

## A RINGERS YEAR

**MAY 2020:** Ringers received permission to go out to undertake nest recording and monitoring on Wed 13<sup>th</sup> May. This was just in time to catch up with nesting Tawny Owls and our rare breeding Goldeneye ducks. I am not exaggerating when I say 'just in time' as I checked a *tawny box* near Powburn and found a Tawny Owlet staring back at me – I commented to Alison “that there had probably been another owlet in this box” – and she replied – “yes its watching you from the branch above your head”. Some of you will know that young tawny owls (*pulli*) are notorious for leaving their nest early and climbing into trees (*branching*) before they can fly; this behaviour of course often leads to folk finding them and taking them into the local vets or animal sanctuary. Don't do this – just put them back up a tree as high as you can reach; and they and their parents will find each other. In this case I was able to capture both owlets, ring them and return them to their nest. Over the next couple of days, we found four more tawny nests including a brand new one in a box at Howick that has stood empty since 2011! Here the adult female was in residence and I was very pleased to have put my gauntlets on before ringing her; she was a very powerful bird (see photos of adult & 3 young from one of the sites).



Another thing we observed on the first afternoon out was a brood of 9 Goldeneye ducklings at a secret location; this showed we were too late to ring (or retrap) the female duck. However, we were able to quickly locate where she had nested as two addled eggs had been left behind in the box as well as some bits of broken eggshell; and so we will be able to submit the nest record to the BTO. Subsequently we retrapped a breeding female (FH92100) incubating her eggs that had originally been ringed in 2017; that successfully raised ducklings in 2018 but was not seen at all in 2019. At another site we recaptured duck FH92097 with 12 eggs that was also originally ringed in 2017, was not seen in 2018 but was successful again in 2019. Two other entirely new female ducks were also found at different location; one in a box only put up at the beginning of March just before the lock-down! Some of these eggs have already hatched and I would be pleased to receive news of any sightings of these lovely small 'black & white' ducklings.



We have also been catching up with the monitoring of our smaller resident birds such as Blue Tits, Great Tits and Coal Tits; along with a sprinkling of Tree Sparrows, Nuthatches, Pied Wagtail and Redstart. At one of my

long-term study sites (Breamish Caravan Site) an open nest box is being used by a Pied Wagtail – that rather surprisingly furnished our first Dragonfly record of the year! After my trainee had just ringed the pulli I watched the male return with a ‘Four-spotted Chaser’ dragonfly to feed its young. However, the adult quickly realised it was just a bit too big! Subsequently it sat on the reception hut roof and proceeded to dismember the unfortunate dragonfly and eat it itself. This site is producing a lot of broods of Blue Tits this year and I always compare it with another study site at Ingram National Park Centre/Café. As a preliminary comparison, it looks like near 60% of the nest boxes at the Caravan Site are occupied compared with only 25% at Ingram. Why exactly this should be is a mystery at present; and we can at least count out the influence of people visiting either site this year. Despite the poor nesting at Ingram one nesting bird was a nice surprise. First, we found a nest-box with some mud plastered around its opening lid which suggested the presence of Nuthatch. However, the box proved to have only a part completed nest – so we moved onto the next box – and found the same application of mud! Opening this very cautiously there was a box full of flakes of bark and 8 well grown pulli Nuthatch; these were duly ringed and returned to their box.



At another site on a farm near Longhorsley, Great and Blue Tits nest along with Redstart and Nuthatch but it was a bird that had found a small tree hole that attracted our attention. Alison first heard the distinctive ‘pitchoo’ call and then we spotted a pair of Marsh Tits carrying food at regular intervals into a hole. Listening near the tree it was possible to hear the pulli asking for food. These rare tits will use small nest boxes (which have been provided) but this pair had found a better natural site (see photo).



I will start to monitor Barn Owls from the beginning of June but at present can only work with one trainee at a time.

Best Regards.

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