

## A RINGERS YEAR By Philip Hanmer : A Ringer and Trainer of the Natural History Society of Northumbria Ringing group (Great North Museum)

**Nov 2018:** Spending several weeks away in Australia this year meant that ringing at Howick had to finish a few weeks earlier than usual. However, before we finished the season we ringed a small flock of Long Tailed Tits, several more Mistle Thrush, and 3 Chiffchaff along with 40 odd other birds. In the final session we captured 87 birds including a retrapped Coal Tit that had been ringed a couple of weeks before at Druridge Bay Country Park; and two Goldfinches first ringed at Howick in August 2015.

Starting 'winter' ringing, with trainees; near Lemmington Hall on the 16<sup>th</sup> November netted 43 new birds and 2 retraps. The retraps were both Goldfinch; one first ringed in December 2014. The new birds included Dunnock, Chaffinch, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Goldfinch, Tree Sparrow and Great Tit. On the 23/11/18 (despite having to dodge the rain) we caught another 35 new birds and 12 retraps. 8 of the retraps were Goldfinch from earlier years.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> we went to the site near Longhorsley that we first visited last winter to see if the Willow Tits and Marsh Tits were still present. It took a little time for the three trainees and I to set-up the site with mist-nets etc. However, the morning generated 27 birds including two retraps. The first bird captured turned out to be a new juvenile (*hatched this year*) Willow Tit (see photo).



Willow Tit



Marsh Tit

This was followed by several Dunnock, Great Tit, Tree Sparrow, and then a pair of juvenile birds – one a Willow Tit and the other a Marsh Tit (see photo). Forgive me for explaining to those that don't know - but the Willow Tit is the second fastest declining species in the UK (after the Turtle Dove) (*Refs: Rare Birds Breeding Panel & RSPB 2018*) and the Marsh Tit is actually rarer in Northumberland (although not nationally). It's unusual to find both species at the same site but it does help identification when a trainee ringer can actually see them both side by side! They are in fact extremely difficult to tell apart and birdwatchers really need to hear them singing and calling to confirm identification in the field. We called a halt around lunchtime but not before we caught our two retraps both originally ringed last winter; one was an adult Willow Tit and the other an adult Robin.

Repeating the hunt for rare tits on the 25<sup>th</sup> we had problems with the weather but eventually we captured 40 birds including 7 retraps. Blue Tits dominated the new birds but we also captured a young Greenfinch (not very common these days) and some Coal and Great Tits. One of the retraps proved to be one of the new juvenile Willow Tits from the 18<sup>th</sup>; another was an adult Willow Tit ringed last winter.

The Rare Birds Breeding Panel and RSPB are organising a national survey for Willow Tits (and Marsh Tits) in 2019 and 2020 and if anyone reading this is interested in participating (principally from February – April) then please get in touch and I can provide you with contact information for the organisers.

Anyone interesting in ringing is invited to get in touch.

Phil Hanmer 'A' Ringer/Trainer; Natural History Society of Northumbria Ringing Group (Hancock Museum)

E-mail: [tytoalbas@btinternet.com](mailto:tytoalbas@btinternet.com)