

A RINGERS YEAR

July 2019: We had our first ringing session of the year at Howick on Friday 19th July catching only 18 new birds but representing 11 different species. Most notable were the pair of juvenile Nuthatches; I say a pair because one was very obviously a male (with reddish flanks and undertail coverts) and a female. However, they were almost certainly siblings from the same brood hatched at Howick; which always seems to a good population of these vocal and entertaining birds (see pict.)



There was also a young Pied Wagtail (see pict.) captured near the Cricket field where they often feed on insects by running along the ground while the Swallows do the same but preferring to catch their prey in the air.



We also captured an adult male Chiffchaff, a juvenile chiffchaff and a juvenile Blackcap (*all warblers that will migrate south in the next few months*).

Rain stopped any ringing on the Saturday morning but we were back for a very busy session on Friday 26th; catching 70 odd birds during the morning. This time the species count went up to 14 (including a young jackdaw that was clearly being too inquisitive for its own good). This time we had five retrapped birds including an adult female Nuthatch, in main moult, first ringed (as an adult) in September 2018. There was also a male Great Tit (also in main moult) first ringed as an adult in September 2017. There was also a moulting adult Chaffinch that had been ringed as a juvenile in Sept 2018. From this ringing record we can correctly age it as a '5' – *that is hatched last year* but we would not have been able to tell this from its plumage as its moult was so far advanced. Turning to the new birds we captured 9 Tree Sparrows; mostly juvenile birds; although ageing sparrows is often difficult if not impossible due to the habit of the juvenile birds, as well as the adults, of undergoing a main moult (including their wings and tail) in their first year. Finding this many tree sparrows in this part of the arboretum is new and represents some change in local behaviour.

Chiffchaffs seem to have had a good local breeding year as we captured 14 distinctly juvenile birds but no Willow Warblers. There were also 7 Blackcaps along with the resident Tits, 3 Bullfinch (a pair and later a single juvenile) a young Robin and a very colourful adult male Greenfinch (see pict.).



13 Swallows were captured around the cricket pitch including one with exceptional colouration on its underparts. Most of 'our' swallows are very white underneath ('rustica' subspecies) but birds with varying degrees of redness do occur and may represent the sub-species 'transitiva' more usually seen in the Middle East; or birds from a North West African race (see pict.)



Rain again stopped us ringing on the Saturday morning.

We did not start ringing this years crop of young Barn Owls until the 17th June which is really very late and so we are still going around the boxes with one visited quite close to my home yesterday. This particular box is shielded on one side by an awkward fence and on the other by some very tall nettles. We had originally ringed both the male and female bird with their 5 eggs on the 4th June. A second visit on the 30th established that the eggs had indeed hatched but all the young were extremely small with no feathers (known as naked young) and it was on the third visit, 28th July, (having navigated the nettles) that we were able to ring four healthy 'owlets' (see pict.) with one showing the very clear underwing spots of a young female. I am really hoping that the weather will not continue to be so extreme for the rest of the summer to give the remaining young Barn Owls a chance to develop and fledge successfully.



We are now regularly ringing at the Howick Ringing Station on Friday and Saturday mornings when weather permits. We are usually on site, based on the edge of the Car Park, from 7:00 until lunchtime. If interested in ringing please get in touch or just turn-up.

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