

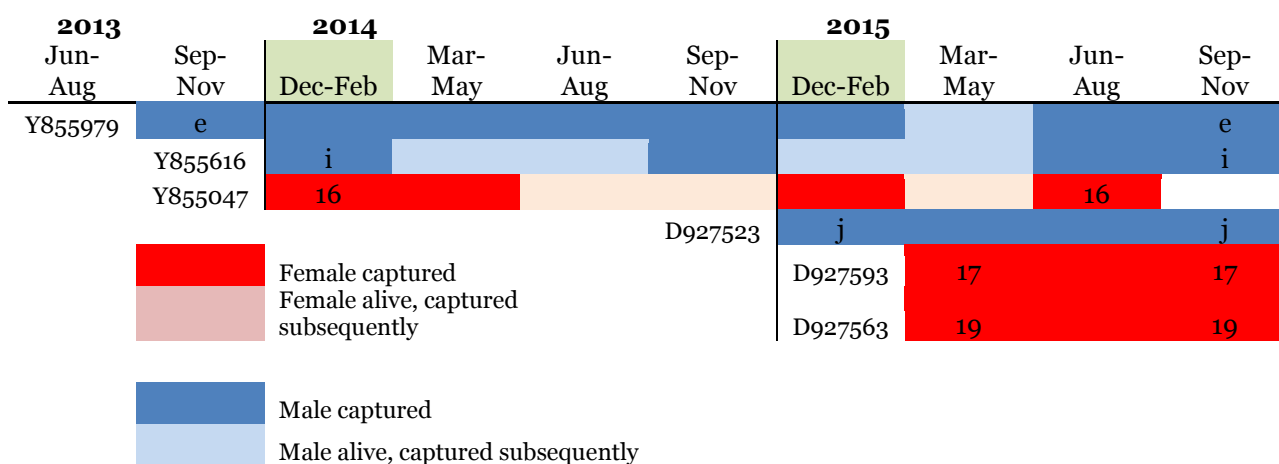
Wicken Reedbed Cetti's Warblers: update November 2015

Cetti's was first recorded for the British list only in 1961, and first bred, in Kent, in 1972. The first record for Cambridgeshire was in 1977, and the first county breeding – in fact at Wicken – was in 1980; a bird caught on the Fen that year had been ringed at Hoddesdon. However, this initial colonisation petered out after the hard winter of 1984/5.

Cetti's re-colonised Wicken in early 2005 – probably first at the North end – and juveniles showed up at the Reedbed later that year. So it's now ten years that I've been keeping tabs on their ups and downs at the Reedbed.

We've discovered a few things. That Cetti's can be very productive in a good year; and that they need to be – as winter mortality (or emigration) is significant, and birds don't live very long. And if birds are around, the recapture rate suggests that we encounter most of the birds present fairly regularly, particularly the males.

After three years of boom 2009–11, there were rather few birds around in the three years which followed, 2012–14. There were several noisy males about but often no females; and as a result breeding was poor or non-existent and we caught relatively few juveniles. There had been some suggestion during 2009-11 that success had been down to the experience of a bunch of older birds as had seemed to be the case early on in the recolonisation. By contrast, in 2012-14 most birds present in summer were second-calendar years, breeding for the first time, and not very successfully at that.



The usual table, above, shows the current picture. In fact it shows a situation of 'all change' . No birds caught before September 2013 were handled in 2014–15. Three old-timers (from 2008, 2009 and 2011) died/disappeared during 2012-13 and this possibly accounted for the poor results in those years and in 2014.

It can be seen from the table that we have currently (June to November 2015) three adult males and three adult females present from earlier in the year. Three of these (one male, two females) were first recorded this Spring, presumably filling the post-winter vacuum and following the disappearance of so many of the older birds. Birds only make it onto the table once they have survived from one quarter into the next, so in addition we must add in (as at least alive at some point in September to November this year) one adult male, one adult female new to the Reedbed (both first caught since September), plus seven male and five juvenile females which may or may not make it into the December–February 2015/16 column.

So unless we have a seriously bad winter, things seem to be looking up again.

Michael Holdsworth
30 November 2015