



Ringer's Roundup

A Ringer's Year - September 2024

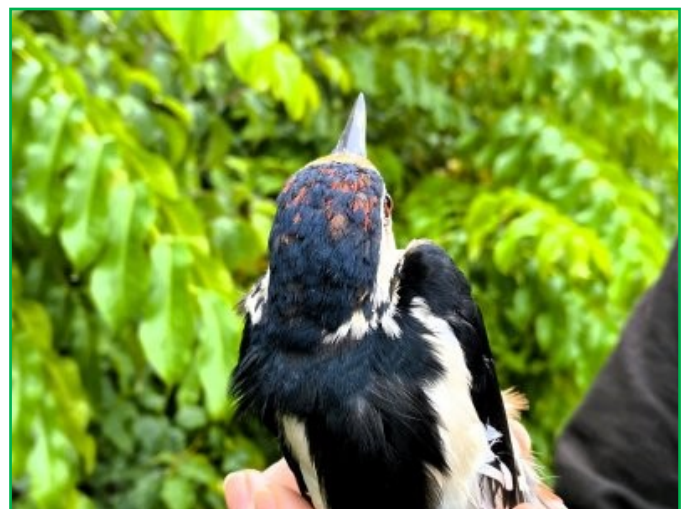
We have continued to ring at Howick Arboretum on Friday and Saturday mornings dodging around the variable weather as best we can. On the 7/9/24 we captured 39 birds (23 new and 16 retraps). Most of the retraps were adult Blue Tits just finishing their full moult; so being prepared for winter. The new birds were much more diverse with what was probably a sibling group of three noisy Mistle Thrushes entering the nets at the same time. It's almost the time of year for us to encounter 'foreign-migrant thrushes' but these three were undoubtedly local given the presence of active Post Juvenile moult in their feathering. There was also an adult female Goldcrest which may have been an incoming migrant but being certain of this with goldcrests is very difficult; as we find both residents and migrants at Howick. Several of this year's Blackcaps and a Chiffchaff were also encountered on their way south to migrate.

As I was away watching *Whales*, Hilary led the session on the 13/9/24 and 14th. The 13th yielded 27 birds (16 new and 11 retraps) again all the retraps were tits but the new birds included not just Chiffchaff and Blackcap but also a late Willow Warbler. The 14th yielded 25 birds (15 new and 10 retraps) with one of the retrapped Blue Tits from 2019. The new birds included several young Chiffchaffs, on migration south, along with a Blackcap.

The 20/9/24 was very overcast and cool but we still captured 49 birds (27 new and 22 retraps). The first retraps were three Long Tailed Tits which are almost impossible to age since they undergo a full Main Molt as juveniles rendering their age indeterminate – unless they have been ringed previously. These were all from 2022 when two of them were juveniles. The new birds started with a young Bullfinch then some Long Tailed Tits, which had to be recorded as 'age unknown'. Several Blackcaps were all aged as '3's' i.e. hatched this year as were three Chiffchaffs but we also, more surprisingly, had two distinctly broad tailed adult Chiffchaffs; one of which showed the remains of her 'brood patch' indicating that she had been nesting quite recently. The last bird of the day was a Treecreeper which we also decided was an adult female for the same reason.

The 21/9/24 netted 43 birds (22 new and 21 retraps) including a Great Tit from 2022 with a leg that looks as though it's been broken and then healed. It does not have full movement but seems to be surviving quite well.

There was also a young Great Spotted Woodpecker that we have caught previously when she had a much more 'red tonsure'; these red feathers are now moulting out – and as no new red feathers are growing in at *the back of the head*, I think it's safe to say that this is a female bird (see photo).



The new birds included what were probably our first incoming migrants of the year, not anything rare but five very unusual looking Blackbirds. Their unusual piebald appearance suggesting foreign origins (see photo.).



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In the same category were some Song Thrush with unusually long wings which were very vocal about their temporary capture.

We should have ringed on the morning of the 27th but did not due to wind and rain but this did not prevent ten of us gathering on a farm near Longhorsley in the afternoon to ring a brood of swans. The farmer had been 'training them' to come to food for some weeks and the usual tussle and wetting of the human participants involved in this procedure was mostly avoided. We were able to ring six healthy cygnets ranging from 5.35kg's to 7.6kg's in weight (*with the help of an IKEA bag and a fisherman balance!*) and provisionally thought three of them were female. They now all have large coloured darvic rings (white lettering on red) ZLS; ZK4; ZK3; ZKZ; ZK7; ZKV. Swans are long lived and the adult female to this brood is already 20 years old (VAH) having been originally ringed at Tynemouth. If you see a Swan (*any swan*) with a Coloured Ring please make a note of it and pass the details on to me (see photos).



Trying again on the 28th we captured 43 birds (27 new and 16 retraps) including retrapped Goldcrests, a House Sparrow (a bit of a rarity), Bullfinch and Long Tailed Tits. The new birds included Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Wrens, Robins and tits. There was also an exceptionally *grey* adult female Blackbird (see photo.). Scrutiny of two books suggests that such coloration indicates a bird of 'Balkan origin' which is an interesting occurrence.

Ringling on the 29th the Car Park at Howick was full of Goldcrest and Long Tailed Tits hunting spiders in the trees. The crests were probably incoming migrants indicating there may be some more interesting birds had also just landed. We captured 56 birds (43 new and 13 retraps). The retraps included an adult female Chiffchaff we had first ringed almost a year ago who still had the remains of her brood-patch suggesting she had nested locally. So, she was hatched at Howick, migrated to Africa, then returned and probably raised at least two broods herself.



Things were slow until 10:30 when Allan one of my C Ringers brought in what he thought was a Yellow-browed Warbler (a rare but regular migrant on passage from the Ural Mtns going southwards). However, on scrutiny by



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myself and Wendy (our experienced scribe) we realised that this was not a classic *yellow-brow*. It had only one Wing-bar (not two); it was a dullish washed-out bird (not crisp and bright); and on turning open both the picture books and a Ringers Reference Book and taking some biometric measurements we concluded it was the related but rarer Hume's Leaf Warbler (see photo.). This bird breeds in the wooded mountains of inner Asia and should be migrating south to winter in India.

We then went onto catch twelve more Chiffchaffs and an actual Yellow-browed Warbler with the more classic appearance (see photo on page 10).

After a brief lull we had an influx of half a dozen Blackbirds (again probably incoming migrants) followed by our third rarity of the day. This was a very inconspicuous bird that looked like a *not-quite right goldfinch or bullfinch* (we had already caught six Bullfinch during the morning). After some scrutiny we realised this was a so called 'Common' Rosefinch; a very soft brown finch with a stout bill! This finch breeds in Eastern Europe from Sweden south to the Danube, the Caucasus and much further East. They normally winter in India (see photo.)



After an exciting morning encountering *a fall of birds* migrating south, I also wanted to note that there were two Red Admiral Butterflies and a larger number of Specked Woods about near the Cricket Pavilion at Howick.

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