

A RINGERS YEAR

Feb 2019: Ringing near Lemmington Hall netted 28 new birds and 22 retraps on the 1/2/19; including 4 Siskins plus a variety of the usual garden/woodland birds. A smaller catch on the 3rd only caught 12 new birds and 8 retraps; including 4 new Siskins and 5 retrapped ones. The retraps included a 'S649037' ringed on the 10/2/17 and 3 others also from early Spring 2017. A very bright morning on the 10th netted 12 new and 6 retrap birds; including a new young male Redpoll (see photo) and a new female Siskin (see photo).



Redpoll



Siskin

It was even brighter and warmer on the 15th and this reduced the catch to 8 birds; on the 17th it was down to 5; with no evidence of a real movement of Siskins north. However, an overcast morning on the 24th produced a better and more interesting catch with 15 new birds and 9 retraps; including 6 new Siskins and 2 retraps. One of the retraps was hatched nearby in 2017 and was a local breeding bird in June 2018; it then almost certainly migrated south and has now returned. Another was ringed in February 2017, stayed on to breed in June before apparently migrating south but has also just returned.

This month has seen an effort to repair, replace and put up some new small bird boxes at the sites I regular monitor like the Breamish Caravan Site and near the old National Park Information Centre at Ingram. We have also re-numbered all the boxes to make record keeping easier. If anyone wants some good box plans do please ask (I can send them on e-mail); and incidentally you don't need a ladder to manage them – *unless you are really expecting trouble from vandals!* Cleaning out of tawny-duck boxes is also underway – because squirrels sometimes take them over – and birds can't sort them out themselves. This also led to us replacing a well used Tawny box at Craster that has been used every year since 2012.

We are also just starting on Barn Owl box checking. This only takes place up until the end of March (to clean out, repair and trap those roosting adults) after which we leave them alone, to start nesting in April, and don't return to check for breeding until well into May. Single males frequently hang-onto 'their' nesting box hoping to attract their old mate (or a new one) in the early spring; while some pairs stay together for most of the

winter (and these tend to be the earliest nesters). More news on what we found in next month's Ringers Year.

Finally with some warmer weather I have heard quite a few people say (including in the media) "birds are starting to nest". Well NO in general they are not; apart from members of the pigeon clan, very few birds nest this time of year whatever the weather. Blackbirds and other thrushes often try to nest early but generally fail the first time, before succeeding the second time around; and in fact most small garden birds do not nest until May in the north (perhaps April further south) because they need both a longer day-length and insect food as well as warmer weather. Long-Tailed Tits probably nest first – but if they are still going around in flocks (including visiting my garden fat-balls) then they are not nesting yet. If you would like to see some birds that do start to nest early then visit Howick and watch the Herons near the Pool squabbling over the remains of last year's nests and starting to rebuild them (see pict.)



Anyone interesting in ringing is invited to get in touch.

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