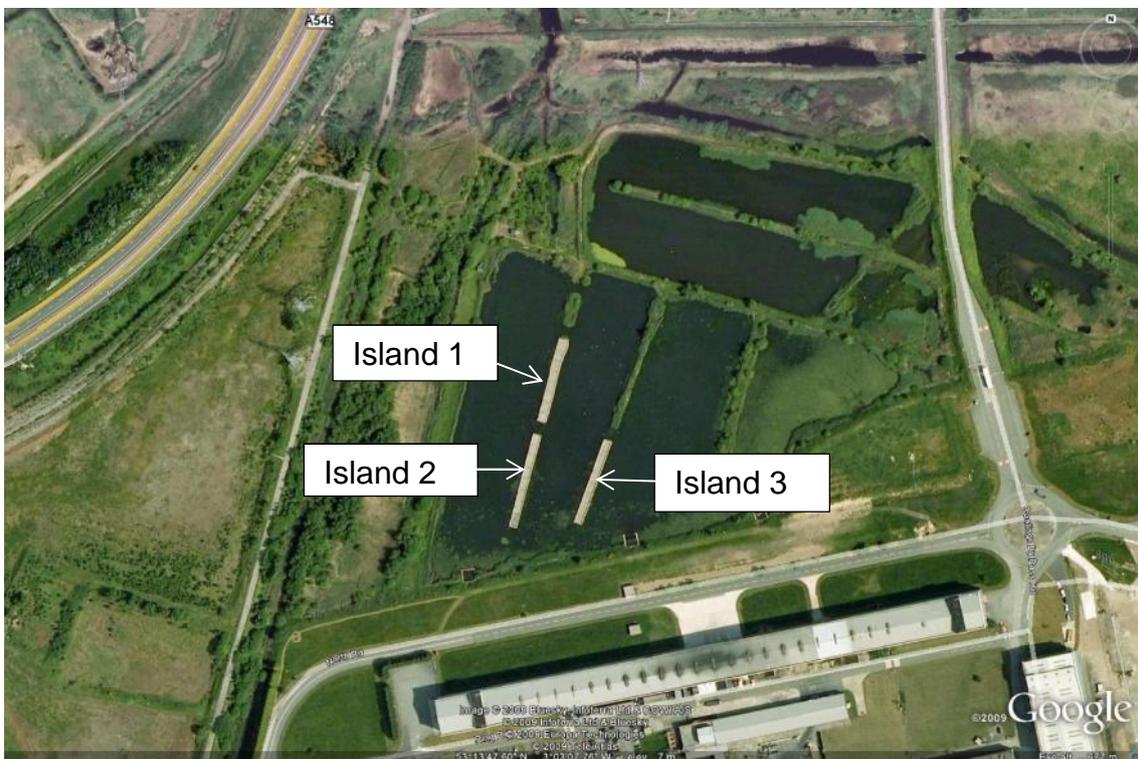
The third trip, on 23rd May, started out on a rising tide and sailed back on the high tide. Weather conditions were entirely the opposite to 16th May: a continuous mist on the river throughout our trip, sitting as low as 10m above the sea. The sea state was good. Given the misty conditions, Common Terns could be heard flying above the boat but were not seen. It was also difficult to pick out low-flying birds until they were close by, so the count is probably an underestimate. However there was plenty of activity, particularly in the area off Oakenholt / Flint Castle where groups of 60+ were seen fishing, in courtship displays and fish-carrying. Several pairs were seen alighting on the water but no copulation was observed. The birds were seen in this area on both the outbound and inbound journeys. Smaller numbers of Common Terns

were observed downstream – two resting on a floating log off Greenfield and three in courtship display mid-estuary opposite Mostyn. The most encouraging sighting was of two pairs of Common Terns in courtship displays in the Dee off Connah's Quay dock –the first time birds have been seen here in the last two years. One of the birds was carrying a fish, another was seen

hunting, making several abortive dives before finally plunging (it was impossible to verify if it was successful). One of the birds was also ringed!

An assessment of the findings from the three surveys can be summarised as follows:

- Common Terns were again feeding in the Dee estuary with counts of 200+ birds matching observations from 2011.
- The terns were observed feeding on each of the trips, usually in shallow water around sandbanks as tides rose and fell.
- The natural dynamic of estuary systems was aptly demonstrated by the changed locations and profiles of river channels compared to 2011. It was especially noticeable off Flint Point/Oakenholt marsh.
- Perhaps because of these changes, Common Terns were counted more frequently further upstream in the Oakenholt area this year, rather than Flint Point last year. Oakenholt is approximately 4.5km from Shotton, a distance suggested as the average foraging distance for Common Terns (Thaxter, C.B., et al. 2011)
- Two pairs were also seen fishing/in courtship display by the docks at Connah's Quay, an area where no birds were seen last year.
- Sightings of large numbers of Common Terns moving through the West Midlands in the days before the first survey is consistent with the observation that the terns appeared to be arriving from a direction upstream of the road bridge. Past ringing recoveries have confirmed that birds from Shotton travel across country through the West Midlands.



Nesting islands for Common Terns at Shotton

3. Observations at Shotton

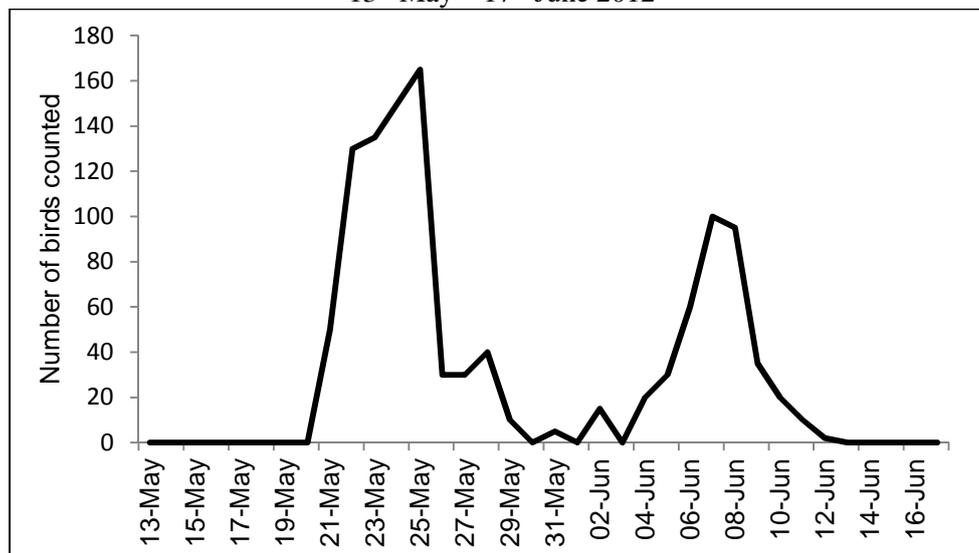
MRG members made regular visits to the Shotton reserve and Steve Hughes at Tata Steel also logged tern numbers. However this year those observations were supplemented by 24-hour surveillance of nesting compartments on the islands provided by five Bushnell Trophy Cams purchased by MRG. Four of the cameras were located on the four compartments previously favoured by breeding terns (Island 1 compartment A8 and Island 2 compartments B1, B2, B3).

They were mounted on supports approximately 0.5m above the level of the compartment and set to record 30-second video clips with a minimum time of one minute between clips. The fifth camera was used to record activity at different locations around the edge of the lagoon, in particular looking for rodent activity. Cameras are triggered by motion-sensors, work in daylight or (infra-red) at night, and record sound as well as vision. After initial field testing, the cameras were activated on 13th May and filming continued for 35 days, through to 17th June. The cameras do not provide high-definition images but provide a good record of activity; several images are included in the text below.

The following points of interest were noted:

- A total of 1651 video clips confirmed the presence of Common Terns, mostly visible but on some occasions by their calls only.
- 89.7% of the video clips recorded roosting activity, involving up to 165 birds with densities of 25-40 per compartment and as high as 50 at the maximum.
- Common Terns roosted on 20 nights although counts of 50 or more were made on only eight nights. Numbers of roosting birds built up rapidly from 21st May to 26th May but then declined equally rapidly. Numbers built up a second time between 4th – 8th June before again falling rapidly (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of Common Terns counted roosting at night at Shotton, 13th May – 17th June 2012



Roosts often cover two dates, starting late evening and ending early morning.
For convenience, the date shown is for early morning.

- Roosting periods varied in length. The maximum duration was 5 hours 55 minutes (on 21st/22nd May), starting at 22.47 in twilight shortly before darkness and ending soon after dawn (04.42). Roosts lasted at least 5 hours on six nights and 4 – 5 hours on four nights.



This photo shows roosting Common Terns on one of the nesting compartments at Shotton. One pair is mating and another Common Tern flies in to join the roost.

- Movement of birds into and out of compartments continued throughout the first night of roost development. Birds aggressively defended their space and there appeared little time when the terns could settle down and rest. As the roosts developed, birds became more relaxed even though space became more limited as numbers rose.
- Peak daytime activity was recorded on 23rd /24th May and 3rd June when 100-300 birds were present for more than three hours. The longest period of sustained activity was on 23rd May between 07.18 – 15.34 (8 hours 16 minutes) although the period of greatest intensity was 10.00-12.20 and only two birds were observed settling on the islands after 13.14. In total that day up to 100 terns were flying over the islands of which 35 landed; four were carrying food, courtship displays/calling were common, one bird was attempting to make a scrape but no mating was observed.
- On 3rd June Common Tern activity focussed on Islands 2 and 3. It was logged by field observers but not recorded on video because of the absence of cameras in their area of activity, underlining the importance of using both methods unless there are sufficient cameras to cover the whole colony.



Courtship display which led to food exchange between the pair.

- Almost all daytime activity occurred between 06.00-12.00 hours and included circling above the colony in courtship flight, landing on the islands, carrying fish, courtship displays including exchange of food and on two occasions making scrapes. However no mating was observed.
- By contrast, mating was observed at roosts on eleven occasions, most attempts being towards the end of a roost. Other courtship behaviour was observed and at least one bird appeared to be making a scrape.
- The islands were inspected on 6th June when no terns were at the colony. Broken tern eggs were found on compartments A8 and B8; it was difficult to assess the exact number of eggs laid but it was a small number, 5 - 10.

The following interactions with other bird species were noted:

Carrion Crows patrolled the islands (and the rest of the reserve) on a regular basis every day. They were observed checking island compartments even before terns started using them and continued daily patrols after tern activity had ceased. In general there were no signs of aggression towards terns but two incidents are worth noting:

- On 29th May a solitary Common Tern was observed in poor condition and did not leave the compartment that day. Crows flew over several times from 13.31 and at 16.02 one crow attacked the bird, severely pecking it. The commotion quickly attracted three other crows but they were not involved in the attack. The tern did not move from the site of the attack and a corpse was later recovered.
- On 8th June a crow fought with an Oystercatcher (which had chicks on a nearby compartment) and then moved a short distance to pick up an egg and fly off with it. Oystercatchers had not bred on this compartment so it is assumed it was a Common Tern egg. No Common Tern activity was recorded on any of the compartments that day so the egg was undefended.

Black-headed Gulls could be heard calling on a number of occasions but only three visits to compartments were filmed. On 22nd May a solitary bird landed briefly when terns were calling overhead; on 23rd May a pair of gulls landed whilst Common Terns were active and the terns appeared to drive away the gulls with ease; and on 25th May a small number of gulls inspected one of the compartments before flying off within five minutes.

Canada Geese roosted on the islands including the filmed compartments but did not deter the Common Terns. They usually arrived at least one hour before nightfall to settle down but on nights when roosting activity intensified they appeared discomforted and flew off. Similarly they would stay on the islands for the first hour or more after daybreak but their presence did not deter terns and on 23rd May when tern activity was particularly intense the geese could be seen moving off as terns flew close to them.

Black Tern was a surprise visitor to the colony and had a six-second cameo role on a night-time video clip before being driven off by a Common Tern. The aggression of the tern cannot be interpreted as a reaction against a different species; there are numerous similar records of aggression against other Common Terns if they moved into their territorial space.

Finally there was no evidence of rodents on the islands. A rat was filmed once by the camera located at the edge of the lagoon.

5 Discussion

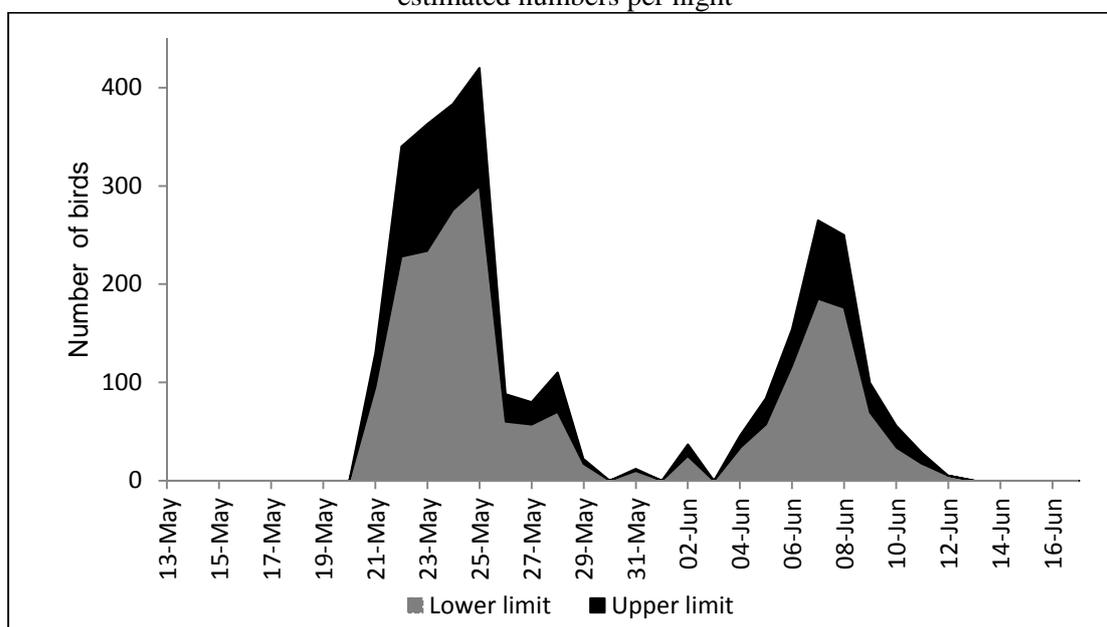
Estimated size of the roost

Numbers of terns using the islands were counted on video clips. To estimate the size of the colony, adjustments were made reflecting the following factors:

- terns were observed using compartments other than those being filmed;
- it is difficult to obtain accurate counts for birds within the cameras' field of view at night, a situation made more difficult by weed growth as the season progressed; and
- approximately 50% of each compartment was outside the field of view, although it covered the central area.

The estimated lower limit for the colony size was 300 roosting birds and the estimated upper limit was 420 birds (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Roosting Common Terns at Shotton 2012, showing estimated numbers per night



During the second peak of activity, terns were observed over Islands 2 and 3 but there is no evidence to suggest these were additional birds increasing the estimated size of the colony.

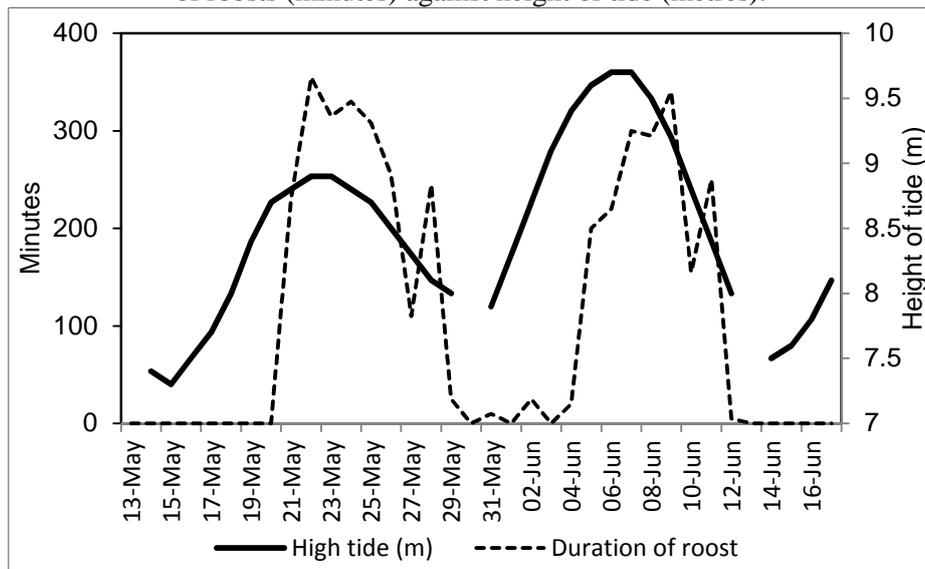
Tidal cycle

The timing and duration of both daytime and roost activity appears to have been influenced by the tidal cycle. In the Dee estuary, the highest tides occur around midnight and mid-day. A tide of approximately 8.5m or higher seems to trigger roosting activity (see Figure 3).

For the first cycle the highest tides, with a new moon, occurred on 22nd/23rd May; the maximum duration of a roost was on 22nd May and numbers of birds roosting built up rapidly on those days but did not peak until 25th May. Daytime activity peaked on 23rd/24th May.

For the second cycle, with a full moon, the highest tides occurred on 6th/7th June; the maximum duration of a roost was on 9th June and numbers of birds roosting peaked on 7th June. Information on daytime activity is limited; field observations recorded strong activity on 3rd June but a further visit on 6th June reported no activity. There was no video evidence of daytime activity between 3rd and 9th June.

Figure 3: Roosting Common Terns at Shotton 2012 showing duration of roosts (minutes) against height of tide (metres).



Night-time high tides sequences often cover two dates, starting late evening and ending early morning. For convenience, the date shown is for early morning.

Why did numbers of roosting birds not build up more gradually as tides increased in height? At the start of the tidal cycle, high tides occur before darkness and are relatively lower so terns would be able to continue fishing for longer and may be able to roost safely on the marsh areas.

It is also interesting to note that the second tidal cycle had higher tides but the number of roosting birds was lower than for the first cycle. It might be that the number of Common Terns in the estuary had already started to decline but up to 300 had been seen during daytime only a few days earlier. It was a full moon so could the reduced numbers roosting reflect changed behaviour in the relatively bright night? (MRG members have observed changes in roosting behaviour of waders depending on the phase of the moon.)

Why did the colony fail again?

From all the evidence gained early in the 2012 season, there was cause for optimism. Counts of 200+ Common Terns were made in the Dee estuary from early May. Even more encouragingly the focus of tern activity had moved slightly upstream, off Oakenholt marsh, and a few terns were observed in courtship off Connah's Quay, an area where no terns were seen in 2011. At Shotton, on the first day of filming (14th May) up to 100 birds were flying over the islands, with up to eight birds landing, three carrying fish and one pair in a courtship display over a period of 32 minutes. Then terns started roosting on the islands, an activity repeated on 20 out of 23 nights between 21st May and 12th June. During this time, numbers of roosting birds were estimated at 300-420 and they appeared relaxed and settled with courtship display and mating observed.

That was not translated into intensive breeding activity. On most days, daytime visits were of short duration and even when significant numbers of terns visited, few were landing on the islands and settling. Some were carrying fish but it is difficult to gauge whether the proportion carrying fish is at a healthy level because there are no comparative data from the colony in its successful years. Sustained activity for more than three hours was recorded on only three days.

From video clips there is no compelling evidence that the colony is threatened by mammalian or avian predators. Crows were quick to exploit opportunities to seize abandoned eggs and attack a

sick bird but they stayed away from the islands whenever terns were around. At night, no rats were seen and roosting birds were relaxed.

In previous years, “displaced” Common Terns assembled at the Seaforth colony, with its limited and by now highly congested breeding area, and then moved to set up an alternative colony in Liverpool docks. Steve White reports that the site of the alternative colony is now hard-surfaced and unavailable as a breeding site and no other sites have been found. The Seaforth colony was badly affected by the weather, about 25 pairs bred at Preston docks and one pair successfully bred at Burton Mere Wetlands, 2.5km from Shotton. It is reasonable to assume that many of the “displaced” terns must have been desperate to find a breeding site – and yet they still failed to move back to Shotton.

Common Terns are long-lived and some are expected to return to the Dee estuary next year. It is not immediately apparent what, if any, steps can be taken to convert roosting activity into successful breeding but further monitoring by cameras and field observation will be essential.

6 Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Countryside Council for Wales, who funded the boat trips, and to Keith Marland, whose boat we used and who provided valuable insight into the dynamics of the Dee estuary. Thanks also to Tata Steel for their continued support for the tern colony at Shotton and especially Steve Hughes who, together with colleagues from Dee Wildfowlers, helps to maintain the islands.

7 References

A full copy of this report and other information relating to this issue can be viewed at: www.davidnorman.org.uk/MRG/shotton_common_terns.htm

Thaxter, C.B., et al. Seabird foraging ranges as a tool for identifying candidate Marine Protected Areas. *Biological Conservation* doi:10.1016/j.biocon.2011.12.009.



A bonus from our video clips: this Black Tern made a six-second cameo appearance at a roost on 28th May 2012 before it was driven off by a Common Tern.

THE CHANGING WINTER STATUS OF REED BUNTINGS RINGED AT WOOLSTON EYES

David Norman

Summary

The Reed Bunting in Britain is a classic partial migrant, with some birds resident or making short-distance annual movements while others perform longer-distance migrations. Six Woolston-ringed Reed Buntings were reported from south-west England and south-west Wales in winter during 1980-1996, but none since. On the other hand, the five most southeasterly birds have all been recorded since 2004. This may indicate a shift in the species' migration pattern, perhaps linked to changing winter weather.

Introduction

In the early years of the Woolston Eyes Conservation Group (WECG) and the start of systematic recording, there were few passerines in winter at Woolston. Reed Bunting was one of the most obvious species that almost quit the site by late autumn and was among the earliest returning spring migrants from February onwards. This would have been a reasonable description of their status in Cheshire for the last century or so, as I summarised in *Birds in Cheshire and Wirral: a breeding and wintering atlas* (Norman 2008):

Coward (1910) noted that 'although a few odd birds, sometimes a male and female evidently a pair, frequently remain throughout the winter, the majority of Reed Buntings leave in the autumn'. Boyd (1951) was used to only small numbers during winter in mid-Cheshire, where he acutely observed that they join the finch-Yellowhammer flocks in the hedgerows. Bell (1962) expanded on the description of their winter status by writing that few remain inland, and that in Wirral, birds from inland localities may make for the coast.

WECG Annual Reports in the 1980s state that small numbers of Reed Buntings were occasionally reported at the Eyes in the three months November – January, usually up to 20-30, with sometimes a roosting flock. More wintering birds were found from 1991 onwards, and the WECG annual report for 1992 suggested that the recent run of relatively mild winters had changed their status. It is not known, however, how much the increase in reports might have been affected by the expanded ringing team and the establishment of winter feeding stations: from 1980 to 1989 I was the only ringer and, although I roamed across all the deposit beds and adjacent areas, I spent little time at the Eyes in winter; from late 1989 onwards, several newly-qualified ringers explored the site all year round. The usual maximum winter count of Reed Buntings during the 1990s was 30-50, but thorough surveying during 1995 suggested a 'thinly dispersed wintering population approaching 100 birds'. WECG Annual Reports during the 2000s described the winter population of Reed Buntings as 'sizeable', 'important' and 'substantial' although in most years maximum counts do not exceed 50.

From the beginning of the ringing programme at Woolston in August 1980, Reed Bunting has been among the most-studied species. For this paper I have analysed the records of Woolston-ringed birds found elsewhere, and those already wearing rings when caught at the Eyes.

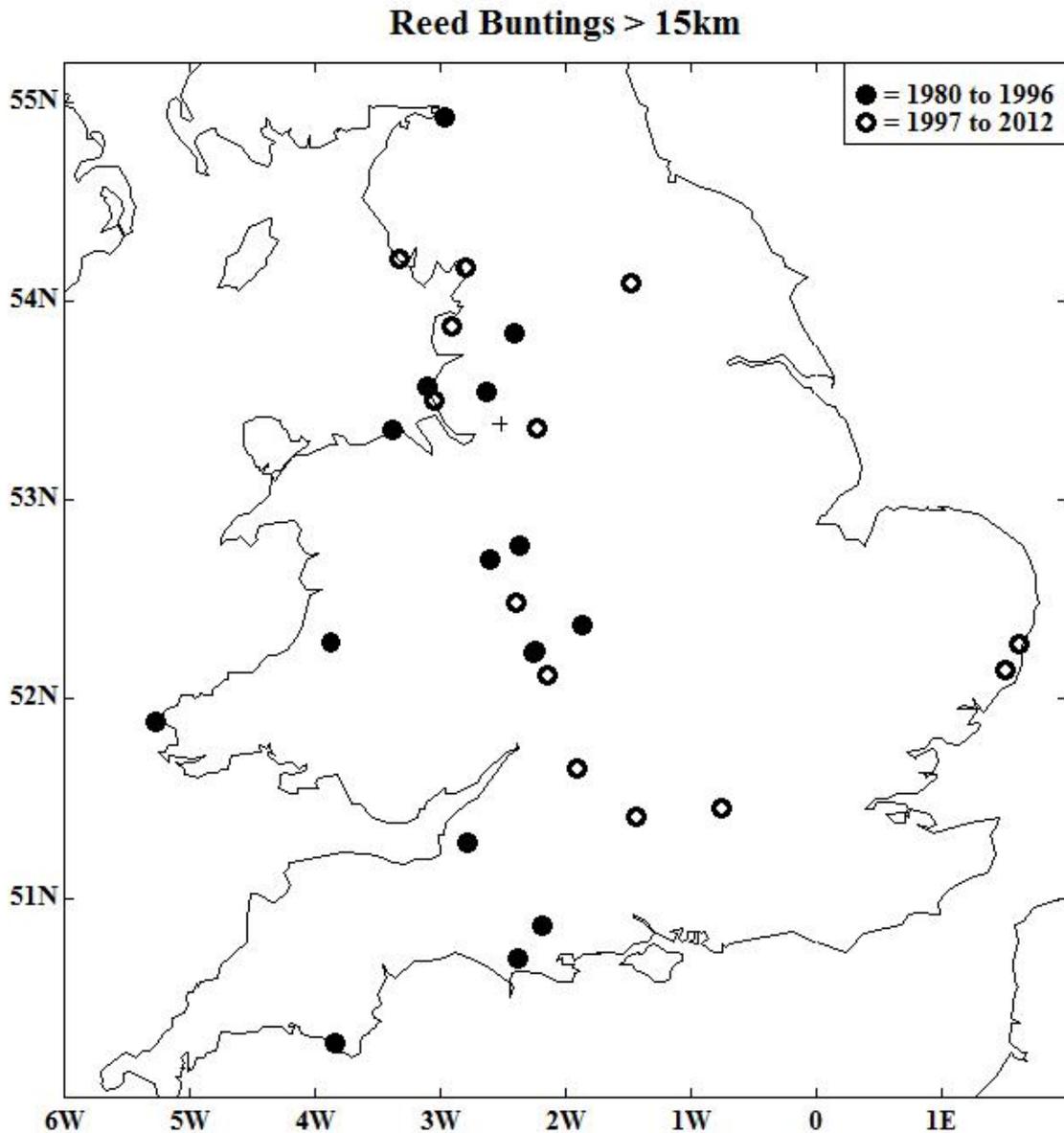
Results

From 1980 to 2012 inclusive 6,577 Reed Buntings have been ringed at Woolston, almost half of them in the three months of August, September and October. Forty were subsequently reported from elsewhere ('recoveries'), and 21 birds were already wearing a ring when caught at Woolston ('controls'), a 1% reporting rate. Twenty-eight of the records were at sites within

15km of the Eyes, and 33 more distant. Ringers caught 32 of the recoveries and eight were found dead, five of them reported as victims of cats.

Discounting the local birds, within 15km of the Eyes, over the whole period (1980-2012) the median latitude for the 9 birds reported in the six months April to September was 50 km north of Woolston, while for the 24 birds reported in the six months October to March, the median latitude was 125 km south of Woolston (Warwickshire/ Worcestershire, where five birds have been found).

There appears to have been a shift in locations of reports in the 1980-2012 period, and the map splits the records into two 16-year groups; as it happens, similar numbers of Reed Buntings were ringed in the first sixteen years (3,072 in 1980-1996) and the second (3,505 in 1997-2012).

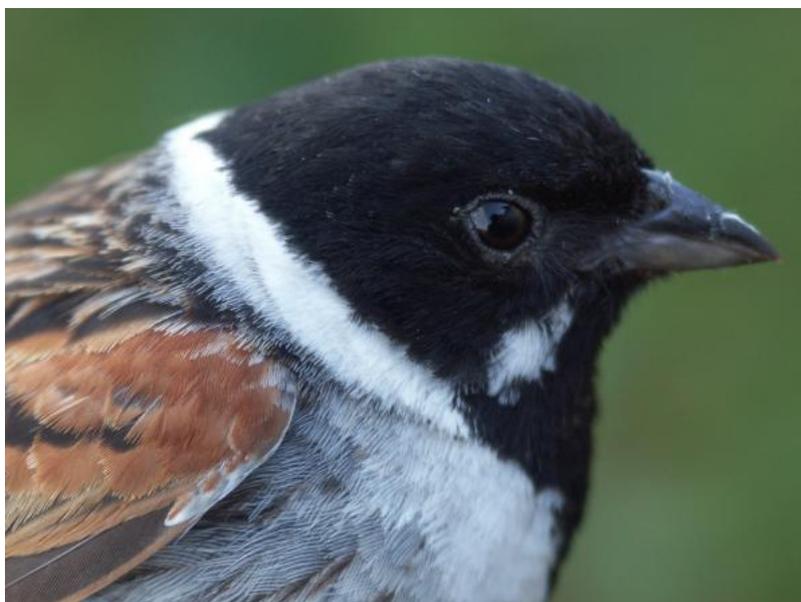


For the ‘winter’ birds (October to March) there was no difference in the median latitude between the 11 birds reported during 1980-1996 and the 12 birds found in 1997-2012. But it is noticeable that all six records in southwest England and southwest Wales, the classic spots for avoiding hard weather, were in 1983-1994, and none since then. On the other hand, the five most southeasterly birds have all been recorded in recent years, with the birds in Wiltshire, Berkshire (2) and Suffolk (2) all since 2004.

There have been birds throughout the entire 1980-2012 period wintering in what appears to be the core 'west Midlands' area of Shropshire (4), Warwickshire (1) and Worcestershire (4), including three examples of two birds to the same site, each shown by a single point on the map. Thus, although the extreme records, to the southwest and southeast, have notably changed, the median direction of wintering sites has shifted only slightly from 183° (just west of south) in 1980-1996 to 169° (just east of south) in 1997-2012.

There was no significant difference between the recovery sites for male and female Reed Buntings, or between those in their first winter or older birds.

The most southerly of these Reed Buntings provided what remains one of the outstanding ringing records from Woolston. F981785, ringed as a juvenile on 27 July 1990 – thus surely a locally-bred bird – was caught on 20 October 1990 by ringers near the south Devon coast, then retrapped the following year as an adult female back at Woolston on 4 August 1991. This was the most distant record of a Woolston-ringed Reed Bunting, 360km away, and the only one proven to have returned to the site.

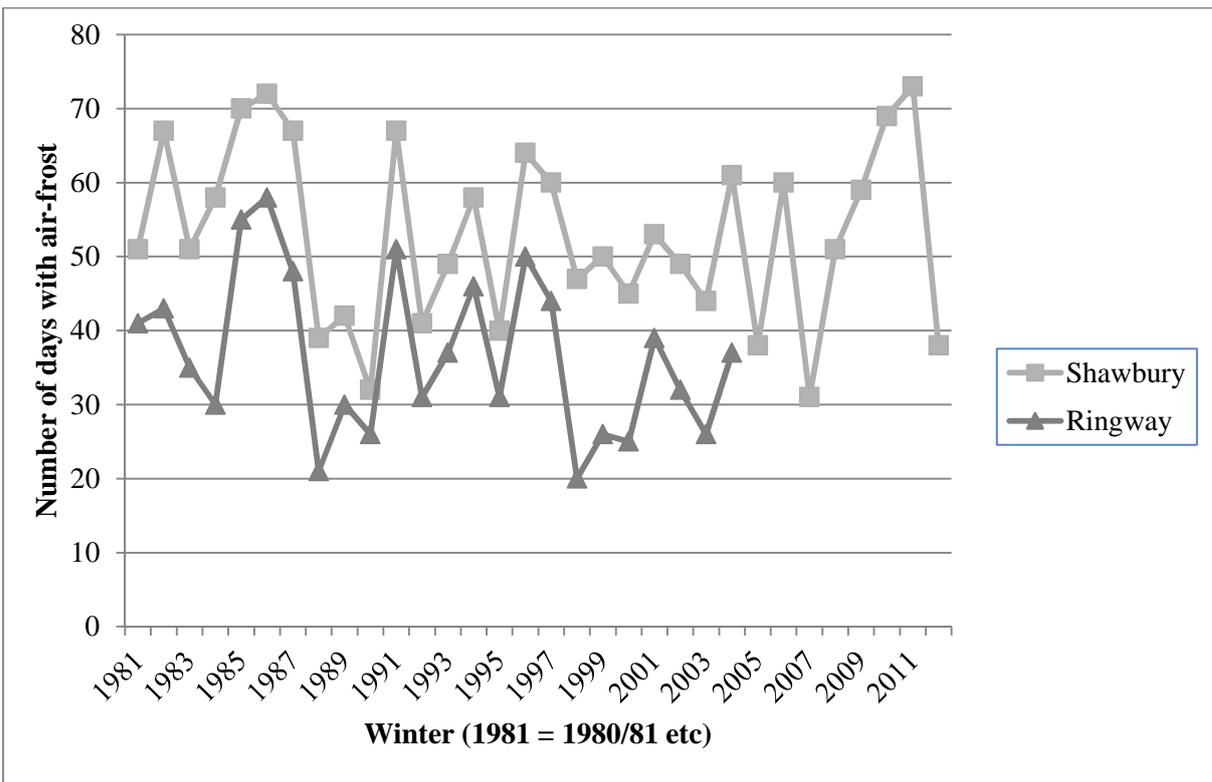
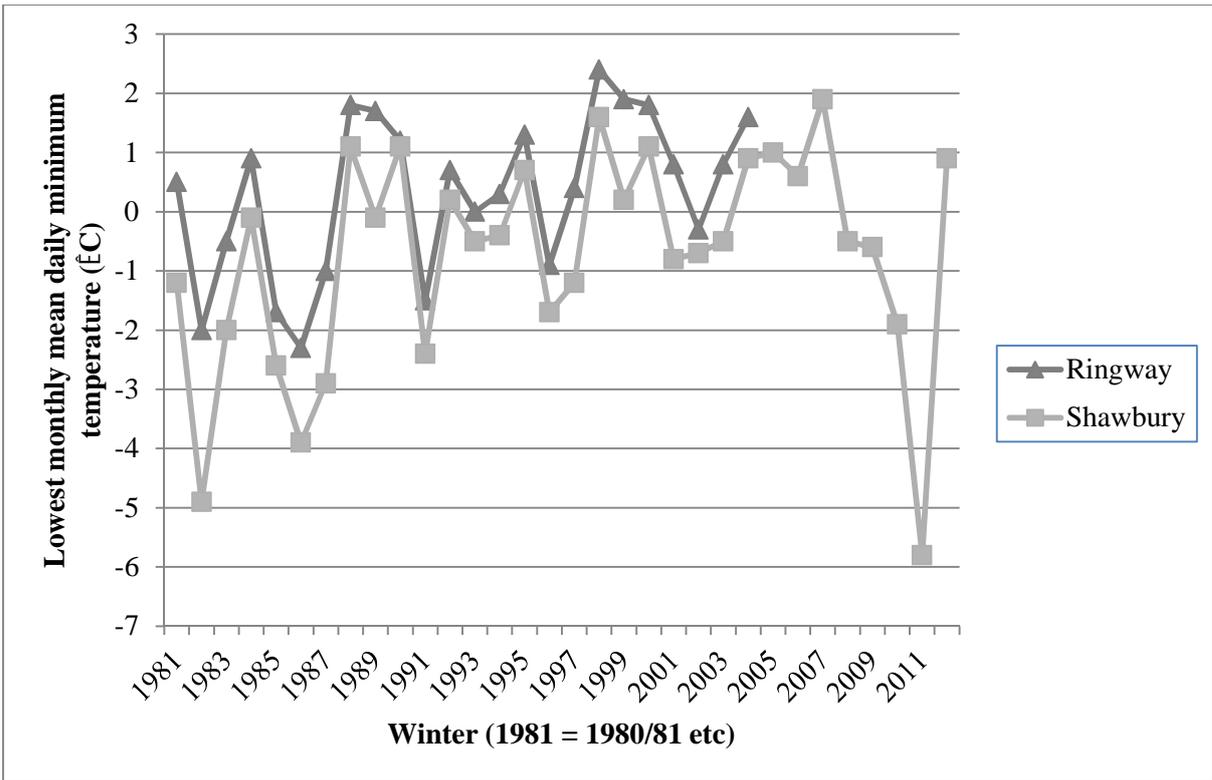


Male Reed Bunting (Photo: D Norman)

Winter weather

The Meteorological Office has run 36 official weather stations across Britain (<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/stationdata/>) including two near to Woolston: Shawbury, near Shrewsbury (68km from Woolston) and Ringway (Manchester Airport), 17km from Woolston. The trends at these two sites are similar although Shawbury was always colder than Ringway in winter; unfortunately the weather station at Ringway was closed in 2004. These cannot exactly replicate conditions at Woolston but they do provide standardised long-term measurements.

The two graphs show the lowest monthly mean temperature each winter, and the number of days with air-frost recorded. There are obviously year-to-year fluctuations, sometimes substantial, but over the thirty winters 1980/81-2009/10, for both sites on average the winter temperature warmed by about a degree per decade, with a reduction of about half a day per year with air-frost. The cold winter 2010/11 broke that trend, however.



Discussion

We should take care perhaps not to read too much into these results. They are from quite small samples of birds, and I have not included statistical tests for their significance. Most of the records are from recaptures by ringers, thus influenced by their distribution and activities, although both of the birds in southwest Wales, and the one in Somerset, were found dead by

members of the public. But, on the face of it, the data do suggest a shift in the more distant wintering areas used by Woolston Reed Buntings.

Thirty-two years is too short a period to draw any deduction on climate change, but until the unusually cold winter of 2010/11, the local weather stations show that winters on average had been getting warmer, with less frost, over the previous thirty years. We do not know which aspects of weather influence the behaviour of partial migrants. Indeed, it may not be a choice that each individual bird makes: it may be that some are internally (endogenously) 'programmed' to stay, and others to move, perhaps being 'programmed' to make short- or longer-distance migrations. There are potential hazards in each strategy and natural selection shifts the equilibrium between them from year to year. Other studies have shown that the smaller females especially are less able to withstand cold weather (Pr s-Jones 2002) but there is no evidence of this from the small sample of Woolston birds. Although the British Reed Bunting population is largely self-contained, a small number cross the Channel to the Channel Islands or France, and there may also be a few birds wintering here from Scandinavia (Pr s-Jones 2002); the ringed birds moving between Woolston and Suffolk hint at such an origin.

This article has concentrated on the winter habits of Reed Buntings, not least because overwinter survival has been suggested by demographic analyses to be the critical factor in Reed Buntings' lives, with the national decline in breeding population (1975-1985) driven by decreasing over-winter survival rates, particularly for the inexperienced first-year birds (Peach *et al.* 1999). The Woolston breeding population has fallen dramatically in the last thirty years. The species used to be included in most years of the mid-May Woolston warbler census; counts dropped from a mean of 103 singing males in the years 1983-1989, to 78 males in 1994-1997 and a mean of only 36 singing males during 2004-2006. This decline is not echoed in national surveys, however, and may mainly reflect the habitat progression at the Eyes.

We should also note that, although the numbers of Reed Buntings present in winter at the Eyes have probably increased since the 1980s, they are only a fraction of the numbers breeding and moving through the site on passage.

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RINGING AT PANDY, NEAR GLYN CEIRIOG, 2011-2012

By Nicola Edmonds

This report covers two years of ringing at Pandy. Together 2011 and 2012 bring the ringing grand total to 7866 birds, with only a few modest milestones passed. Of note were the 500th ringed Swallow and 150th Jackdaw, plus a new species for my list – a brood of six Treecreeper in an artificial nest site in 2011. Indeed these were the first pulli of this species to be ringed at Pandy, as the totals previously show only three fully grown birds which, I assume, were mist-netted by Andy.

Overall the 2011 season was a short one, as I was abroad for the first part leading to a frantic rush upon my return, which was dominated by nest box checks – and thus a considerable reduction in open nest finding. Consequently a total of only 74 nests of 11 species were recorded (c.f. 121 nests of 19 species in 2010), with 41 of those in boxes, and most of the rest from regularly used nest sites. Ringing totals came to 348 birds of eight species, of which 332 were pulli and 16 fully grown. By comparison, an earlier start to 2012 allowed more open nesting species to be sought out, and that plus a new site to explore brought figures up to 98 nests of 16 species recorded. However, with 2012 being the wettest UK summer since 1912, survival rates plummeted and many of these nests failed, being washed away or the eggs deserted, and chicks either chilled or starved to death. In the end 34 of the nests failed to fledge any young at all, and of the 497 eggs laid, only 377 hatched (76%) and 242 chicks fledged (64%), an egg/fledge survival of a mere 48%. Ringing totals were right down, and only reached a dismal 257 birds of 12 species, of which 235 were pulli and 22 fully grown. All ringing totals for both years can be seen in table 2.

2011 – a year of mystery, and mixed fortunes.

The recording for the year started at the end of May, right on the peak of the Great Tit nesting period. It was fortunate that none of these nests were missed; despite the warm spell during late March through April the first egg dates were not advanced this year, and the earliest was the 21st April (15th in 2010). The number of nests was quite low with only 20 pairs (see table 1), which is surprising as 2010 was a reasonably good year (31 pairs and 73% egg/fledge survival), and the boxes were not bunged. Brood sizes were also small, with an average of 6.5 eggs per nest (7.1 in 2010). However this gave the Great Tits an advantage, as smaller broods often see more young fledge than larger ones, and indeed this year there was an above average success rate of 79% (2005 to 2011 average is 72%).

Great Tits weren't the only ones to have a fair 2011 season. Blue Tits managed an above average egg/fledge survival of 76% (2005-2011 average is 57%), although the number of pairs continued to remain low, and two of the 11 nests recorded were not in nest boxes. Interestingly, the earliest first egg date this year was 23rd April, and not the traditional week after the Great Tits, although that nest eventually failed with seven dead young. On a brighter note, many of the nests contained larger than average clutches, and two had 10 eggs each, all of which survived to fledging. A further nest had 11 eggs, though only five chicks survived. Blue Tits normally have lower survival rates than the Great Tits, possibly because clutch sizes do tend to be larger (8.2 in 2011, and 8.7 in 2010) and therefore a higher proportion of chicks are often lost.

While the tits were having a better than normal year, the Pied Flycatchers suffered a disastrous season. Though brood sizes (7.6) and hatch rates (92%) were both good, a cool wet period in early June meant chick survival fell right down (see table 1), and only just over 50% managed to fledge – a pattern that occurred back in both 2005 and 2009, when rain hit the valley during the most vulnerable time for chick rearing. To make matters worse, only 10 pairs were recorded in all the boxes this year, worse than the previous record low in 2007 (11 pairs), which is very worrying. With Great Tit and Blue Tit nests also down in number, it cannot be attributed to lack of nest boxes available, and 2010 was not a particularly poor year either for breeding success. Why so few Pied Flycatchers returned to the valley is a mystery, particularly when other Pied Flycatcher sites at Prion and Glyn Arthur retained their numbers.

Table 1. Total counts and survival rates for Blue Tits, Great Tits and Pied Flycatchers for 2011 and 2012.

		Totals				Survival (%)		
		Nests	Eggs	Pulli	Fledged	Egg/pulli	Pulli/fledge	Egg/fledge
Blue Tit	2011	11	90	88	68	97.8	77.3	75.6
	2012	6	49	28	14	57.1	50.0	28.6
Great Tit	2011	20	131	120	103	91.6	85.8	78.6
	2012	28	150	107	36	71.3	33.6	24.0
Pied Flycatcher	2011	10	76	70	40	92.1	57.1	52.6
	2012	18	123	96	65	78.0	67.7	52.8

Mixed successes were seen in other species too. Only four of the accessible Jackdaw nests were active, which all had smallish clutch sizes (three eggs) but every one of the hatched young fledged. There were two other nests, both with four eggs, but the strange thing about both of these was that below one there was a dead adult (ringed as a nestling in 2007), and two dead adults found on the second nest, sat on the eggs. They appeared to have been dead for at least a few weeks, though what killed them was never discovered but it is strange that two separate nests were affected.

Poor health seemed to feature in a number of species this year. Signs of sickness in some of the failing Pied Flycatcher broods may or may not have been a result of lack of food. One of the Swallow nests made a much clearer case that something more than starvation was afoot: three chicks were found dead in the nest and, of the remaining two, one was wheezing – and found dead at the next visit (the remaining chick survived to fledge). This case highlights the importance of keeping good hygiene between visiting different nests, and after handling those Swallows the equipment used was washed and the cloth bags put to one side so as not to spread any disease to other birds.

Swallows weren't having the best of years overall, and in 20 nests recorded 89 eggs were laid, 74 hatched, but only 55 young fledged: an egg/fledge survival of 62%. There was a noticeable number of total nest failures too, some of which were predated, and a few where the nest had fallen – perhaps as a result of predation. A large number of dead fledgling/well grown chicks were found underneath or not far from nests, and I have to wonder if this was a result of poor health due to lack of food, or a sickness of some sort in the general bird population. Even with the Pied Flycatcher, Jackdaw and Swallow deaths considered together, either of these may be the case – and I will probably never know for certain.

There is little else to say about the 2011 season. There were no Dippers recorded as they had finished nesting by the time I started visiting the valley, and no Tawny Owls in the boxes, no Stock Doves found, and – to my concern – no Spotted Flycatchers seen at any of their normal sites. There wasn't a great deal of time for open nest finding, but there were two Pied Wagtail nests – the first for a while – although one was deserted at egg stage, plus a Chaffinch, and a couple of token records each of Wren and House Martin nests, which were all inaccessible but the heads of the young could be seen, confirming the nest was active.

2012 – good start to a bad year.

Unlike the previous year, nest recording began promptly in the first weeks of April, and signs that the season was off to an early start were everywhere. Dippers were on eggs at one site, and the handful of nest boxes checked had Great Tits in the first stages of laying, plus a Nuthatch female already sitting. This was all closely following a UK-wide drought, and expecting the summer of 2012 to follow on from this, hosepipe bans were by now being introduced by several water companies. Then everything changed: drought turned into floods, and what must have been only a week after that promising first visit the rain started, and didn't stop again all summer.

The substantial drop in ringing totals for 2012 is without a doubt largely due to an almost catastrophic nest failure in the Great Tit-occupied boxes. Whilst there was a fairly good number at 28 nesting pairs, clutch sizes were down to an average of 5.4 eggs, and total eggs laid only reached 150. Of these 107 hatched, with six nests completely deserted, and only 36 of the chicks actually fledged, giving an overall egg/fledge survival of an appallingly low 24% (see table 1). All the young died in ten of the nests, and losses were recorded in a further eight. Just one fledged all of its young. Growth rates were extremely slow, and so few Great Tit chicks made it beyond the hatchling stage that only 50 were actually ringed, quite a drop from over 150 ringed in the good year of 2010 – and even the 116 managed in 2011.

Blue Tits did no better. There were only six nests recorded, and one of these was in a natural site. Their overall egg/fledge survival rate was just above the Great Tits at 29%, but they also suffered heavy losses at the egg stage, with one notable nest of 14 eggs (the largest clutch I have personally seen) deserted – though it is unclear if this was due to the adults being in too poor condition to hatch the eggs, or if one of the pair was in fact predated.

After their meagre breeding success in 2011, the Pied Flycatchers were actually back up on number of pairs, with 18 nests recorded in the boxes. Their clutch sizes dipped to 6.8, and hatching rates were much lower than normal – though only one nest of eight eggs was actually deserted. Of 123 eggs laid, 96 hatched, and 65 young fledged, an egg/fledge survival of just 53% - as bad as the previous year. Compared to the Great Tits, however, only three nests were deserted at chick stage, but two were predated and this contributed to the overall decrease in survival. In fact, five nests fledged all the chicks in the nest (even if not all the eggs hatched), whilst the remaining few had some losses. All the 2011 and 2012 survival rates for the three species can be seen in table 1.

It wasn't just nest box species that were affected by the atrocious weather. The Jackdaw colony was struggling, and I have never seen the normally pot-bellied chicks looking so

thin. Typically survival rates are pretty high for Jackdaw nests, but this year was bad enough to see a dip and was only at 81% (egg/fledge). On the plus side, the help of several weather-resistant friends made it possible to access a record 12 nests, and ring the most Jackdaw chicks in my time at Pandy – 26 – and that despite clutch sizes being very low (2.7). Jackdaws can lay up to five eggs, and in a more favourable season I could have potentially doubled my total for the year!

Once again Swallows were not faring well. After the previous year pair numbers seemed to have dropped, plus I had temporarily lost access to a couple of sites. Overall only 13 nests were recorded, and 34 chicks ringed. They did a little better than the previous year though, with no sign of that sickness, and had a survival rate of just under 70%.

Elsewhere, those Dippers that had started early managed to fledge three young from four eggs, and the pair went on to have a second brood with the same outcome. No doubt for them the rain was a blessing – drought conditions lower the river levels in which they hunt for food, in some cases drying up entire feeding spots. Also if the river drops too low they may not breed at all, as they typically nest right over the water. Had the drought continued I doubt there would have been a second brood. There was one other nest at a less well-used site on one of the river's many smaller tributaries, but unfortunately this was abandoned at egg stage. The third site went unused.

This season I was granted access to a new site, one that I had intended to visit many years earlier but had never found the time. Having been told there were many birds to be found there, it was pleasing to find a Redstart nest (inaccessible), and two Pied Wagtail nests. The latter were interesting – the female had already begun incubating her second clutch whilst the male was feeding the young still in the first. The two nests were only about one or two metres apart, and seven young were fledged in total. Alas the Redstart nest was predated, but buoyed by it being my first since 2009 I went on to find two more – and both were accessible in wall cavities with removable bricks!

I managed to record a handful of other open nests from a range of species, including three Blackbirds, two Grey Wagtails, two Robins, a Chaffinch, and even a Pheasant. The Stock Doves had also returned, but there were no Tawny Owls – aside from one odd cold egg in a box, which didn't hatch. Unfortunately there was absolutely no sign of Spotted Flycatchers in the valley, and I worry I might never see them here again.

Not wanting to end the dismal year of 2012 on a down note, it was good to see Nuthatches reappear in the boxes, with two nests fledging 10 young. I successfully caught the females from both boxes, and I'm fairly sure one of them was nesting two boxes away in the previous year as they are territorial all year round. The males proved far too wary to catch – but perhaps next year if they return I can give it another go.

Acknowledgements

To my friends Leah, Alex, and Arjen, who braved the weather to help me safely access all those Jackdaw nests – for which I am very grateful. I also wish to thank all the landowners for their continued support, and for their offers of shelter and hot cuppas when I was looking half-drowned.

Table 2. Ringing totals for 2011 and 2012, and the Pandy grand total (1993-2012).

Species*	2011			2012			Grand total		
	Fledged	Pullus	Total	Fledged	Pullus	Total	Fledged	Pullus	Total
<i>Kestrel</i>							0	1	1
<i>Curlew</i>							0	2	2
<i>Stock Dove</i>					1	1	2	21	23
Tawny Owl							0	26	26
Swift							1	7	8
Great Spotted Woodpecker							10	0	10
Magpie							1	0	1
Jackdaw		11	11		26	26	0	169	169
Goldcrest							28	0	28
Blue Tit	4	82	86	1	18	19	471	946	1417
Great Tit	2	116	118	8	50	58	228	1491	1719
Coal Tit							43	13	56
Marsh Tit							3	0	3
Skylark							0	5	5
<i>Swallow</i>		59	59		34	34	3	548	551
<i>House Martin</i>							2	0	2
Long-tailed Tit							25	0	25
Wood Warbler							0	10	10
Chiffchaff							6	6	12
<i>Willow Warbler</i>							41	111	152
Blackcap							5	12	17
Garden Warbler							10	67	77
Lesser Whitethroat							1	0	1
<i>Whitethroat</i>							1	0	1
Nuthatch		6	6	2	11	13	27	55	82

Species*	2011			2012			Grand total		
	Fledged	Pullus	Total	Fledged	Pullus	Total	Fledged	Pullus	Total
Treecreeper		6	6				3	6	9
Wren							27	56	83
Dipper					6	6	12	153	165
Blackbird					8	8	23	158	181
Song Thrush							9	88	97
<i>Mistle Thrush</i>							3	10	13
Spotted Flycatcher							0	204	204
Robin							37	144	181
<i>Pied Flycatcher</i>	10	47	57	11	60	71	240	1396	1636
<i>Redstart</i>					6	6	1	109	110
<i>Whinchat</i>							0	63	63
<i>Dunnock</i>							27	58	85
House Sparrow							1	2	3
<i>Grey Wagtail</i>					7	7	11	148	159
Pied Wagtail		5	5		8	8	2	62	64
<i>Meadow Pipit</i>							0	13	13
Chaffinch							135	135	270
Greenfinch							32	8	40
Goldfinch							2	26	28
Siskin							4	0	4
Linnet							0	7	7
<i>Bullfinch</i>							7	28	35
Yellowhammer							2	16	18
TOTALS	16	332	348	22	235	257	1470	6380	7866

*Status of species: **Red-listed**; *amber listed*; green-listed.

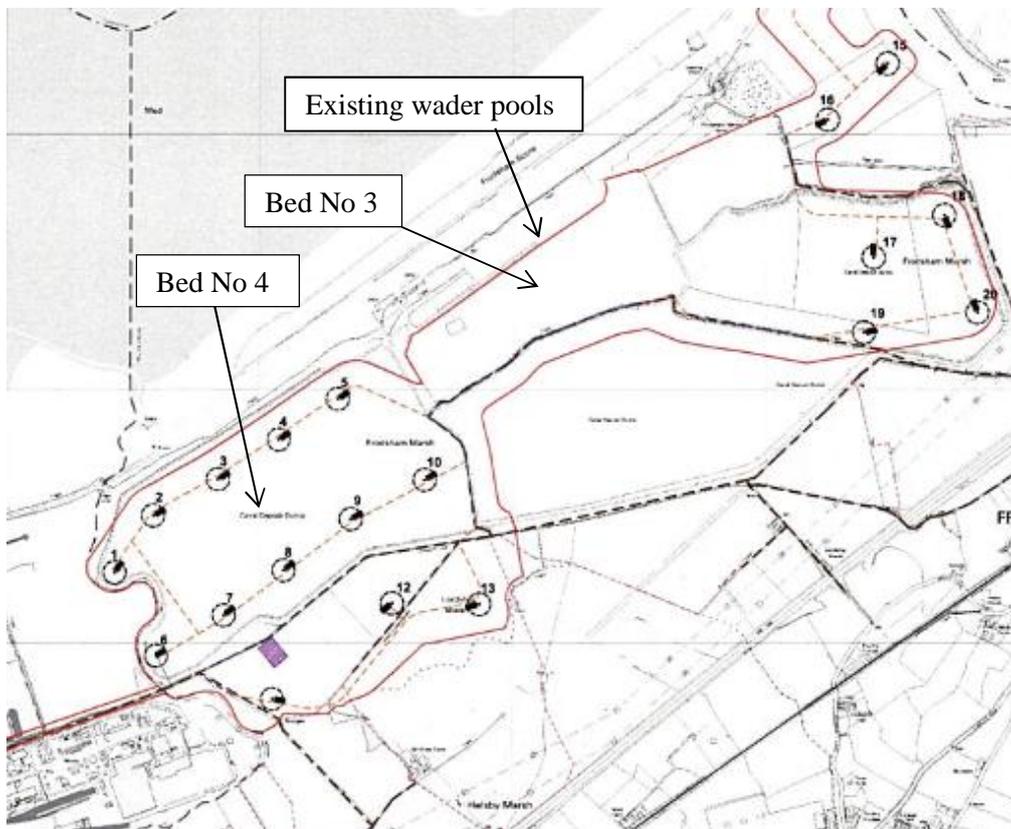
BIRD-RINGING AT FRODSHAM MARSH, 2012

Peter Coffey

Introduction

For several years an air of uncertainty has hung over Frodsham marsh because of the submission of a planning application for a wind farm at the site, with many rumours about what this might entail. The application was eventually approved in October 2012. Most bird-ringing in recent years has been concentrated on bed no.4 which will be the site for 10 turbines, each 125m high with turbine blades 90m in diameter. At first glance this may seem a horrifying prospect but ringing in the past at a number of ever-changing industrial sites has demonstrated that opportunities will be presented by the proposed regime.

No turbines will be erected in a central section of Frodsham marsh which is on the flight line for waders and wildfowl moving from the estuary to the flooded area of bed no.6 and the line of pits along the edge of the Manchester Ship Canal which include our recent night-time wader-ringing site. Conditions attached to the approval require, among many other matters, creation of wader scrapes on bed no.3 to increase the suitable habitat for them.



Extract from the approved plans showing position of turbines relative to beds no 3 and 4 and the pools used in recent years for MRG's wader-ringing.

(Original plans prepared by Scott Wilson Ltd)

On bed no.4, planning conditions include the prevention of the encroachment of dry scrubland into the existing reedbed, managing the reedbed habitat for the lifetime of the wind farm and protecting it from possible future agricultural activities during the lifetime (25 years) of the wind farm. This is potentially good news – the task of arresting the progress of scrub on such a large area is not to be underestimated and, as MRG has found at other sites, is hard to control once the process takes hold. My mist-netting glades are situated in the northeast sector of bed no.4. Glades at the interface between extensive *phragmites* stands and shrubs/small trees are

ideal for catching birds; the photograph below (left) shows an early morning catch of warblers. The scale of the habitat management required can be seen from the second photograph; in parts the scrub is quite dense and trees are more than 8m high. Some of the scrub will have to be removed when turbines are erected but a glance at aerial photographs demonstrates the extent of the scrub encroachment. The change in vegetation cover on bed no. 4 from dredging deposits to pioneer species to extensive reed bed to scrub invasion has been relatively rapid – all within my lifetime as a ringer at Frodsham marsh from the mid-1980s. Even more recently, the continued growth of trees within the last four years has led to the abandonment of an early glade. A habitat management plan to control scrub encroachment will be welcome.



A mist-net glade (left) and dry scrub along the northern side of bed no.4 (Photos: P Coffey).

Under the management programme, habitats and species will be monitored annually for the first five years then every five years after that. Let's hope MRG can contribute useful ringing data and habitat advice to this monitoring. To provide context for future monitoring, this report comments on ringing activity in 2012 and looks at the overall picture over the years 2010-12.

Ringing in 2012

Between May –July David Norman usually searches for a variety of nesting birds but changed vehicular access arrangements meant he was unable to search in his usual places, and his sole contribution to the ringing totals was a female Greenland Wheatear that succumbed to the delights of a mealworm in a spring trap on 22 May. She was fat (ESF score of 4) and probably able to make it to Iceland.

The same pair of Marsh Harriers again nested but much farther away from the usual vantage points so the nest was not located. The birds behaved differently from 2010 and 2011 – they were much more wary and there were signs of human disturbance around the bed. At least one published photograph appeared to have been taken from much closer to their nesting area than it should have been. One chick fledged on 9 July, earlier again than in previous years.

Wader-catching on the new moon high tides in July and August is usually one of the highlights but not in 2012. The usual pool, which had been perfect in 2010 and dry in 2011, was about one metre deep in water, with Mute Swans up-ending and not touching the bottom!

It was even wet enough for standing water in some of the glades on bed no.4 but not enough to restrict ringing. I worked the bed on 14 occasions between 26th July and 27th September using a maximum of eight nets. It was reasonably successful – 592 birds handled of 24 species compared to 557 in 2011 and 691 in 2010. The quality of the catch was, as usual, high with warblers accounting for 82% of birds caught. Nine species of warbler included 144 Reed Warblers, 87 Chiffchaffs, 83 Whitethroats, 60 Sedge Warblers, 54 Blackcaps, 44 Willow Warblers, 5 Garden Warblers, 3 Grasshopper Warblers and one Lesser Whitethroat. The last Grasshopper Warbler was caught on 8th September, later than in previous years. Chiffchaff numbers were the highest for several years (70 in 2010, 57 in 2011) and Blackcap numbers continued to increase (27 in 2010, 36 in 2011) but Whitethroat numbers were down, perhaps not

surprisingly after the excellent numbers in 2011 (104). Other birds included a female Redstart on 26th August, and a juvenile Lesser Redpoll on 22nd and 22 Reed Buntings on 27th September.

Frodsham marsh is a good site for Sedge Warblers, with the ratio of Reed Warblers to Sedge Warblers usually about 2:1. This year that ratio is 2.4:1, probably reflecting the poor early season breeding success. In the first two catches at the end of July, numbers of adults to juveniles were 5:5 for Sedge Warbler and 5:7 for Reed Warbler, in both cases showing remarkably low numbers of juveniles for this stage of the season. Sedge Warblers are less likely to raise late broods than Reed Warblers, and by the end of the season the ratio of adults: juveniles were 1:4 (12:48) and 1:9.3 (14:130) respectively.

Late breeding attempts were not restricted to Reed Warblers; Chiffchaff and Whitethroat caught on 8th September were aged as 3JJs. A male Willow Warbler was still happily singing his song from a patch of scrub into September; two birds, an adult female and a juvenile, were caught approximately 50m from the male's territory on 13th September but it is unlikely they were part of a recent breeding attempt because the female's brood patch was in an advanced stage of feathering over and she was carrying fat. The capture of a Willow Warbler as late as 13th September is indicative of the poor early breeding season leaving birds either to abandon breeding for the year or to try for a second brood and risk delaying their migration.

Table 1: Summary of birds caught at Frodsham Marsh in 2012

Species	New Birds		Controls/ Retraps**	Totals
	Full-grown	Pullus		
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1			1
Jay	1			1
Magpie	1			1
Goldcrest	2			2
Long-tailed Tit	9			9
Blue Tit	10		2	12
Great Tit	4		1	5
Chiffchaff	87			87
Willow Warbler	44			44
Blackcap	54			54
Garden Warbler	5			5
Lesser Whitethroat	1			1
Whitethroat	83			83
Grasshopper Warbler	3			3
Sedge Warbler	59		1	60
Reed Warbler	141		3	144
Wren	24		2	26
Robin	21			21
Redstart	1			1
Wheatear	1			1
Dunnock	3			3
Chaffinch	2			2
Goldfinch	3			3
Lesser Redpoll	1			1
Reed Bunting	22		1	23
Totals (24 species)	583	0	10	593

** Controls are birds ringed elsewhere and caught at Frodsham; retraps are birds ringed at Frodsham and later caught there again. Only retrapped birds ringed in previous years are included in this analysis.

Summary of ringing 2010 – 2012

The three years provide interesting comparisons: 2010 was a good year with benign weather conditions favouring nesting birds and high tide wader roosts; 2011 was a dry year, poor for wader roosting but generally favourable for nesting birds; and 2012 was a very wet year, poor for both chick survival and wader roosts.

Wader ringing at new moon high tide roosts always has been a hit-and-miss affair: the water level in the pools must be neither too high nor too low and when it is at the right level, the weather has to be suitable for ringing over the narrow window of a few nights when tides are at their highest. Two successful catches in 2010 yielded a total of 80 waders of nine species and a bonus Little Grebe, only the 17th ringed by MRG. The waders included 46 Dunlin of the *schinzii* race putting on fat to fuel their journey to Africa, 17 Redshanks most of which were moulting adults of the Icelandic-breeding race but including a bird ringed as a chick at Carnforth, Lancashire in 2006, two Little Ringed Plover, six Ringed Plover, two Snipe, three Lapwing, two Common Sandpiper, a juvenile Greenshank and an adult male Black-tailed Godwit of the Icelandic-breeding population that was in moult. This list gives a tantalising glimpse of the value of these small unspectacular pools. Unfortunately natural conditions prevented any wader ringing in 2011 and 2012 but there is nothing in the approved wind farm scheme that should prevent ringing there in years to come. Indeed, the wader scrapes to be created on bed no.3 should provide new opportunities to mist-net waders and we would hope to increase the information we gather on these species, perhaps extending the dates which at present are limited to avoid the wildfowl shooting seasons.



Little Grebe (left) and Black-tailed Godwit caught at night at Frodsham pools on 12th August 2010 (Photos: D Norman)

Pulli ringing for ground-nesting species in the open spaces at Frodsham marsh requires considerable effort, patience and access. David Norman has achieved considerable success over many years but more recently the trend of declining breeding populations of Lapwing and Skylark has reduced the number of pulli ringed. A total of just thirty pulli of six species were ringed in 2010-11 and two of those were tree-nesting Buzzard chicks. No pulli were ringed in 2012 because new access arrangements restricted David's ability to drive into breeding areas and use his car as a hide. A hard task becomes much harder! It is not expected that the development of the wind farm will have an impact on many of the nesting birds; restricted access is likely to be a bigger problem.

Ringing effort on bed no. 4 is shown in Table 2. The ringing period each year is reasonably consistent; other commitments have restricted the opportunity for earlier visits and the end date is determined by the start of the Pheasant shooting season (1st October). Poor weather prevented visits for several periods each year and on 28-30th September for two of the three years.

Table 2: Ringing effort and outcomes for mist-netting activity on bed no.4

	2010	2011	2012
Ringing period	23/7 – 27/9	27/7 – 30/9	26/7 – 27/9
Number of visits	13	15	14
Number of nets (maximum)	7	11	8
Average net length(m) x hours per visit	660	825	668
Number of birds caught	691	557	593
Number of species	20	24	24

The measure of ringing effort – average net length (metres) multiplied by duration (hours) of mist-netting per visit – is almost identical in 2010 and 2012 but 24% higher in 2011, the year in which the lowest number of birds were caught! This apparent inconsistency resulted from two different elements. Firstly an early start to the 2011 breeding season after a warm and dry April, combined with a slightly later start to mist-netting meant that juveniles from first broods had already started to disperse. Also the relative lack of Plum Reed Aphid on the *phragmites* later in the season may have discouraged local birds and migrants passing through from spending much time on the bed. Secondly several new glades were opened but proved to be less productive than anticipated and were not used in 2012.

Warblers consistently make up the major component of catches on the bed, 79% on average (84% in 2010, 69% in 2011 and 82% in 2012). Nine species have been caught each year, with Reed Warbler (505) the most numerous followed by Whitethroat (249) and Sedge Warbler (237). The different species show varying patterns, with three having highest totals in 2010, two in 2011 and four in 2012 but the total number of warblers caught each year, despite the variations in local weather conditions and food supply, demonstrates the value of the site.

Table 3 shows the number of warblers and other selected species handled each year split between adult and juvenile birds; “adult” includes birds ringed in earlier years and all within-year retraps are excluded.

Table 3: Number of adult and juvenile birds of selected species caught in 2010-2012

	2010			2011			2012		
	Adult	Juv	Total	Adult	Juv	Total	Adult	Juv	Total
Chiffchaff	12	58	70	11	47	58	10	77	87
Willow Warbler	5	36	41	9	14	23	18	26	44
Blackcap	0	27	27	5	31	36	10	44	54
Garden Warbler	1	5	6	2	2	4	2	3	5
Lesser Whitethroat	0	1	1	1	2	3	0	1	1
Whitethroat	3	59	62	6	98	104	3	80	83
Grasshopper Warbler	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	3	3
Sedge Warbler	11	115	126	6	45	51	12	48	60
Reed Warbler	47	207	254	1	72	73	14	130	144
<i>Warblers Sub-total</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>509</i>	<i>588</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>312</i>	<i>353</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>412</i>	<i>481</i>
Wren	2	17	19	2	30	32	4	22	26
Robin	2	8	10	2	9	11	3	18	21
Reed Bunting	5	8	13	39	35	74	16	7	23

For Sedge Warblers the ratio of adult to juvenile varies from 1:10 to 1:7.5 to 1:4 for 2010, 2011 and 2012 respectively. The ratios for Reed Warblers are 1:4.5, 1:7.2 and 1:9.3 respectively but the 2010 ratio may be slightly anomalous because of the large number of adult birds (26) caught on the first visit. The number of adult *Sylvia* Warblers caught each year is consistently low whilst significant numbers of moulting adult *Phylloscopus* warblers are caught each year.

Wrens and Robins are caught in modest numbers each year. The ratio of adult to juvenile Wrens was lowest in 2012 (1:5.5) whilst Robins appear to have had a better year numerically in 2012 with as many birds in that year as the previous two combined, although the adult to juvenile ratio is reasonably consistent across all years.

Reed Buntings account for 6% of the total catch but this is an underestimate of the potential for this species. They breed on No 4 bed but few juveniles, breeding adults or post-breeding moulting adults are caught in July-late September. The autumn passage begins in the last week of September with more adults than juveniles caught in each of the last two years. The migration carries through into October but to date all ringing has stopped on 30th September as the Pheasant shooting season over the bed starts. When the wind farm is developed, shooting will cease so further ringing in October should allow coverage of the full autumn passage.

The number of finches caught on bed no.4 is very low considering the large population of Goldfinches, and to a lesser extent Linnets and occasional Redpolls, but the absence of shallow wet areas where they can drink reduces the prospect of higher catches. Maybe the habitat management scheme could address this issue.



Juvenile Sedge Warbler (Photo: P Coffey)

Finally it is worth noting some of the interesting controls from the last three years. Sedge Warblers caught at Frodsham had been ringed at Icklesham, West Sussex and Gloucestershire. Frodsham-ringed birds travelled 701 km to the Loire-Atlantique region of France (in just 9 days in August 2010) and 1162 km to Spain. A Reed Warbler from Frodsham was controlled one year later in Dordogne, France (941 km) and another Reed Warbler ringed at Leighton Moss, Lancashire was caught at Frodsham 19 days later.

Two Chiffchaff flew from Frodsham to Portland Bill, Dorset (310 km) and Icklesham (355 km) in 35 and 24 days respectively. Other local movements in the Mersey valley and Wirral areas were reported. The saddest recovery was a Whitethroat ringed at Frodsham in August 2011 that successfully migrated to Africa and back only to be killed by a cat in Woolton, Liverpool in May 2012.

Ringing totals for all areas of Frodsham Marsh between 2010 and 2012 are shown below in table 4.

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Table 4: Ringing totals at Frodsham marsh 2010-2012

Species	2010		2011		2012		Total	
	New	C/R	New	C/R	New	C/R	New	C/R
Little Grebe	1						1	
Marsh Harrier	3		2				5	
Buzzard			2				2	
Oystercatcher			1				1	
Little Ringed Plover	2						2	
Ringed Plover	6						6	
Lapwing	12						12	
Dunlin	46						46	
Snipe	2						2	
Black-tailed Godwit	1						1	
Common Sandpiper	2						2	
Greenshank	1						1	
Redshank	16	1					16	1
Great Spotted W'pecker					1		1	
Jay	1		2		1		4	
Magpie					1		1	
Goldcrest			1		2		3	
Blue Tit	18	1	14	4	10	2	42	7
Great Tit	4	2	12		4	1	20	3
Skylark	1						1	
Swallow			1				1	
Long-tailed Tit	2	6			9		11	6
Chiffchaff	70		57	1	87		214	1
Willow Warbler	41		23		44		108	
Blackcap	27		36		54		117	
Garden Warbler	6		4		5		15	
Lesser Whitethroat	1		3		1		5	
Whitethroat	62		104		83		249	
Grasshopper Warbler	1		1		3		5	
Sedge Warbler	125	1	51		59	1	235	2
Reed Warbler	249	5	106	1	141	3	496	9
Treecreeper	1						1	
Wren	19		30		24	2	73	2
Blackbird			3				3	
Song Thrush			2				2	
Robin	10		9		21		40	
Redstart			1		1		2	
Wheatear					1		1	
Dunnock			3		3		6	
Meadow Pipit	4		8				12	
Chaffinch	2		4		2		8	
Goldfinch	23		9		3		35	
Linnet	1		1				2	
Lesser Redpoll					1		1	
Reed Bunting	13		74		22	1	109	1
Totals (species)	773	16	564	6	583	10	1920	32

C/R = Controls and retraps including birds ringed at Frodsham in earlier years.

WOOLSTON EYES RINGING REPORT 2012

Michael Miles*

*On behalf of the ringing team (Jason Atkinson, John Blundell, Kieran Foster, Michael Miles, Hugh Pulsford, Margaret Rawlins, Dave Riley, Lisa Warvill and occasional help on No. 1 bed from Sam Bayley and Stephen Menzie.)

Ringling operations in 2012 were carried out in two areas of the Reserve: the east end of No. 1 bed and the centre of No. 3 bed. The grand total of 4,268 birds of 53 species newly-ringed across the Reserve was an 18% decrease on the 5,215 birds of 50 species ringed in 2011 and 26% below the 10 year average of 5,784. This decrease of 947 birds is a reflection of the very poor breeding season suffered by a number of species and especially the warblers that are such a feature of Woolston. Ringling effort has been calculated as “number of ringling sessions” and was comparable to 2011 although adverse weather will have restricted the numbers of nets deployed at some sessions.

Just two species were ringed in record numbers: Mallard and Tree Pipit. The 13 Mallards ringed should be considered in the context of just 35 ringed in 33 years of ringling at Woolston. It is noteworthy that three of these birds have been reported as shot locally to Woolston. There are plans to increase the number of wildfowl ringed at The Eyes and it will be interesting to see the impact of shooting on other species. The five Tree Pipits ringed brings the 33 year total to 25, 15 of these in the last five years. These birds are trapped principally during autumn migration; regular ringling on No. 1 bed, where the habitat is more attractive to pipits in general, has increased catches in recent years.

After just a single Sparrowhawk ringed in 2011 the four birds, two on each bed, ringed in 2012 was more representative of recent years. Year-on-year changes in numbers caught tell us little about the population at Woolston because catching Sparrowhawks is somewhat opportunistic as they fly into nets set for other species. The adult male Kestrel caught on No. 3 bed was the first from that bed since 2002. After two blank years four Water Rails were ringed. With more trapping effort on No. 3 bed catches of Moorhens improved with eight new birds ringed and the juvenile Coot trapped on 3rd November was just the 23rd in 33 years. No Kingfishers were ringed, the first blank year since 2004. Just one Kingfisher was ringed in 2011 and the local population must be reflecting the effects of recent harsh winters.

The 136 Goldcrests ringed represented the best total since 2005. Of this total 122 were ringed in the three months of September, October and November and include winter immigrants from the continent. Willow Tits had another good year with 37 new birds ringed, the same as in 2011; the ten year average is 33. Blue Tits and Great Tits had a good season in the nest boxes on No. 3 bed with no repeat of the widespread predation of 2011. However, overall numbers ringed were below 2011 levels. It should be born in mind that 2009, 2010 and 2011 were exceptional years for these species and the 2012 totals are in line with ten year averages up to 2007.

One of the more notable catches of 2012 took place on 17th May when atmospheric conditions brought a flock of Swifts very low over No. 3 bed and Kieran Foster used a flick net to catch 33, the third highest annual total at Woolston and the first since 2008. Although the usual roost of several hundred hirundines formed on No. 3 bed over the late summer and early autumn, weather conditions, particularly the amount of wind, hampered attempts to catch them. As a result the modest catch of a single Sand Martin and 105 Swallows compares poorly with the ten-year average of 46 and 428 respectively.

Catches of Long-tailed Tits were exactly the same as in 2011 the 87 birds ringed being half the ten-year average. For the second year running there was an absence of the large family parties sometimes encountered in the summer and autumn. No Cetti's Warblers were trapped in 2012, the first blank year since 2005.

Many warblers had a very poor breeding season and suffered a veritable “perfect storm” of adverse weather related impacts. Northerly migration was impeded by storms around the Mediterranean and adverse winds on the continent such that adults of most warbler species arrived back on breeding territory later than normal. High rainfall then washed out many nesting attempts and chicks perished through cold, wet and lack of food. This sorry story was reflected in the numbers ringed at Woolston. Catches of Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers were lower than in 2011 and below their respective ten-year averages. The short-distance migrant Chiffchaffs, wintering around the Mediterranean, appeared slightly less affected than the trans-Saharan migrant Willow Warblers. Whitethroats were also badly impacted with the 94 birds ringed being the lowest total since 2008 and comparing to a ten-year average of 174. Garden Warblers and Blackcaps appeared to be less severely affected. The 33 Garden Warblers ringed was close to the ten year average of 36 although well down on the 50 birds ringed in 2011. Similarly for Blackcap, the 462 birds ringed compared to a ten-year average of 494 although over 600 were ringed in both 2010 and 2011.

No Grasshopper Warblers were ringed on No. 1 bed and the four birds ringed on No. 3 bed represented the lowest Woolston total since 2008. We have to go back to 1986, when David Norman was the only qualified ringer operating at Woolston, to find a year when fewer Sedge Warblers were ringed than the 44 birds in 2012. The ten-year average is 131. The story for Reed Warblers is similar with 334 birds ringed compared with a ten-year average of 573. On No. 3 bed the first juvenile was ringed on 7th July compared to 4th June in 2011. Adults delayed autumn migration in an attempt to fledge late broods and salvage something from the breeding season and this may have compromised their capacity to make a successful southerly migration.

The resident insectivores had a breeding season much in line with 2011. Early broods failed in the adverse weather but some recovery was made with later replacement broods. The longer-term trend appears negative, particularly in the case of Wrens. The five year average ringed up to 2007 was 245 whereas the equivalent figure for the five years to 2012 is 160, a fall of 35%. Comparing the same two periods, totals ringed for all birds have declined by just 16%. The decline for Robins is 16% and for Dunnocks 24%. There is an effect from reduced ringing effort but it must also be the case that Wrens in particular have suffered in the recent harsh winters. Blackbirds had a reasonable breeding season with 84 new birds ringed comparing with a ten year average of 88. Bucking all trends, the 64 new Song Thrushes ringed was the third highest total in 33 years and compared to a ten-year average of 49.

Catches of Reed Buntings were the lowest since 2008 and before that 1996. The first juvenile on No. 3 bed was ringed on 2nd August whereas the equivalent date in 2011 was 26th June and it seems probably that early nesting attempts failed as a result of the adverse weather.

No new species were added to the Reserve’s ringing list in 2012 so the number of species ringed remains at 103. Individual species milestones included the 9,000th Reed Warbler, the 8,000th Blackcap, the 100th Coal Tit, the 4,000th Chaffinch and the 2,000th Bullfinch.

No. 1 bed

Ringing took place on most weekends along the south side and around the east end of No. 1 bed. In addition, Dave Riley’s retirement allowed him to increase the amount of weekday ringing. As a result, the 1643 birds ringed in 2012 represent just a 5% decrease on the 1724 birds ringed in 2011. In a poor year this is a good result when compared to the 25% reduction on No. 3 bed where ringing effort was broadly constant.

Two Sparrowhawks were caught, both first year males and both in August. A first year female Water Rail, flushed into a mist net at the feeding station on 19th October, was the first caught on the bed since 2008 and the only rail species caught in 2012. For the second year in succession there were no Green Woodpeckers caught on the bed. Seven Great Spotted Woodpeckers were ringed and three retrapped that had all been ringed in 2011.

Corvids were represented by four Jays, all adults. It was the third best year on record for Goldcrests with 85 new birds ringed. None of these 85 birds was caught again after ringing implying that most were moving through the site. The distribution of these catches may give an indication of the origin of the birds. Five birds were caught in spring and four presumed local juveniles were caught between 14th June and 25th July. A very strong autumn movement



First-year male Firecrest (Photo: D Riley)

produced 76 birds between 1st September and 24th November and this will probably have included both British and continental birds. A female Goldcrest, originally ringed on 15th October 2011, was retrapped exactly one year later on 14th October. A first year male Firecrest, the first to be caught at Woolston since 2009, was trapped and ringed on 21st October.

Willow Tits continue to do well with 19 new birds ringed and seven retrapped from previous years with the oldest originally ringed on 28th July 2006. Coal Tits continue their colonisation of Woolston and seven new birds were ringed during the year. Only 90 new Blue Tits were ringed, the third lowest total since 1995. A further 59 birds were retrapped from previous years, the oldest having been ringed on 29th September 2007. This compares with 63 Blue Tits retrapped in 2011 and implies a stable population of adult birds around the bed but a poor breeding season. This is in contrast to the experience from the boxes on No. 3 bed. Great Tits were again caught in average numbers with 79 new birds ringed and 55 retrapped from previous years, the oldest from 3rd June 2005.

No significant roost of hirundines formed on the bed with the result that no Sand Martins and just six Swallows were ringed. The 39 Long-tailed Tits ringed was the second lowest total since 1995. Catches were again down on No. 3 bed and it appears that this species had a second poor breeding season in succession. Only 18 first-year birds were caught on the bed during the year. Eleven birds were retrapped from previous years with the oldest having been ringed on 10th August 2007.

Chiffchaffs appeared to have a reasonable year. The 197 new birds ringed was an improvement on 161 in 2011. Ten birds were retrapped from previous years plus one originally ringed on No. 3 bed and two ringed elsewhere in the U.K. Willow Warblers were also caught in fair numbers with 126 new birds ringed. Six birds were retrapped from previous years, the oldest from 31st July 2009. Just six Garden Warblers were caught, the worst year since 2002. Blackcaps, like Chiffchaffs relatively short-distance migrants, appeared to have fared rather better and 112 new

birds ringed compared reasonably with the five year average of 128. No birds were retrapped from previous years. After a blank year in 2011 a single Lesser Whitethroat was caught on the bed. The 12 Common Whitethroats caught represents the lowest total since 1995 with the second worst total being the 49 in 2011.

As has been noted elsewhere *Acrocephalus* warblers had a very poor breeding season and on this bed reduced ringing effort in the reed beds has also led to reduced catches. No Grasshopper Warblers were caught this year, the first blank year since 2004, and the 19 Sedge Warblers ringed was the second lowest total on record after 18 in 2011. Just two adult females were caught in breeding condition and, for the second year running, no birds from previous years were retrapped. Only 77 new Reed Warblers were ringed, this species being found primarily in the reed beds until post-natal dispersal of juveniles. Nine retraps from previous years included one ringed on 26th July 2008. In addition two birds were retrapped that had originally been ringed on No. 3 bed. Eighteen adults were caught in breeding condition, nine of each sex.

Just two new Treecreepers were ringed, both juveniles. The 41 Wrens ringed was the lowest total since 1995 and the cumulative impact of harsh winters is the probable cause of this reduced catch. Robins were caught in more typical numbers with 69 new Robins. Amongst the six retrapped Robins was one ringed as a nestling on 5th June 2010. Just 22 blackbirds were ringed, 25% below the average of previous years although this species was caught in good numbers on No. 3 bed. This is the second year in succession that catches of Blackbirds have differed markedly on the two beds for reasons at present unclear. Although 15 birds were caught in breeding condition only two juveniles were caught, the first on the late date of 3rd August. This might imply that Blackbirds had a particularly poor breeding season on this bed. Catches of Song Thrushes improved from the low point in 2011 with 18 birds ringed but no birds were retrapped from previous years. As with Blackbirds, although 13 birds were caught in breeding condition only three juvenile birds were caught. Three Redwings ringed constituted a typical catch. Twenty-four new Dunnocks and three retraps from previous years, the oldest from 16th February 2008, were typical numbers.

After a blank year in 2011 a record five Tree Pipits were ringed. For the second year running the dispersal of juvenile Meadow Pipits was well sampled with 19 birds ringed of which only three were adults.

With the exception of the breeding season, the feeding station was in use and as a consequence catches of Chaffinches recovered from the low of 2011 with 62 new birds ringed. Five Bramblings were ringed, all in the second winter period. The greater use of the feeding station was reflected in the catch of 294 new Greenfinches. Eighteen Greenfinches were retrapped and 13 of these had originally been ringed on No. 3 bed. It was a second poor year for Goldfinches with six birds ringed after just five in 2011. In contrast the 11 Siskins ringed constituted a record although it must be born in mind that there is an element of chance in catches of irruptive species like Siskin. Linnet numbers were again low with just four free-flying birds and three nestlings ringed. It was a poor year for Lesser Redpolls with one bird ringed in January and four on spring passage. Twenty-three birds were ringed during autumn between 15th September and 18th November. One of the birds ringed in March was retrapped in November. Bullfinches enjoyed yet another good year with 76 new birds ringed. As late breeders Bullfinches may well have escaped the worst of the poor weather in early summer. A further 14 were retrapped from previous years with the oldest having been ringed on 5th April 2008. Two of these had originally been ringed on No. 3 bed.

Reed Buntings had another poor year with just 64 new birds ringed. Catches were better on No. 3 bed where the sacrificial crop is believed to attract this species in late autumn and early winter. A further 23 birds were retrapped from previous years with one from 20th April 2007 being the oldest.

No. 3 bed

In the centre of No. 3 bed the 2,625 new birds ringed in 2012 was a decrease of 25% from the total of 3,491 ringed in 2011.

The construction of a new “portable” (just about) duck trap has greatly improved the efficiency of trapping and this has been demonstrated by increased catches of rails and wildfowl. A record 13 Mallards were trapped, five ducks and eight drakes. Three of these birds have subsequently been shot locally. Two juvenile male Sparrowhawks were ringed, one on 18th August and the other on 11th December. The undoubted raptor highlight was the handsome adult male Kestrel caught on 2nd June, the first on the bed since 2002. After two blank years, the result of low trapping effort, three Water Rails were ringed together with eight Moorhens, all juveniles, and a female Coot. Taken together these 13 rails represent the best year since 2009 and a return to a more normal level of trapping.

No Jack Snipes were caught in 2012, the first blank year since 2008. A roost of up to 30 Common Snipes built up in the second winter period in front of the Frank Linley hide and three were netted at dawn on 27th October. One of these birds was retrapped on 10th November. After a blank year in 2011 the recent run of Stock Dove catches resumed with two adult males caught at the feeders on 11th and 12th May respectively. Seven of the nine Stock Doves caught on the bed in recent years have been caught at the feeders between mid-May and mid-June. Woodpigeon is another species that scavenges under the feeders and the two nets placed there accounted for all the six Woodpigeons caught this year. All of these birds were adults.

For the third year in succession Tawny Owl was caught. A new adult female was ringed and the adult female ringed last year was retrapped but no evidence of breeding was found. Very occasionally atmospheric conditions will be such that Swifts fly very low in a location suitable for “flick-netting”. Such conditions prevailed on 17th May and Kieran Foster took advantage of them to catch 33 Swifts, the first caught at Woolston since 2008. There were 33 captures of Great Spotted Woodpeckers during the year, mainly at the feeders. Ten new birds were ringed, seven of them juveniles. One bird was trapped on seven occasions during the year.

Seventeen new Jays were ringed, the second best year ever. Twelve of these birds were juveniles. Four Jays were retrapped from previous years, the oldest from 2008. Two juvenile Magpies were caught in June. The average of recent years is four. It is worth repeating again that this species is common on the bed but difficult to catch because of their size and intelligence. As an indication of this, the No. 3 bed database contains details of 93 Magpies ringed and only four of these birds have been retrapped. Two were retrapped once and not encountered again, a third was retrapped in 2009 and then again in 2012 and the fourth, not the sharpest knife in the drawer, was retrapped twice, just three days apart, in 2009. A Carrion Crow was caught by hand in the dark during heavy rain on 26th August. After being dried and warmed it was ringed and released. This is the first of this species ringed at Woolston since 1990 and the first fledged bird to be ringed on No. 3 bed.

Goldcrests were caught in good numbers with 51 new birds ringed. Three were caught in the first winter period and the other 48 between 13th September and 15th December when Woolston enjoys a passage of Goldcrests from elsewhere in the U.K and from the continent. There were no recently fledged juveniles caught this year. It was the third blank year in a row for Firecrest.

Tits had a reasonable year. Eighteen new Willow Tits were ringed and although this is below 2011 and the record year in 2010, fifteen of these were juveniles implying two or perhaps three successful broods on the bed. Five adults were retrapped from previous years, the oldest having been ringed as a juvenile on 24th August 2007. In addition an adult originally ringed on No. 1 bed has been trapped on No. 3 bed 17 times since 22nd August 2009. Three new Coal Tits were ringed, all juveniles. Blue Tits and Great Tits were caught in average numbers and the nest boxes did well with no recurrence of the predation that had such an impact in 2011. Of the 168 new Blue Tits ringed 56 were ringed as pulli in the nest boxes. Thirty-three Blue Tits were retrapped from previous years, the oldest being ringed on 23rd December 2006 and encountered

just twice since. Three pulli from the nest boxes were retrapped. This low figure is typical. Once Blue Tits leave the nest boxes we rarely encounter them again and how they disperse is not well understood. A total of 170 Great Tits ringed included 85 pulli, an improvement from 55 pulli in 2011. Twenty of these pulli were subsequently retrapped. It is typical that a significantly larger proportion of fledged Great Tits remain on the bed than do Blue Tits. Sixty Five different adult Great Tits were retrapped, the oldest from 2009.

As in recent years a mixed roost of several hundred Swallows and Sand Martins formed in late summer. However, the weather was not kind and on several evenings it was too windy to set nets in the exposed position in the reed bed. As a result just three roost catches were made compared with nine in 2011. The resulting catch of a single Sand Martin was the lowest total since the blank year in 1991 and the 99 Swallows trapped was the lowest since 2009.

No Cetti's Warblers were ringed, the first blank year since 2008 and possibly a reflection of a poor breeding season in areas to the south and east of Woolston. Long-tailed Tits appeared to have another poor breeding season with just 51 ringed and an absence of large family parties. Nineteen Long-tailed Tits were retrapped, the oldest having been ringed as a juvenile on 26th May 2007 and retrapped 32 times up to the end of 2012.

Comment has already been made concerning the poor breeding season suffered by some of our warbler species. This is starkly illustrated by the comparison that in 2012 just 903 new warblers of nine species were ringed compared with 1,463 new birds of ten species in 2011. This is a decline of 38%. Although well below the record catch of 2011 the 114 new Chiffchaffs ringed reflected a better performance than some other warbler species and compared with a nine year average of 141. The dates of arrival and first juvenile were typical. The picture is the same for Willow Warbler with 43 new birds ringed, below recent years but in line with the nine year average of 41. The first juvenile was ringed on 14th July, the latest date in the last nine years.

Garden Warblers fared well with 27 new birds ringed and the first juvenile ringed on 14th July, a typical date. A juvenile ringed on the bed on 4th August was retrapped in south-west France just 17 days later. Although below the record years of 2010 and 2011, the 350 new Blackcaps ringed indicate that this short-distance migrant fared better than some species that had crossed the Sahara Desert. Early and late dates can be complicated by overwintering birds but the first bird considered to be a migrant was trapped on 24th March, the earliest date in the last nine years and the first juvenile ringed on 2nd June, the equal earliest date in the same period. Blackcaps nest in deep cover and their nests would be less exposed to wind and rain than the warblers nesting in the reed beds. On 13th October a bird wearing a German ring was caught, the first foreign-ringed Blackcap to be caught on the bed. It was ringed at Helgoland in April 2012.

Just a single juvenile Lesser Whitethroat was ringed on 11th August. This is the rarest *Sylvia* warbler at Woolston the best recent year of which has not exceeded four birds ringed on the bed. After two exceptional years a more typical 82 new Whitethroats were ringed. A comparison with years prior to 2010 is complicated by the improvement in habitat resulting from management work. The first returning bird was caught on 12th May, the latest date in the last nine years and the first juvenile was not caught until 30th June, again the latest date in the same period. Twenty six birds were caught in breeding condition. These dates point to a difficult breeding season in common with other warbler species.

Four Grasshopper Warblers were handled during the year, all new birds and all adults. Although no juveniles were trapped, a male and a female with an active brood patch were trapped in the same net at different times on 14th July and it seems probable that breeding took place although it is unclear whether any young fledged. Just 25 new Sedge Warblers were ringed, the lowest total in recent times with the exception of 2005 when no ringing took place in the reed beds. Just three of these birds were females with active brood patches. The first bird was caught on 12th May, the latest date in recent years, and the last on 22nd September, the second latest date since 2004. The picture painted is of adults returning late and in small numbers and remaining late into the autumn in an attempt to salvage something from a very poor breeding season.

Although the picture with Reed Warblers was a little less stark the story is the same. The total of 257 new birds ringed was well below the average from 2009 to 2011 of 448. The first juvenile was not ringed until 7th July and the last bird lingered until 6th October, the second latest date in recent years. Only one Sedge Warbler was retrapped from a previous year, a bird from 2011. In contrast the 30 returning Reed Warblers (40 in 2011) included representatives from all ringing years back to 2006. The oldest had been ringed as a juvenile on 28th July 2006 and not encountered again until trapped as a breeding male on 14th July.

No Nuthatches have ever been caught on No. 3 bed and the “escape of 2012” occurred when a ringer watched a bird fly into a net, find a small hole and exit before it could be caught. Seven new Treecreepers were ringed with the first juvenile on 21st July, over a month later than was the case in 2011.

In contrast to No. 1 bed Wrens were caught in average numbers with 85 new birds ringed. Robins had a record total of 119 new birds ringed, well above the recent average of 87 and, of these, 108 were juveniles implying a good breeding season. The first juvenile was ringed on 12th May, about a week earlier than average. Although a little below the record year of 2011, the 62 new Blackbirds ringed was above average. Nearly half of these birds were caught in the second winter period when many of them would not be local. In addition the first juvenile was caught on the late date of 14th July and it seems likely that early broods did not do well for the second season in succession. Song Thrushes appeared to fare better with a record 46 new birds ringed. Twenty four of these were ringed in the second winter period but 11 juveniles were ringed before 1st September and were probably locally hatched birds. The first juvenile was ringed on 1st June, the earliest date in the last 10 years. The autumn influx of Redwings was far more pronounced than in 2011 and a record 30 new birds were ringed during the year, 28 of these between 21st October and 15th December.

Probably the biggest surprise of the year was the juvenile Pied Flycatcher found in a net by the North Meadow on 18th August. It was just the fourth to be ringed at Woolston and almost exactly 17 years after the last one on 19th August 1995. In between these two birds a Pied Flycatcher originally ringed in Cumbria was controlled on No. 1 bed on 6th August 2005. Unsurprisingly, all five handlings of this species at Woolston have taken place between 6th and 19th August and all five birds were dispersing juveniles.

Dunnocks had a poor year with just 47 new birds ringed of which 38 were juveniles. This compares with 111 new birds in the record year of 2009. The first juvenile was ringed on 2nd June, the second latest date since 2004 and it may be that early broods were lost in the bad weather conditions. Two Meadow Pipits were trapped, one on each of the typical autumn migration dates of 15th and 22nd September. As is usually the case, passage across No. 3 bed was much lighter than that across No. 1 bed.

Chaffinches had an above average year with 180 new birds ringed. The seven year average is 153. The first juvenile was caught on 10th June, a typical date and the same as in 2011. Of the new birds ringed 121 were caught around the feeding station and the winter seed crop in the North Meadow during the last three months of the year and some of these were long-winged and probable winter migrants from Scandinavia. Nine Chaffinches were retrapped from previous years with the oldest being two birds from 2008. After the record of 76 new Bramblings ringed in 2011 a more normal total of 25 were ringed in 2012. These were all caught in the second winter period and heralded an exceptional “Brambling winter” in 2012/2013. A Brambling was caught that had been ringed at Kingnorth power station in Kent 33 days earlier. The total of 213 new Greenfinches ringed is a reduction from 253 in 2011 and below the seven year average of 260. This is not necessarily a reflection of the trend in the status of Greenfinches on the bed because from observations it appears that Greenfinches prefer the more open aspect of the feeders in front of the John Morgan Hide. Fourteen Greenfinches were retrapped from previous years, the oldest from 2008.

Goldfinches were caught in record numbers with 14 new birds ringed. Eight of these were juveniles, the first caught on 8th August. Again the winter seed crop must take some credit. Sightings of this attractive finch are increasing on the bed. After a blank year in 2011 seven new Linnets were ringed, again caught around the winter seed crop. It is only since 2009 that this species has been caught on the bed. Lesser Redpolls were caught in both winter periods and an above average total of 34 were ringed in the year. A bird first ringed on 28th January demonstrated winter site fidelity when it was retrapped on 2nd December. The first returning bird was ringed on 8th September and this is the earliest first arrival date ever, beating the 2011 arrival on 1st October. A Lesser Redpoll ringed at Iken Marsh, Suffolk on 28th January 2012 was controlled on 10th November. Bullfinches had a good year with 112 new birds ringed, the fourth year in a row that over 100 Bullfinches have been ringed on the bed. The first juvenile was ringed on 9th June, the earliest date in the last nine years. Thirty-one Bullfinches were retrapped from previous years, the earliest from 2008. In contrast to Greenfinches, Bullfinches are caught in good numbers around the more enclosed feeders used by the ringers.

Although the 74 Reed Buntings ringed constituted an above-average year, the first juvenile was not ringed until 2nd August which is the latest date in the last nine years. In addition only five juvenile birds had been ringed by 30th September and this implies a poor breeding season. This species is another attracted to the winter seed crop in the second winter period and 45 of the new birds were ringed in the last three months of the year. Twenty-two Reed Buntings were retrapped from previous years, the oldest from 2008.

Recoveries

Woolston always features prominently in the Group's "Selected Controls and Recoveries" (see pp 10 – 20). This year is no exception: a Chiffchaff and Reed Warbler in The Netherlands, a Garden Warbler, Sedge Warbler and Reed Warbler in France were controlled; five birds involved UK movements of more than 200 km (two Reed Warblers, a Cetti's Warbler, a Blackcap and a Chiffchaff); and a further four moved 100 – 200 km (three Greenfinches and a Lesser Redpoll).

However the star bird was a Kingfisher ringed at Woolston on 24th June 2011 and controlled in The Netherlands on 12th May 2012 after a journey of 575 km. Kingfishers are not noted for long-distance movements although there are occasional reports of birds that have crossed the sea. The Woolston bird was the first BTO-ringed Kingfisher controlled in The Netherlands and only the second ever reported – a bird ringed at Catterick, North Yorkshire in 2005 was found dead in The Netherlands just six weeks later.



SPECIES	No. 1	No. 3	TOTALS 2012	TOTALS 1980-2012
Mallard		13	13	35
Sparrowhawk	2	2	4	96
Kestrel		1	1	33
Water Rail	1	3	4	86
Moorhen		8	8	230
Coot		1	1	23
Common Snipe		3	3	54
Stock Dove		2	2	17
Woodpigeon		6	6	88
Tawny Owl		1	1	14
Swift		33	33	233
G Spotted Woodpecker	7	10	17	245
Magpie		2	2	124
Jay	4	17	21	275
Carrion Crow		1	1	16
Goldcrest	85	51	136	1528
Firecrest	1		1	10
Blue Tit	90	168	258	8858
Great Tit	79	170	249	5394
Coal Tit	7	3	10	103
Willow Tit	19	18	37	652
Sand Martin		1	1	1098
Swallow	6	99	105	11627
Long-tailed Tit	36	51	87	3343
Chiffchaff	197	114	311	5813
Willow Warbler	126	43	169	7307
Blackcap	112	350	462	8341
Garden Warbler	6	27	33	771
Lesser Whitethroat	1	1	2	247
Whitethroat	12	82	94	4611
Grasshopper Warbler		4	4	184
Sedge Warbler	19	25	44	4749
Reed Warbler	77	257	334	9044
Treecreeper	2	7	9	163
Wren	41	85	126	5291
Blackbird	22	62	84	2411
Song Thrush	18	46	64	1101
Redwing	3	30	33	282
Robin	69	119	188	3872
Pied Flycatcher		1	1	4
Dunnock	24	47	71	3401
Tree Pipit	5		5	25
Meadow Pipit	19	2	21	586
Chaffinch	62	180	242	4099
Brambling	5	25	30	271
Greenfinch	294	213	507	11520
Goldfinch	6	14	20	658
Siskin	11		11	54
Linnet	7	7	14	1098
Lesser Redpoll	28	34	62	1707
Bullfinch	76	112	188	2185
Reed Bunting	64	74	138	6577
Others (50 species)				1665
GRAND TOTAL	1643	2625	4268	122219

Glyn Arthur 2012

Bob Harris

The first visit of the year, mid-April, produced 40 active nests, all but one tits. One bird was already incubating, seven nests had eggs – mainly three or four – and the rest were in varying stages of build. The one nest not due to either Blue or Great Tit was a Robin – which caused a bit of consternation when I approached the box to have the female sit on the nest staring me out! The only evidence of re-appearing African migrants was a single male Redstart and several calling Chiffchaff. Elsewhere Buzzards and Ravens were in evidence, woodpeckers were drumming and the inadvertent flushing of Pheasants caused many a missed heartbeat.



Southern slopes of Glyn Arthur

The following week a few Willow Warblers were about, Blackcaps were in and male Pied Flycatchers were singing and alarm calling when I approached adopted nest boxes. Five boxes showed activity either due to Redstart or Pied Flycatcher. Of the other boxes, 61 were now active – 43 building, 15 with eggs and three with incubating birds (two Blue Tit, one Great Tit).

The next week experienced virtually never-ending rain and cold temperatures and the effects were seen in my next visit. Eggs that were cold and covered last week were still cold and covered this – be it with one or two more eggs added to the clutch size. Pied Flycatcher activity was conspicuous by its absence – no singing, no females and only four males seen all day. Four nests were assigned to Pied Flycatchers. Two Redstarts nests were active, one with three eggs – in a hijacked tit nest that had one egg – and the other with the nest lined and ready for eggs. Of the rest, 27 nests had eggs, with a range from one egg in three nests to thirteen eggs in one and everything in between. A further six nests were being built and three had adults incubating. The Robin present in box 110, at the far end of the stream, now had four chicks that were all ringed on this visit.

Another week of cold weather and a predicted temperature of 3°C, which felt more like -6°C with the wind chill factor, kept expectations low and initiated thoughts for a poor year. At the end of the day 18 nests housed Blue Tit with two of the clutches actually hatching, irrespective of the weather, and another seven nests with Great Tit. Another eight nests were unidentified tits and the two Redstarts nest had one female incubating and the other with five cold eggs. Pied Flycatchers were still an unknown quantity. Singing males were few and far between and, still, no females were seen. However, one nest was found with two eggs and a further 19 boxes had building activity with ten of these ready for eggs.

Two broods of Blue Tit and one of Great Tit were ringed on the next visit – with all other broods being too young to ring. In all there were five broods of Blue Tit and 13 nests with eggs and three broods of Great Tit and eight with eggs. Another four nests with eggs were still unidentified. Pied Flycatchers fell into two camps – those with eggs (13) and those still awaiting eggs (11). The two incubating Pied Flycatcher females were lifted and processed – and found to be already ringed. One was ringed as a chick the previous year and the other was a bird ringed as an adult in 2009 and caught on its return every year since – so at least four years old. The Redstarts were not inspected on this visit, leaving both females to incubate undisturbed.

Twelve female Pied Flycatchers were lifted on the next visit which proved to be a long day as it included the mid-season ‘check all the nest boxes again’ task (for late builders, and any second layers where they have failed somewhere else). Eight of these twelve females were totally new birds and four were re-trapped. The Redstarts had both hatched, but were still too small to ring, and one new nest was found.

Given that 2012 was an exceptional year for bad weather, being predominantly wet and cold, my notes record that this, the seventh visit, was the first day that was a typical ‘Glyn Arthur day’. Temperatures for the last week had been in the low twenties, there had been no rain, and the skies today were blue with fluffy white clouds. At the end of the day 39 chicks had been ringed (20 Blue Tit, six Great Tit and 13 Redstart), nineteen nests had young tits present and another five still with eggs. Three nests, all Blue Tit, were lost due to squirrel predation.



A brood of thirteen Blue Tits

Checking all of the Pied Flycatcher nests, two clutches had recently hatched with the rest all still having incubating females. Four females were lifted, all new, and three were ‘missed’. Of these three, two were caught the following week and the last and final one was an ‘escapee’ for the year as she was never caught. We were now also catching males and three were processed.

Nesting was now at its height – ten Blue Tits nests held 74 young, and one with seven eggs; six Great Tit held 35 young, and one with six eggs; Pied Flycatchers had 61 young in eight nests and 68 eggs in a further twelve nests; two Redstart broods were ringed with another nest still at egg stage. Two further Pied Flycatchers and one Redstart were found to be breeding naturally in the alders – with all the nests too high to reach.

The weather did much to dictate the nature of the next visit as we had just witnessed the worst June rainfall since 1766 and, on this visit, it was chilly with intermittent drizzle. Boxes were visited in order to gain essential information only with the rest being left to continue to feed what was left of their young without further disturbance, thus many Blue and Great Tit chicks fledged unringed. Luck was with us that day as eight male Pied Flycatchers were caught very quickly as catching attempts were kept to a minimum.

The final two visits of the year degenerated into very bitty affairs with much walking from one end of the site to the other. It was all a case of visiting and ringing as many Pied Flycatchers chicks as possible with targeted attempts to try and catch the remaining males. It should be stated that all adults had full biometrics taken and all were photographed as part of the continuing phenotypic studies.

The final figures for the year were:

	nests	eggs	pulli	fledged	Success (%)
Pied Flycatcher	21	140	126	97	77
Redstart	3	19	19	19	100
Blue Tit	24	170	168	115	68
Great Tit	12	98	77	59	77
Robin	1	4	4	4	100

For the Pied Flycatchers the Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) project means we have to try and catch all of the adults on site – for me these are just the ones using the boxes. Consequently there were 21 adults of each sex to catch. We already know that one female evaded capture but the rest were all taken. Thirteen were new and details of the seven retraps are:

- V570527 Caught as an adult female in 2009, 2010 and 2011
- L638163 Ringed as a pullus in 2011.
- V570710 Ringed as pullus in 2009, recaptured as female 2010, 2011
- L638150 Ringed as a pullus in 2011
- X060342 Ringed as a pullus in 2010, recaptured as female in 2011
- L638119 Ringed as a pullus in 2011
- L638028 Ringed as an adult female in 2011

Sixteen males were caught, nine new, five retraps and two controls. The retraps are:

- X060334 Ringed as a pullus in 2010, not seen 2011
- L638101 Ringed as a pullus in 2011
- L638147 Caught as an adult male in 2011
- L638168 Caught as an adult male in 2011
- L638178 Caught as an adult male in 2011

The two male controls were birds ringed at other sites in North Wales in previous years.

- X062920 Ringed as a pullus at Llanarmon-Yn-Ial, Denbighshire in 2010
- X932382 Ringed as a pullus at Llewesog Hall, Prion, Denbighshire in 2010



The starring Robin!

My personal thanks to the Williams family for permitting me free access to their land for this study.

GROUP MEMBERS IN 2012

During the year Hazel Nichols and Lucy Ryan joined, both as existing C permit holders. Mist-net endorsements have been gained by Nicola Edmonds and Lisa Warvill, Leah Williams has received her C permit with mist-net and nest-box pullus endorsement, and Jason Atkinson gained a C permit via South Manchester Ringing Group. Tony Davis, Terry Lowe and Jeff Clarke are now country members.

MRG Patron: F Bairlein **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>			
J Atkinson	Cheadle	L Warvill	Liverpool
S Binney	Higher Bebington	M Whiteside	Burwardsley
J E Birch	Shotton	C J Williams	Hoylake
J Blundell	Bolton	L Williams	Liverpool
R P Cockbain	Hale	B W Wright	Broxton
P Coffey	Little Sutton		
D P Cross	West Kirby	<i>Trainees</i>	
A Duncalf	Northwich	R Brumby	Chester
R Eades	Parkgate	A Davies	Salford
N Edmonds	Pensby	J Hill	Chowley, Cheshire
J Elliott	Heswall	H Rowland	Bebington
D Faulkner	Pantymwyn		
K Foster	St Helens	<i>Country Members</i>	
A Garner	Sandiway	C Batty	Poulton-le-Fylde
P Guest	Warrington	C Benson	Co. Galway, Eire
R Harris	Whixall, Shrops	D Bowman	Lymm
A Hitchmough	West Kirby	T Bradshaw	Meols
Z Houghton	Sandbach	J Clarke	Warrington
R Leigh	Higher Marston	T Cleeves	Huddersfield
A M McCreary	Littleton	A Davis	Atherton
K McNiffe	Eastham	P Fearon	Crosby
S Menzie	Liverpool	A Jones	St Albans
M R Miles	Alderley Edge	H Jones	Mellor, Lancs
H Nichols	Meols, Wirral	T Lowe	Liverpool
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
L Ryan	Allerton, Liverpool	R Taylor	Huddersfield
E Samuels	Bromborough	P Thompson	Wilmslow
K Simcock	Huntington	T Westhead	Chorley
P Slater	Speke	H Williams	Devon
M G Smith	Upton		
G E Thomason	Widnes	<i>Honorary Member</i>	
P Triggs	Llanbedr DC	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.