



Ringer's Roundup

A Ringer's Year - March 2025

Having missed the first two weeks of March by travelling to see some of the Natural History of Costa Rica I was worried I would not have enough to write about, but my C Ringers and Trainees have continued to undertake the March check of Barn Owl boxes and done an excellent job of it. Most Barn Owls are not actually nesting yet but in doing emergency repairs (*replacing whole boxes in a couple of locations*) and cleaning-out boxes (*usually from the trouble caused by jackdaws*) we locate a number of roosting owls and sometimes pairs. This tells us which boxes are likely to be used for nesting and whether its going to be an 'early' or 'late' season for owls in North Northumberland.



In one box near Longhorsley we found a female Tawny Owl which I ringed back in 2010 and I know she has nested most years since then (see photo). However in 2024 she laid eggs and tried to incubate them for nearly two months (they should hatch after one month) but they did not hatch and we suspect at 16 years old she might have laid infertile eggs. It remains to be seen what happens this year.

Another Tawny was seen (and left undisturbed) in a box near Mindrum. Six pairs of owls were found in boxes in the far north of the county, including a very interesting pair which was found in one of the new Owl Sheds built by Coast Care volunteers. The female of this pair was owl [GY55803] which was ringed in her nest as a chick in 2017 much further south near Bilton. So, at 8 years old and having moved north it will be interesting to see if she nests successfully. Another owl was seen to emerge from a hole in a tree very close to an empty box. The scrutiny of the cavity revealed 3 early eggs!

Another Owl Shed much further south, on the coast, has an owl in residence along with a Stable that's been given over to owls. The pair that nested at Howick last year is back again (*with their very own excellent view of the Hall*) and a new female has actually laid four eggs in a traditional site new Boulmer.





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Two boxes near the coast held Stock Doves (*a high-class pigeon; some would say*). Half a dozen boxes were occupied inland south of Rothbury but in general it does not look like it will be an early Barn Owl year. The above photos show a female (spotty) Barn Owl and a male (with no spots).

The very first day that I was back from travelling, found my colleague Hilary and I down to meet a medium sized Van from 'Green Future Buildings' by a farm lake near Longhorsley. This was to help put up an artificial Sand Martin Bank (see photos).



Hilary had proposed we seek funding for this through the Coquetdale Wildlife Group by making an application to the Wingates Wind Farm Community Fund. This had been successful and we have now filled all the nesting tubes with sand to encourage the Sand Martins to nest.

Finally at a site near East Linden we had a morning ringing session on the 24th. This proved successful in catching 4 newly arrived (probably returned from Africa) Chiffchaffs (see photo.). There was also an adult Marsh Tit [BAB4432] (see photo.) that we had originally ringed (at one year old) on the 26/4/24 at the same location and a surprise Tree Sparrow.

The Tree Sparrow was carrying a numbered coloured ring and we quickly discovered it had come from a breeding site to the east of Morpeth and had been ringed in April 2024 (see photo).



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There were also other birds including a nice Nuthatch, a male Siskin, a pair of Long Tailed Tits and several Goldfinches.



Next month Tawny Owls and Goldeneye ducks get down to nesting.

Phil Hanmer

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