

Reed Warblers returning to the Wicken Reedbed - Update to 2012

This analysis looks at the site-fidelity of returning adult Reed Warblers to the Wicken Reedbed in 2010-12. My previous 2012 analysis of returning adults 2010-11 went into some detail, but here first is a quick catch-up summary.

Summary

Most Reed Warblers are caught at the Reedbed, where all the net-rides are within 200-300m of each other. There is, however, good Reed Warbler habitat in every direction from the net sites. Most pulli are ringed some distance away.

The statistical chances of recapturing any Reed Warbler will depend as much on this local geography as on mortality. This compact ringing site is obviously used by a large population of birds. It may be that Reed Warblers breeding outside the Reedbed area forage quite widely and only visit the catching area irregularly. There is evidence that new adults arrive throughout the season. Despite 30-40 ringing sessions each year, many breeding-season birds avoid getting caught for the whole season, or get caught surprisingly infrequently.

Reed Warblers arrive at Wicken from mid-April. As a rule, the majority arrive in the third week, but peak arrival varies from year to year. The adult birds have mostly left by the third week of August. Juvenile birds continue to be caught for a further six weeks.

Breeding and staging

Adult Reed Warblers captured at Wicken have either to be birds breeding at Wicken that year, or birds passing through. Some of these birds will have been born at Wicken; others elsewhere. Similarly, the juvenile birds-of-the-year caught in their first year may or may not come from Wicken.

The returning adult charts

These now include 2012 data. Again they confirm that adult Reed Warblers do return year on year to this same small area; and that many young birds are

back, probably breeding, at their probable birthplace in their first year after fledging. Many skip years, either through absence or by escaping capture.

The Reed Warbler season was divided into three periods:

- an Early (E) period, before 15 May, of about three weeks, as birds pass through; or stay to breed.
- a Breeding Season (B) period of two months, 15 May to 15 July inclusive
- and a Late (L) period, after 15 July. Adults will be starting to leave and most will be gone in a month. Juveniles will be around for another two months.

The tables (see separate document *Reed Warblers returning - Tables Update 2012*) show the recapture histories: the first part is of birds first ringed as juveniles (age 3 birds); the second shows birds first ringed as adults (age 4 birds). The first column shows the period in which the bird was first ringed, and subsequent columns show the recapture history, by period.

Thus the first captures in the first column combine data from several years. The most recent capture-year shown will always, however, be 2010, 2011 or 2012.

Some more detailed speculation on patterns was provided in last year's paper. But the general picture remains the same.

- Reed Warblers are remarkably site-faithful, whether first caught as adults or as juveniles. Juveniles are often back breeding in their second year.
- Whether or not adults are first caught in the Breeding Season, or the Late Season, they are quite likely sooner or later, to be caught in a Breeding Season.
- Very few Early Season birds are recaptured.
- There are rather few birds only caught and regularly caught in a Late Season. These would be the Wicken-users (but not breeding with us) that I had hoped to identify.

- Any analysis is compromised by the fact that we only probably catch a proportion of the birds present in any year.

Comments welcome.

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