

A RINGERS YEAR

AUG 2022: Having just returned from a week visiting my son in East Anglia I noticed how much more diverse woodland and hedgerow there is in Norfolk and Suffolk, than Northumberland. There is in fact an assumption that the whole of East Anglia is made up of large arable fields; this is not true and no one *has yet* started massacring the hedge rows like they have around Alnwick!

Returning to one of four late nesting Barn Owls that we know about on the 18th of August we had a pleasant surprise. This tree box near Fontburn had six eggs and a two year old female bird in residence on the 21st of July when the eggs were just hatching. On the 18th all 6 had hatched and we were able to ring all but one of them (which was exceptionally small). Checking two more near Longhorsley on the 31st we found one box had failed while another had succeeded with four well grown young owls. This leaves us one more to return to check in September.



Turning to ringing at Howick, we had a report from the British Trust for Ornithology of an unusually well-travelled Long-Tailed Tit. It was of a bird we 'controlled' as a retrap on the 29/7/22 that was actually originally ringed on the 25th September 2021 at 'Gravelly Marsh, Needs Ore, Hampshire 519 kms away.



We started to see the first signs of autumn migration on the 5/8/22. In amongst the 44 birds we processed (26 new & 18 retraps) there were some adult warblers on the way to Africa. Willow Warblers in particular are becoming quite rare at Howick so seeing a well feathered (newly moulted) adult bird was very nice.



There were also 5 very young (locally hatched) Blackcaps and 5 similarly local Chiffchaffs. All these juvenile birds will have to 'feed-up' more to put on 'fat' before they can migrate. Almost the last bird captured was a young (but very strong and noisy) Jay. This is a resident that does not migrate and its siblings hung around in the trees waiting for it to be released! The retraps included a Coal Tit first ringed in 2020 and a pair of Nuthatch ringed as adults last year.

On the 6/8/22 two of my licensed C ringers, who live in Newcastle, travelled up to ring at Howick and brought with them a Doctorate Research Student from the University this young lady is from the Philippines and wants to add to her ringing experience before going back home to conduct ornithological field work. During the session we captured 32 birds (20 new & 12 retraps) including another adult Willow Warbler together with more juvenile Chiffchaffs and several very young Goldcrests. There was also an adult female Blackbird in Main Molt (replacing her Primary Flight Feathers etc.). Blackbirds suffer in long dry summers as they find it difficult to find food, so this one was probably coming to a bird-feeder when she flew into our net.

We had a larger catch on the 12/8/22: 50 birds (37 new & 13 retraps). All but two of the new birds were juveniles of the year including Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, Willow Warbler, Chaffinch, Dunnock, Tits and Robins. The few adults were a Great Tit and a Bullfinch. We had three more Bullfinch in the retraps, first ringed in 2020 (1) and 2021 (2) at Howick. Numbers fell back to 41 (18 new & 23 retraps) on the 13/8/22 but were still mostly juvenile birds (except for one adult Blackbird). This time we had four juvenile Bullfinch, several Blackcaps and some Chiffchaffs. The retraps included an interesting male Chaffinch first ringed in 2015 that is now eight years old. On the 19/8/22 only 30 birds were processed (18 new & 12 retraps). Most of the new

birds were juvenile and included 7 Blackcaps but there was also an adult male Blackcap with nice new plumage (having finished its main moult).



There were also four juvenile Goldcrest.

Ringling on the 26/8/22 (in my absence) captured 40 birds (30 new & 10 retraps) again mostly this year's juveniles, including Tits, Goldcrests, Chiffchaff, Blackcaps, Chaffinch and the first Garden Warbler of the year. The Garden Warbler is a long-distance migrant on its way to humid West and Central Africa, south of the Sahara. Its close relative, the Blackcap, rarely crosses the Sahara preferring to winter around the Mediterranean or North Africa. In amongst the retraps there was an adult Chiffchaff first ringed in 2021 as a juvenile. It will be interesting to get the full details on this bird's travels from the BTO.

We are continuing to be at the Howick Ringing Station, weather permitting, most Friday and Saturday mornings until the end of October. If you're interested in seeing what we are doing just call in at the picnic-benches at Howick.

Best Regards

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