



Ringer's Roundup

A Ringer's Year - February 2025

February is always a strange month; its short and the weather is invariably unsettled; we humans are always looking for signs of spring and its almost inevitable that some ill-informed media commentator tells us that birds have started nesting (most have not). We will start a check of Barn Owl sites in March to do last minute repairs to boxes, clean out old jackdaw sticks and excessive amounts of owl pellets and yes, it's just possible that a particularly forward pair of owls will have started laying eggs. However, its more likely we will find that some pairs of birds have adopted a box (perhaps having roosting there all winter) or a new youngish male has claimed a box and is hoping to attract a mate.

During April and most of May we will leave our Barn Owls in peace to let them get on with nesting and not return to them until the end of May and June to find out what they have done. So, if you see Barn Owls around a box in the next couple of months by all means tell us about it but please leave them alone. Tawny Owls will be starting to lay eggs soon and we will leave them to get on with this until April. Finally, if you're going to tell me you have nesting Blue Tits in your garden (because you have seen one taking a feather into a box); no sorry they are not nesting yet – they nest until May but ambitious birds do like to try to 'claim' boxes and holes at this time of year (it's a bit putting towels on a deck-chair).

Like last month it was interesting to get some returns from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). First there was an adult Blue Tit (AER9187) controlled by Hilary near East Linden on the 6/2/25; that it turns out was originally ringed as a pullus (in its nest) by another ringer on the in the first week of June 2022; just a mile away near South Linden. So, it had not travelled far but it had survived into its third year. Then there was a Siskin (BEE0590) controlled near Longframlington on the 31/1/25 that had been ringed (just out of its nest) at Swarland in June 2024. Finally, Allan, ringing at Selkirk, back on 9/3/24, had ringed a Siskin (BJD0216) and this was then controlled by another ringer at Peebles on the 28/1/25; clearly on its way back north but using just a slightly different route than last year.



Doing the last session of the BTO Winter Ringing Project on the 17/2/25 we captured 28 birds 17 new and 11 retraps. Almost the first bird captured was a very alert adult Male Nuthatch (see photo). Nuthatches are not exactly a woodpecker but they get very vocal and try to claim a piece of woodland as their territory this time of year. Then there were two Siskins; an adult male and a juvenile female (hatched last year); both probably going to travel further north before nesting. There were then a whole bunch of Blue Tits and Great Tits not a single one a juvenile. Confirming yet again what a poor breeding year last years tits had. Finally, there was a juvenile Dunnock and a juvenile Robin (the number of Robins around our garden this year is excessive; and yes,

they insist on constantly chasing each other). You may ask why there are still juvenile Dunnocks and Robins about (and not juvenile tits) – the explanation is that these birds are capable of having multiple broods, so if the 'May' nest fails they can try again unlike the tits who can only do it once.

The retraps included two adult Long Tailed Tits, almost certainly a pair, that we see regularly see around the garden (particularly liking to feed on fat balls). Sometimes there is another Long Tailed in tow; probably a related bird (see



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photo). There were also four adult Blue Tits, one from 2023, and yet another adult Robin, also from 2023. The BTO (almost certainly my son Hugh) will analyze all the results of the Winter Ringing Project undertaken by ringers up and down the country.

Despite the vagaries of the weather, we managed another session of the Blackbird colour ringing project at Howick Village on the 5/2/25. One new female was ringed with an Orange ring above the metal BTO ring on the right leg; indicating a 2025 bird; and Orange above Blue on her left (see pict). She is now easily identifiable at a distance as 'Orange/Blue'. We also recaptured Green/Yellow from 2024; Blue/Yellow from 2024; Red/

White from 2025; and Yellow/Yellow from 2024. Clearly Howick Village is a good place for Blackbirds to prosper. The by-catch included a new Dunnock (ringed by a new trainee) and a retrap Robin and another retrapped Dunnock.

Trying again on the 19/2/25 we were defeated by some incredibly cold weather after re-trapping Yellow/Yellow we packed up and finished early. Yellow/Yellow seems to have lost some tail feathers (see pict.) after perhaps fighting with fellow blackbirds or having an encounter with a local free-ranging cat...



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