

A RINGERS YEAR

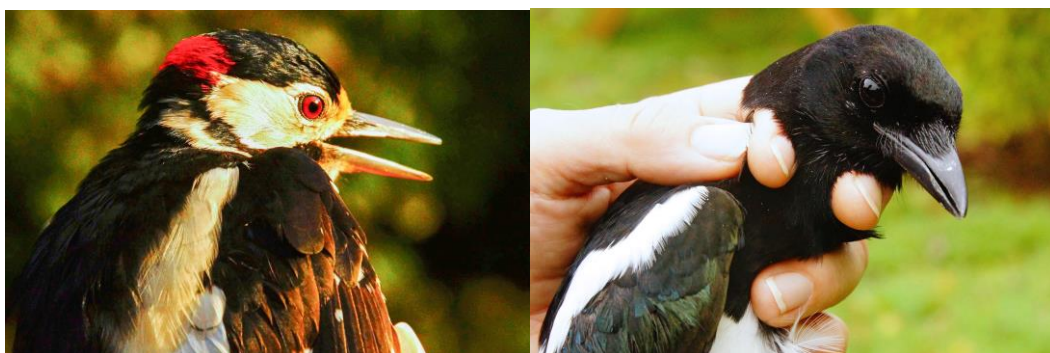
OCTOBER 2022: Ringing at Howick Ringing Station during October has again been much disrupted by the weather although catches have been high and interesting on the few sessions we have been able to conduct.

On the 3rd October we captured and processed 76 birds; 52 new and 24 retraps from 20 different species. The retraps included several Long-Tailed Tits which always frustrate trainees. They do not understand why they cannot age them as 'juveniles of the year'. All Long-Tailed Tits (*which in Family terms are not tits at-all*) do a complete moult, even when juvenile, in the summer. Once this is finished they are inseparable from adult birds. This fact was re-inforced when the ring numbers of a couple of the birds were checked and showed they had originally been ringed in 2019 and 2020 respectively! Turning to the new birds, these included the first Redwing of the autumn, our regular autumn migrant from Scandinavia which was associated with a flock of Blackbirds and other thrushes. (*Rather suggesting that they had all recently arrived together coming-in across the North Sea*). There were also lots of Chiffchaff, almost certainly not local birds but rather ones in the process of travelling from the north and east, down the country towards the south. Quite late in the morning we captured that beautiful little rarity, a Yellow-browed Warbler. A mere 6.5 gram bundle of energy. This widespread breeder in Siberia has its normal migration south into South Asia (China etc.) but it's believed that part of the population is pioneering a new migration route down through Europe and into Africa.

We were next able to ring on the 21st when we captured 98 birds (probably a record for a Howick session); 87 new and 11 retraps from 18 species. In the retraps there was a Female Great Spotted Woodpecker ringed as an adult in 2021 and a Blackbird from 2020, clearly both residents. However, in the new birds there were large numbers of migrant thrushes feeding on the juicy berries that this part of the arboretum provides this time of year. Blackbirds, Mistle Thrush and Redwing were all processed. There were also a lot of tiny Goldcrest, some weighing less than 5.0 grams. Despite their diminutive size this species moves (rather than having a regular migration) all over Europe often in-search of food and to get away from bad-weather. The small, largely sedentary, breeding population of Howick can increase markedly at this time of year. There was also a Blackcap carrying a score of '5' body fat, clearly intent on travelling far south.



There was also another Yellow-browed Warbler this time looking distinctly adult in its tail and wing coverts. We also captured a local male Great Spotted Woodpecker and a similarly local young Magpie that seemed quite interested in studying us!



Again, there were a lot of Bullfinch tucking into the local berry crop and we intercepted the local flock of Long-Tailed Tits, capturing 14 at one time.

Ringling on the 22nd captured 44 birds; 34 new and 10 retraps of 12 species with almost the first new bird captured being a Siberian Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus tristis*) which is either an Eastern race of the Common Chiffchaff or a distinct species, with a call very different from our more usual chiffchaff. In either case it naturally breeds in the coniferous taiga forests of Siberia from the Urals to Lake Baikal and normally migrates south to India to winter. Its photo (here with a Common Chiffchaff in the background) clearly shows its grey-brown appearance and almost complete lack of yellow.



Its status is probably that of a vagrant from the East (*rather than a bird establishing a new migration pattern like the Yellow-brow*) but it's not that unusual for small numbers of birds to be spotted wintering in Britain (including on the Northumberland coast). Several common Chiffchaffs were also ringed along with some Goldcrests. The Siberian Chiff was carrying 4 fat but one of the Common Chiffs had up to 6 (*with fat bulging out from its trachea like a pat of butter*). These birds are preparing to travel a long way. Goldcrests were again in evidence along with a perky looking female Blackcap (photo.) that was also carrying 6 fat.

The 29/10/22 proved surprisingly calm until 11:00 (when it rained) and we were able to capture 72 birds; 56 new and 16 retraps of 16 different species. We were 'croaked at' by a passing Raven quite early in the morning but we quickly discovered that most noise was being made by Blackbirds, Redwing and Goldcrest who were all occupying the low trees and shrubs on the ringing site. Eventually catching all of these species to which must be added some Song Thrushes, who might also have been incoming migrants. There were also two Blackcaps travelling south one with '5' fat and two Chiffchaff of which one also had '5' fat, stored up for its journey. Another new young Magpie was captured (some-what less pecky than the one captured back on the 21st) together with a retrap Great Tit from 2018.

We have now stopped regular ringling at Howick for this year. **Best Regards**

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