



Ringer's Roundup

A Ringer's Year - October 2024

While last month's ringing at Howick ended on the excitement of migrants and rare birds this October has been a lot quieter. This has been due in part to the weather although the arboretum does seem to be short of some birds this year.

Things did start well on the 4/10/24 when we captured 45 birds (31 new & 14 retraps). The retraps were all local 'tits' while the new birds included Goldcrests with at least one being an adult; a late migrating male Blackcap and several members of the thrush family (that were probably all in-coming migrants): two Blackbirds, two Song Thrushes and a Redwing (see photo). We also caught a Nuthatch (see photo) and a new Yellow-browed Warbler (*highly frustrating as some special colour rings for a national Yellow-brow research project did not arrive in the post until the next day!*).



three Bullfinches and Song Thrush. Finally, on the 26th we captured 15 birds (9 new & 6 retraps) including five Goldcrests.

After topping up some bird-feeders at Howick on the 3/10/24 I visited the main pool at Howick and fed the resident swans. This brief visit did not disappoint with the appearance of a Kingfisher, two Water Rail (one flying so close I could not focus a camera on it!) and at least ten Migrant Hawker Dragonflies (see photo.)!

This short report on Howick ringing enables me to add my annual report on this year's Barn Owl monitoring:





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BARN OWL BREEDING SEASON 2024:

This study (of around 110 sites) in **North Northumberland** (North of the R. Wansbeck and outside the National Park) indicates that this was the best year for Barn Owl productivity since 2020. At 52% occupancy it was above the long-term average of 30%; although only 47 nests were successful at raising young (10 having failed).

The influence of the weather was clear with temperatures increasing in May, enough to kick start nesting. However, some of the failures can be put down to birds not having sufficient body weight to follow the process through to successfully raising a brood. There were no really early nests (*only one brood was ringed in May; on the 29th*) and most were ringed in July or even August. There were no second broods probably due to the unsettled weather making hunting difficult.



The average number of eggs laid per clutch was down and the maximum was 6 (7 in 2023). The average number of owlets fledged was 2.4 although at least two pairs raised 5.

A total of 138 owlets were ringed and mostly fledged. Although in two instances young owls left their nests early (possibly searching for food) and quickly perished. 24 new adult Barn Owls were ringed and 26 re-trapped/controlled; including one coastal female that had been ringed near Warkworth in 2016 and is probably 10 yrs old. She has nested most years since; and doing so again this year she raised one young in August. Another controlled female was found nesting near Newton by the Sea (raising 3 young in June); she had first been located in a small 'tawny/duck box' at Low Newton in December 2022 and found to have come from Bacton in Suffolk!



Jackdaws continue to be a problem occupying owl nest sites. Kestrels only used two boxes (*and one sub-standard box close to a box that was used by an owl; so, we have now replaced this with a second owl box*). A Tawny Owl again occupied a Barn Owl box they first used in 2023 and a Mandarin duck took over another for the first time!

Successful Barn Owl nests were near: Wooler, Rock, Belford, Bamburgh, Seahouses, Embleton, Newton, Fallowdon, Berwick, Howick, Craster, Lesbury, Warkworth, Rothbury, Fontburn, Longframlington and Longhorsley.

Thanks are due to all those who have helped with this project; and those that have donated money for the making of boxes etc. .

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