



A Ringer's Year - December 2023

An interesting control (by a fellow ringer) of a Barn Owl checked near Amble reached me from the BTO; this was of a Barn Owl FH69456 a bird originally ringed near Warkworth back in 2014. So, at nine years old it's surviving well! In response to questions as to "how did the Barn Owls do this year" I have attached my summary of this year's productivity:

BARN OWL BREEDING SEASON 2023:

This study (of around 100 sites) in **North Northumberland** (outside the National Park) indicates that this was a poorer year than 2022 but still better than 2021. At 36% occupancy it was above the long-term average of 30% - although only 29 nests were successful at raising young.

The influence of the weather seems very stark this year as the mild winter encouraged birds into starting to nest (particularly inland) but then the wet and cold spring caused delays. This seems to have particularly affected coastal sites as we came across some adult owls which were underweight occupying nest sites, but did not go on to actually breed. It was very notable how few of the usually reliable coastal sites did well this year. Towards the end of June and into July there seems to have been a loss of eggs/young around hatching time. I emphasise the geographical area of this study because there have been reports of better productivity further west.



As the summer moved on the weather did not improve, and this mitigated against second or late broods.

The average number of eggs laid per clutch was up at 4.5 similar to last year although one '7' was recorded. The average number of owlets fledged was 2.1 although two pairs raised 6 and another 5 (in a site used for the first time). The attached table shows how Barn Owl productivity has changed over time.

A total of 77 owlets were ringed and mostly fledged, although in two instances young owls left their nests early (possibly searching for food) and perished early. 20 new adult Barn Owls were ringed and 33 re-

trapped/controlled; including females that are 8 and 6 years old respectively.

One coastal female that I had ringed (in the nest) at Lesbury in 2011; had nested most years (*near Boulmer*) since 2012 and was unfortunately found dead in September (12 years). *She almost certainly had not nested this year.* Interestingly this bird had been controlled an amazing 16 times over the years and clearly suffered no ill-effects.

Jackdaws continue to be a problem occupying owl nest sites.



Ringer's Roundup

Kestrels seemed to make a bit of a come-back, occupying four owl boxes (*although one had lost its roof during Storm Arwen – which did not seem to bother the kestrel overmuch!*). Two Tawny Owl (see picture of one of the females) put Barn Owls off using boxes, one of which was rather late.

Tawny Owls usually nest very early in smaller boxes in dark secluded places (in trees) while Barn Owls like to nest later and use larger boxes in more 'open' places, or in buildings that they can see their way in and out of easily.



With the recent dreadful weather, I have also had time to review this year's sessions at Howick Ringing Station and I can take this opportunity to thank all the folks at Howick Arboretum who have again supported our efforts. This year we captured 1,017 birds from 21 visits (compared to 1,124 in 2022 and 878 in 2021). 86 were new adults, 630 new juveniles of the year and 24 we could not age (Tree Sparrows etc.).

The rest were re-traps. We captured a Brambling this year but no Redpoll, Siskin, Greenfinch, Whitethroat, Swallow, nor any Yellow-browed Warblers (there were 3 last year). However, we did catch a Firecrest, 4 Garden Warblers (1 in 2022); 9 Redwing and 53 Blackbirds. There was also two Chaffinches first ringed in 2014; two Great Tits from 2018, and a Coal Tit from 2020.



Finally, while ringing at home last week, we controlled a Goldcrest with an unusual ring on it; after some careful examination it proved to be a **Jersey** Ringing Scheme ring! This detail has gone into the BTO and I hope to hear back soon as to when it was ringed (see photo.)

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