

## A RINGERS YEAR

**January 2023.** With the weather relenting a bit we have been able to get out and about to replace some damaged bird boxes and put up a few new ones. Over near Lesbury we were aware that a particularly over large barn owl box that's been up for a number of years was quite literally starting to come apart. It was also on a tree that had lost most of its upper trunk and branches to Storm Arwen last year. So first we put a brand new box up on a near-by tree.



Then we cautiously approached the original box and quickly discovered that there was a roosting owl in residence. This we captured and discovered it was new female, less than a year old, weighing 340g (not breeding weight but OK for this time of year). We carefully transferred this owl to the new box, letting her settle in and go to sleep on clean wood shavings. Then we left her in peace.



What about the old box (?) Well I just had to push it with my hand (I didn't need to use any tools) and it fell off the tree in several pieces, so the owl had had a lucky escape from possible injury in the next gale! We also put up a commercial type A frame box in a new very open barn near Brinkburn, taking off the very large landing stage that had been attached to the front of the box. These tea-tray sized extrusions are in fashion (*partly because they afford photographers good views of owls*) but are a danger to young owls who clamber out onto them before they can fly. Adults definitely don't need them! We also went to the moorland south of Longhorsley where we found another box on a tree that was damaged by Storm Arwen. This one is more stable but we will have to replace it sometime. Again, there was an owl in residence. This was a retrap female number GY37116 weighing 380g that's at least three years old. This is the female that nested in the same box last year and appears to have a mate roosting close by. We concluded this as there was a 'vole larder' in the box and on leaving the site we saw an owl close-by hunting. Quite close by there was another box to check which just needed to have some pruning carried out around it. To our surprise there was yet another owl in residence. This was also a retrap (technically a 'Control' as it had been previously ringed by another ringer) of at least three years old from just a mile or two away. These two females could stay to breed in their respective nests if there is sufficient small mammal prey around in May. Unlike Tawny Owls they are not very territorially aggressive. We have since gone on to put a new box up at a local equestrian center and a couple of others.

Meanwhile my C Ringer, Hilary, has had a second Fieldfare take up semi residence in her garden. As reported last month she was able to capture and ring one of these visitors from Norway (a juvenile female) by providing it with free apples! This second bird succumbed to the same bait and proved to be another juvenile but this time a male with some black feathers in its crown. Both birds are still visiting the garden.



Ringling at East Linden with Hilary and two other ringers on a cold but not actually frosty morning proved interesting as we caught some of my favourite bird. These were Redpoll which are intrepid wanderers, rather than regular migrants. They search out fine seeds from birches but will settle for Niger seed! The males are particularly beautiful.



We also captured a new Willow Tit and an adult retrap.

Finally, I have just managed to keep up to date with the BTO's Winter Ringing Initiative by operating a short morning ringing session, with just a couple of nets, at home once per fortnight. To date I have managed this with 21 birds captured on New Years Day (14 new and 7 retraps). One of the retraps was a Coal Tit first ringed in 2018 (when it was already an adult). Ringing again on the 15<sup>th</sup> I captured 26 birds (15 new and 11 retraps) including four Long Tailed Tits. Finally, I managed another session on the 28<sup>th</sup> when I captured 29 birds (15 new and 14 retraps). These include a pair of Redpoll, a new juvenile female and Control adult male (*ringed by someone else, as an adult in 2020*). Since then (outside the scope of the Winter Ringing initiative) I have trapped three adult Siskin and a Goldfinch; all coming to eat Niger seed.

One of my next tasks is to make some prototype Swift boxes using a grant kindly given by Alnwick Wildlife Group. My intention to make some practical boxes for swifts that are not so expensive or complicated as some of the versions you can find on line. I will then make a set of plans available to anyone wanting to do this themselves.

Best Regards

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