

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

December 2018: The uncharacteristically mild (and often damp) weather had led to some poor conditions for ringing but we did manage a short session near my home on the 1st of December processing 3 retraps; and 13 new birds including a new Nuthatch (hatched this year). The 14th was a much more successful session with 19 retraps and 40 new birds. The first bird captured was a Blue Tit but it proved more interesting than usual as it had previously been ringed as a pulli in its bird box nest at Lemmington Hall on the 26/5/18; the number of such retraps we get is very low due to the high mortality in very young tits soon after they leave the nest. The species recorded during this session were: Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Black Bird (one of the very few juveniles about this year), Tree Sparrow, Bullfinch, Robin, Goldfinch and Long Tailed Tit.

Saturday 22nd generated 23 new birds and 8 retraps; particularly notable was a retrapped Siskin first seen and ringed on the 17/2/17 (as an adult). This male clearly bred locally in 2017 being retrapped on the 31/3/17 and the 20/5/17; it's at least 3 yrs old and is a beautiful bird with its black head and green and yellow feathers (see picture). It's probably been somewhere else in the UK or abroad in recent months but as no one else recaptured and read its ring number we can't say where this was. Five birds entered 'open' traps on the 26th and were all so intent on feeding that I easily sneaked up on them; they included another Siskin (an adult female ringed back on the 4/3/17) and 4 Long Tailed Tits. In fact a flock of 20 or so Long Tailed Tits seem to be regularly visiting our garden, particularly around 15:30 in the afternoon! One of these tits is clearly a slow learner (*or does not mind being regularly captured in return for free food*) as it was captured again on the 27th and 28th.

Sunday ringing at the *Willow/Marsh Tit site* near Longhorsley has continued with 33 new birds and 9 retraps recorded on the 2nd. These included a Marsh Tit last seen on the 26/1/18 and an entirely new one which we ringed and aged as a juvenile (suggesting that it was hatched close to this site). There was also an obvious pair of Greenfinch together with other tits and some House Sparrows.

On the 9th we captured 21 new birds and 12 retraps. The retraps included a Willow Tit with another two new ones (*but no Marsh Tits this week*). There was a pair of Nuthatch (with a male showing reddish feathers on its flanks) and several Tree Sparrows and finally a very splendid looking male Greenfinch (see picture for comparison with the smaller and less stocky Siskin).



Greenfinch



Siskin

The 16th generated 29 new birds and 18 retraps including 2 retrap Willow Tits; another pair of Greenfinch and two Blackbirds. The 23rd was very much 'House Sparrow day' with 14 ringed out of 20 new birds; plus 23 retraps. There was also two retrapped Willow Tit and a Marsh Tit. One of these Willow Tit (APB7718) was first ringed on the 26/1/18 and provoked great discussion about its 'species' which was a set of conversations re-run on the 23rd. I would even go so far as to speculate it is a hybrid! Don't let any birdwatcher tell you that these species are always easy to tell apart.

Squeezing in an extra session on the 27th which included my son (*know working as a Research Ecologist at the BTO*) we failed to capture any Willow/Marsh Tits and had to settle for three Long Tailed Tits. In the hand these birds show little fear and are especially calm if they can still hear their fellows singing (which they do even from inside a bird bag while waiting to be processed) see attached photo.



Long-tailed Tit

The 24th December took us to the other *Willow Tit site* at Craster. 36 new birds were captured plus 2 retraps; the retraps were a Great Tit first ringed on the 29/3/16 and a Willow Tit from the 8/4/16 (see attached picture).



Willow Tit

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.

Finally can I recommend that anyone interested in birds should get hold of the recently published: “2017 Birds in Northumbria” published by the Northumberland & Tyneside Bird Club (details on their web-site).

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