

## A RINGERS YEAR

**FEBRUARY 2023** Despite unhelpful weather it has been possible to get out and about this month to put up some new small boxes in a woodland near Longhorsley, plus boxes for Tawny Owls. We have also got some Barn Owl boxes up and surveyed a number of new sites. We are rapidly running out of time to put any more up, not because you can't put new boxes up anytime (you really can) but because I and my assistants will soon have to turn our attention to monitoring the spring breeding season.

A little late in the Barn Owl breeding season last year we were invited to check a nest box west of Rothbury. On the 18/7/22 we found four nearly fledged young owls in this box but no sign of the adults. Returning to the same site on the 6<sup>th</sup> Feb this year, ostensibly to check on the safety of the box itself, we found a pair of healthy adult owls in residence. The male was a bird of 4 or 5 yrs old weighing 340g, while the female was only 3 yrs old and weighed 360g. The weight of the female is insufficient to lay eggs but she has got time between now and April to get up to something over 400g.



**Female**

**Male**

Meanwhile returns from the British Trust for Ornithology tell us of two casualties from last years young owls. One hatched (out of three) from Warkworth was found dead near Alnmouth on the 8<sup>th</sup> February and another from Fontburn (out of five) was killed on the A1 near Morpeth on the 1<sup>st</sup>. There was also an owl from near Craster in its third year that was found dead inland near Rennington in November. This was notable as one of the many offspring of my 'Dumfries Owl' that had nested in that area until she was 10 years old. Sadly she is now lost herself.

Early in the month I was invited to visit a private Nature Reserve that's been created very close to Morpeth. It's called 'Clarke's Bog' and is well worth a visit if you get the opportunity. Having seen a number of such creations over the years I really do have to say this is excellent. So often you find such sites to be disappointing, consisting of little more than a field or perhaps a block of woodland. As the RSPB has proved, you really do have to move soil and create new habitats if it's to be meaningful. As part of the ongoing monitoring of this site a bird ringing programme has been started and some of my C Ringers has become involved in this.

One of my C Ringers has just used her relatively new permit to seek some proper warmer weather in The Gambia, at the Kartong Bird Observatory. This is now operating again after being shut down by Covid for the last few years. Birds ringed on the first day included Pied Kingfisher and Senegal Coucal. This observatory is pioneering some genuine new research and science education in West Africa.



Pied Kingfisher



Senegal Coucal

I concluded my contribution to the BTO's Winter Ringing Initiative on the 14<sup>th</sup> Feb, by ringing with two nets in the garden for three hours. In total I did all eight sessions; at approximately two week intervals and captured a total of 272 birds from thirteen species. These were:

Blackbird, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Dunnock, Goldfinch, Great Tit, House Sparrow, Long Tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Redpoll, Robin, Tree Sparrow and Wren.

For anyone who still thinks that a Robin they see in their garden in the winter is always the same bird, I should tell you that I ringed 17 new robins over the eight sessions! There were also notable recaptures including a Blue Tit from 2019, a Coal Tit from 2018, a Tree Sparrow from 2018; and a controlled Redpoll that was first ringed at Waxham in Norfolk on the 12/10/20 as an adult male.

Ringing at one of Hilary's sites in a woodland near Longframlington on a cold and slightly damp morning proved interesting as we caught a rare Marsh Tit and we retrapped a resident Treecreeper (now an adult).



This wood is a regenerated birch woodland which is damp in places and logically should have resident Willow Tits. These need damp rotten wood in which to nest. However, as far as we can tell the only rare tits in the woodland are their close relatives, the marsh tit.

I have now prototyped my new Swift boxes based on researching all the multivarious designs you can find on the internet and produced a box that you can make for about #15.00. I have drawn up a plan of this which is available and I hope to get posted on some Web-Sites soon. Meanwhile anyone wanting a copy urgently is invited to e-mail me. Swifts are late migrants so it's not too late to put a box up – although realistically you may have to wait at least a year for it to be taken up.

Recently published in Birds in Northumbria 2021 (Annual Report of the Northumberland and Tyneside Bird Club) is my paper on '*Clangers in space and time – Goldeneye in Northumberland and their travels*'. For a copy go to the Clubs Website for details. It contains lots of interesting reports and papers.

Best Regards

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