



Ringer's Roundup

A Ringer's Year - December 2024

I have mentioned the BTO Winter Ringing Project before and one of my C Ringers (Kevin) is running his own sessions in a garden in Rothbury (south of the river) and so far, having a more interesting time than myself. On the morning of the 3/12/24 he captured 38 birds including a young male Sparrowhawk (which look very brown like the females at this age). This proved to be a Control (i.e. already ringed) and we were both fascinated to discover where it had come from (see photo). The BTO system was working efficiently and soon told us it had been ringed 31 km's away near Catcleugh Reservoir in Redesdale Forest in its nest; back on 8/7/24. This is not migration but a natural dispersal of a young bird away from its natal site.

The same day he also captured one of our distinctly winter birds that has migrated from Scandinavia 'a male Brambling' (see photo).



Ringling again on the 14/12/24 a local but relatively rare bird was captured; this was a young Marsh Tit. On a bird table they can be mistaken for just another Coal Tit or confused (quite justifiably) with their close relatives the Willow Tit (also rare). However, Northumberland seems to be unusual in having both Willow and Marsh at a number of locations, especially around the River Coquet. At the same session a Blue Tit was retrapped that had actually been ringed at a box we put up with the Middle School pupils earlier in the year. It was ringed in a nest that originally started with 10 eggs but only 3 young, fledged back on the 4/6/24.

This highlights the fact that 2024 seems to have been a poor breeding season for tits which is now showing up in the numbers of young birds captured at winter ringing sessions. What we are seeing is a higher-than-normal proportion of 'adult' as distinct from juvenile birds hatched in May & June this year. For example, at my own winter ringing session back on the 14/12/24 we captured 10 Blue Tits but every single one was an adult bird. Less scientifically relevant (but still interesting) was the capturing of 9 Robins in the same small

garden in the same three-hour period! Some probably have foreign accents!

This time of year, we also do some bird box maintenance and on the 4/12/24 we set out to do some pruning and cleaning out on a box near the village of Embleton Terrace. In the process we recaptured a roosting owl that proved to be female [GY37130] originally ringed as part of a brood of five in its nest near Coltpark on 1/7/20.

We discovered her in the current box in June 2023 where she successfully raised three young of her own. Checking in May 2024 she was again in this box but only weighed 310g (a worryingly low weight) although she had laid some eggs but on checking back in July, she was found not to have incubated these and was still underweight at 330g.



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On the 4/12/24 she was still alive and weighed a better 350g; so, it seemed she was surviving the winter and we hope she will be heavy enough to breed successfully in 2025 (see photo).

The same day we also visited a box near Wingate's in which 3 owlets had been raised in June. We suspected this needed a major repair or replacement.

While being watched by some bored Bulls we first checked the box and found a new roosting male owl



probably in its third year (see photo); this we ringed but kept confined in a bag while we returned to inspecting the box. It was a good job we did because the box was near collapse and we quickly set about replacing it. This we were able to do expeditiously and quickly return the owl to it – where it quickly settled down and went back to sleep!

This month also saw Coast Care at work in the week of the 11/12/24 on a farm north of Embleton. Here I joined some Volunteers working on a Northumberland Coast project to build an Owl Shed. These small wooden buildings contain an owl box and are an attempt to replace old farm buildings (that owls like to nest in) that have been lost to neglect or 'holiday cottages' (see photo). Finally, I have also redesigned the traditional 'Trecreeper box' that you will find in some books, in order try to make it more attractive to these delightful little birds (already paired up in some of our woods). We had a box used successfully near Ingram this last May but it was sadly in need of replacement, which I have already done. Subsequently I have made a few more which will be put up in the New Year (see photo).



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