

A RINGERS YEAR

JUNE 2023. We thought we had sort of finished with Tawny Owls for this year, with them all being ringed and mostly fledged by the end of May, but a surprise find by C Ringer Hilary with a new trainee in tow was made on the 3/6/23. They were checking a 'barn owl box' near Thropton, more in hope than expectation as to finding anything other than jackdaws, when out popped a young Tawny Owl. This is not exactly in a dark wooded area (where you might expect to find tawny owls) but in a few trees bordering a path with some Bluebells. It actually looks straight out onto some sheep pasture. Its interesting to note that adult tawnies with kill and predate jackdaws (unlike Barn Owls) which might partly explain how the young tawny came to be in an unusual box and location.

I never know the full story of the years nesting Goldeneye Duck until I have collated all the sightings of broods of ducklings and also been around and checked all the nest sites for unhatched eggs but its nice to report that one female succeeded in hatching an incredible 18 ducklings over at Branton this year. This was by a new female ringed as 'FH79945' on the 26/4/23 in her nest, who had her brood out on the water on the 16/5/23.

The monitoring of this year's small bird boxes has pretty much come to a halt, with only Tree Sparrows continuing to nest into the summer in boxes with suitably sized holes. We would hope for Spotted Flycatchers in 'open fronted' boxes but it has to be said that they seem very scarce this year. Redstarts have also been a bit absent from our study sites although a trainee was lucky enough to have some nesting on the farm where she lives, in boxes she made herself.

We are doing a couple of Bird Ringing Demonstrations at Howick Arboretum in June for Newcastle University Students and then starting to ring Barn Owls (and a few Kestrels) as we move into July.

During the last couple of weeks of May and into the start of June we try to check all our barn owl sites to note where they are nesting, ring and recapture adults, record if they have eggs and if any have hatched. In some years (if the winter and spring have been particularly mild) we can find pulli owls ready to be ringed but there were none of these this year. A rough count-up found: 9 with very small pulli, 22 with eggs, 8 pairs without any eggs yet and 4 Kestrels. All we can say at the moment is that it's an average year, as we have to return to sites to see what has actually transpired and ring the young pulli owls. At the time of writing we have just started to do this and returning to a box in a hay barn south of Berwick we ringed 3 pulli (one of which went to sleep during the proceedings).



Kestrels using barn owl boxes does seem to be an interesting feature of this year and it has to be said that getting the timing right on when to return to these is very tricky. For example, returning to one box on National Trust land near the coast, which had very small pulli on the 29/5/23, on the 19/6/23 we found only one young still in the nest. This suggested several others had already fledged. On the other hand, a box near a local Hotel had 5 eggs on the 26/5/23 and still 4 very small young on the 20/6/23. At another box near Lowick there were 5 eggs on the 25/5/23 but 4 well grown young on the 21/6/23. This was all the more remarkable because the box in question was damaged by Storm Arwen and lost its roof. This clearly put any owls off the idea of using it but not it seems the Kestrels.



Doing a couple of ringing demonstrations, for Newcastle University, at Howick recently produced some interesting results. In terms of local 'residents' we captured three corvids. These were a beautiful young Jay, a fearsome Carrion Crow and a very smart looking Magpie (yes, I know lots of folks dislike them – but do look at the plumage before dismissing them as just 'black & white trouble makers').



There were also several Chiffchaff Warblers back from Africa, including one ringed as a juvenile back in 2021 at Howick and another, also a juvenile, ringed in 2022, also at Howick. There was also a new juvenile only hatched this year.



In July we will get back around to all our barn owls and see how successful they have been. We will also start regular ringing at Howick Ringing Station (on Friday & Saturday mornings) before the end of the month and continue into the Autumn.

Best Regards

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