

# ***A SUMMARY OF BIRD RINGING AT BAINTON, CAMBS***

***2017***



***By Chris Hughes***

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***TERMINOLOGY***

***INTRODUCTION***

***THE 2017 SEASON***

***BIRDS CAUGHT ON THE HEATH - 2017***

***RECOVERIES AND CONTROLS***

***RETRAP HISTORIES OF BIRDS RINGED IN 2015 OR EARLIER***

***PLANS FOR 2018***

***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

*Cover photo: Juvenile Nightingale ringed at 05.20 hours on 19 June 2017*

*(Chris Hughes)*

## **TERMINOLOGY**

### **BTO**

The British Trust for Ornithology

### **CES**

Constant Effort Site – nets are set in the same place year on year for 12 visits within 10 day periods between end April/early May and end of Aug/early Sept

### **PROCESSED**

The processing of a bird for ringing, retrap or control

### **RINGED**

The application of a ring to a bird's leg. Data such as age, sex, wing length, weight etc are also obtained

### **RETRAP**

A bird caught by a ringer at the same site where it was originally ringed or, if sites are close together, a bird caught within 5km of where it was first ringed

### **CONTROL**

A bird caught by a ringer more than 5km away from the site where it was originally ringed

### **RECOVERY**

A bird caught as in control above or a bird found by a third party e.g. reported by a member of the public

### **RINGING BASE**

Birds are brought back to my car for processing

## **INTRODUCTION**

As in 2016, 11 of the 12 CES visits were completed in 2017 despite some decidedly dodgy weather and the loss of an elderly mother and my father-in-law, all in the space of a week in May. In its own way, visiting Bainton and spending time here helped me cope with their loss. 2017 was less productive in overall numbers of birds caught than 2016 with no new species added to the 45 ringed so far. In total, just shy of 16000 birds have been processed here in the last 16 years – neatly averaging out at 1000 per season.

The Nightingale continues to cling on but now seems to be confined to the very dense scrubby area by the main track where I park and ring from. It seems that there was one pair around this general area and breeding was proved by the capture of a juvenile on 19 June. Just 3 birds were captured - two males (one a retrap from 2013) and the sole juvenile. The slow decline of this species, not just from Bainton but nationally, is cause for concern and the BTO continues its research into the possible reasons for this. Loss of habitat, for whatever reason (and clearly not helped by burgeoning deer populations across the UK and especially on the heath at Bainton) is not the only factor, with climate change affecting several species, some positively and others, like the Nightingale, less so.

## **THE 2017 SEASON**

*My contemporaneous notes were used as a basis for this section of the summary.*

The sessions held were:

**29 April 2017 – 59 ringed, 25 retraps – Total 84 birds**

First session of the year and on arrival at 0150 I was greeted by a singing Nightingale and a snoring fisherman! The Nightingale sang all morning from the same patch of scrub and the fisherman duly woke up and got on with his day too. Despite the many hundreds of visits to the site, I managed to get disorientated in the dark after I'd put the nets up and finally got back to the ringing base after using the singing bird and the noise from a passing train on

the ECML as a marker. 12 Long tailed Tits were ringed – all adults – and an unusually large number of this species to be caught at this time of year. Also of note were four Bullfinches, caught as two separate pairs in different nets. Two Garden Warblers with ring numbers Z856148 and 150 were retrapped together in the same net and had been ringed together as adults in May 2016. A Blackbird, ringed in October 2011 and retrapped in 2012 and 2013, popped up again.

### **10 May 2017 – 30 ringed, 13 retraps – Total 43 birds**

An early start as usual with some frost and ice on the metal poles. A ground and air frost developed rapidly and by first light, some nets were covered in frost and glowing white - hence very few birds caught. A dawn chorus of Blackcap, Garden and Willow Warbler, Wren, Reed Bunting, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Chiffchaff and Goldcrest kicked off the morning, being joined from 0450 by Turtle Dove and Cuckoo. The Nightingale this morning seemed to be singing from several close but different locations on the heath. *(I was sure it was just one male as there was no simultaneous singing but in fact, having subsequently caught two during the year, it may well have been two individuals in action on adjoining territories. If it was two, it seems only one bred successfully with just the one juvenile caught.)* By 0845 it was quite warm and sunny with a gentle breeze stirring the nets. 3 female Blue Tits, all with well developed brood patches were ringed together with a pair of Reed Buntings, not particularly common on the heath.

### **24 May 2017 – 36 ringed, 32 retraps – Total 68 birds**

A mild, still morning with Cetti's Warbler and Nightingale both singing on my arrival at 0100. The first juveniles of the year were ringed – Robin, Great and Long tailed Tit plus a Linnet – and female Whitethroat and Garden Warblers with good brood patches were ringed. Both the Nightingale and Cetti's Warbler were duly trapped and ringed and whilst ringing the former, a Nightingale, probably the female, was uttering its characteristic croaking call from nearby. I'm familiar with this alarm call from previous years whilst working the nets and it's clearly the signal to others of my presence.

### **10 June 2017 – 27 ringed, 18 retraps – Total 45 birds**

A dull, warm and overcast morning with light rain for an hour from 0500, more rain from 0630 and a strengthening breeze. The morning ended with it

blowing a gale. A Tawny Owl was calling as I set the nets and a young bird, close to the ground near me, was answering. At 0500 the Nightingale was once more in song with the simultaneous scolding call from what I believe to be a female. The relatively low catch reflected the weather conditions but new juvenile species caught were Chiffchaff, Dunnock, Song Thrush and Blackcap. An adult Reed Warbler, traversing the heath, was the only one of this species caught all year. A Song Thrush and Blackbird, both ringed as juveniles in 2014 were retrapped for the first time. Eyed and Poplar Hawkmoths were both successfully released from the nets early on.

### **19 June 2017 – 65 ringed, 22 retraps – Total 87 birds**

Another hawkmoth, a Privet, was released from the nets and flew off very strongly. An extremely hot morning with a temperature of 18 degC at 0115. The young Tawny Owl was again begging for food as I set the nets with the only other sound a distant Cetti's Warbler. Blazing hot sun by 0730 with a gentle breeze. A Cuckoo landed briefly on the pylon near the car, disturbing the local Turtle Dove from his usual perch. I noted an abundance of insects this morning with the hope that juveniles were being well supplied and species ringed were Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Nightingale, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Treecreeper, Blue and Great Tit. A second Cetti's for the year was ringed – another male with very sharp claws - and notable retraps included a Garden Warbler from 2014 and a Treecreeper, ringed as a juvenile in 2016. Star retrap was the male Nightingale, ringed in 2013 and retrapped for the 10<sup>th</sup> time – a superb record of site fidelity. A Coal Tit and two adult Willow Warblers were already in post breeding moult.

### **27 June 2017 – 52 ringed, 18 retraps – Total 70 birds**

A breezy and dull start to the morning. A short shower around 0430 was followed by drizzle, on and off, from 0515. By 0730 rain forced the closure of all the nets for an hour or more. By 0900 all were re-opened as the weather improved, albeit with a breeze. Given the weather conditions the overall total of 70 birds was really good with the first young Whitethroat of the year, two more juvenile Treecreepers and another juvenile Linnet being ringed. Most unusual bird of the morning was a hefty Woodpigeon putting something of a strain on the net. I commented in my notes on the lack of juvenile Long tailed Tits which, given the 12 adults caught on my first visit of the year, was a disappointment.

**4 July 2017 – 65 ringed, 21 retraps – Total 86 birds**

A dull, overcast and warm morning with a gentle breeze gradually gaining in strength. An excellent session for juveniles with young Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Song Thrush, Lesser Whitethroat, Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Long tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Treecreeper, Linnets and Bullfinch all being ringed. A single juvenile Bullfinch was the first for the year and the prize for the most arresting bird was a very recently fledged Lesser Whitethroat – all stumpy tail and yellow gape – see photo below.



A stunning adult male Greenfinch was ringed and amongst the retraps was a Green Woodpecker, ringed in 2016 and a Song Thrush ringed in 2014, both retrapped for the first time.

### **29 July 2017 – 42 ringed, 6 retraps – Total 48 birds**

A cloudy start to the day, mild with a light breeze but the skies cleared, the wind grew stronger and by early morning the classic 'not great for ringing' weather of bright sun and strong wind was in full flow. The nets were so visible that I was pleased to catch what I did. By contrast, the same session last year in dull but slightly breezy weather realised 146 birds! Overnight rain had soaked the vegetation so I was getting involuntary showers as my net poles touched nearby bushes as I was setting up. All part of the experience. The session was mainly notable for the ringing of a juvenile Great Spotted Woodpecker – the first juvenile to be caught since 2014 - and the final bird of the morning was another juvenile woodpecker, this time a Green – strong noisy birds both.

### **7 August 2017 – 53 new, 10 retraps – Total 63 birds**

Railway crossing closed for some sort of remedial work but one of the workmen kindly let me nip through to the site entrance. A bit breezy on arrival about 0300 with stronger gusts of wind from about 0530. However, it was dull so the nets, although blowing about a bit, were not too visible. The session was mainly notable for 10 juvenile Bullfinch and 9 juvenile Whitethroat being ringed.

### **23 August 2017 – 49 ringed, 8 retraps – Total 57 birds**

First session post Birdfair ringing demo which was brilliant as usual. I think we've just about got the organisation of the demo sorted out now and it's interesting to think back at how it's evolved. We used to be tucked away in a corner, almost forgotten and certainly not graced by many visitors yet now, folk flood over to our latest location and I think it's very well run. The BTO staff are great and it's nice to meet up with some old ringing mates who I only ever see on the third weekend in August. An interesting trip down to the site as the A1 was closed at South Croxton and I found myself heading north up to

Grantham. Normally on auto pilot so had to reboot and find somewhere to turn and head in the right direction. Despite the detour I got to the site in reasonable time and thankfully all the nets went up without a hitch. A dull, warm start to the morning but the sun broke through around 0750 together with a bit of a breeze. Another 7 juvenile Bullfinch were ringed plus a juvenile male Green Woodpecker and a Blackbird, first ringed in 2013 was retrapped.

### **3 September 2017 – 48 ringed, 11 retraps – 59 birds**

Final CES visit of the year and another dull, warm morning. As seems to be the norm, a strengthening breeze sprang up. On site at 0300. A couple of fishermen were snoozing nearby who, I hope, I didn't wake as I unloaded the car and set off across the heath. A Tawny Owl was calling early on in the dark and a Blackbird and Robin started singing in a rather desultory fashion around 0530 by which time a glorious orange sunrise was beginning to appear. 11 juvenile Blackcap and 4 juvenile Song Thrush were ringed and another 2013 vintage Blackbird with a consecutive ring number to the one caught at the last session, was retrapped. I wonder what the odds of that happening are?

Site 'put to bed' for the year.

### ***BIRDS CAUGHT ON THE HEATH – 2017***

<b>Species</b>	<b>Ringed</b>	<b>Retraps</b>	<b>Total</b>
Woodpigeon	1	0	1
Green Woodpecker	2	2	4
Grt. Sp Woodpecker	1	0	1
Wren	37	10	47
Dunnock	37	25	62
Robin	37	10	47
Nightingale	2	1	3
Blackbird	35	24	59
Song Thrush	15	14	29
Cetti's Warbler	2	0	2
Reed Warbler	1	0	1

Lesser Whitethroat	13	2	15
Whitethroat	34	4	38
Garden Warbler	27	9	36
Blackcap	78	9	87
Chiffchaff	48	18	66
Willow Warbler	21	12	33
Goldcrest	8	3	11
Long tailed Tit	23	4	27
Coal Tit	2	0	2
Blue Tit	26	6	32
Great Tit	20	5	25
Treecreeper	9	2	11
Chaffinch	2	0	2
Greenfinch	1	0	1
Linnet	3	0	3
Bullfinch	38	15	53
Reed Bunting	5	1	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>528</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>704</b>

704 birds of 28 species were processed during the year. Of those ringed, 19 species recorded a reduction in numbers from 2016, some being significant e.g. Wren down from 57 to 37, Robin from 59 to 37, Blackbird from 58 to 35 and Song Thrush 40 to 15 – all indicating a less than successful breeding season. Summer visitors such as Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler also seemed to be badly affected by the weather, their numbers being down from 65 to 48 and 43 to 21 respectively. On the plus side, both Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat fared much better (34 from 16 and 13 from 6 respectively) and Long tailed Tit numbers were up from 9 to 23. This year they seemed to ‘dribble’ into the net rather than arrive in large family flocks as normal.

### ***RECOVERIES AND CONTROLS***

Just one bird, ringed at Bainton was reported by the BTO:

**Reed Warbler** – ring number Z028535, ringed as an adult male in the reedbed by Michelle Househam on 21 June 2014 and controlled on 20 August 2017 at Marais-Moisan-Ouest, Messages, Landes, **FRANCE**, 985 km from Bainton and

1156 days after first being ringed. This bird was at least 4 years old when caught by French ringers.

No birds ringed elsewhere were controlled in 2017.

### ***RETRAP HISTORIES OF BIRDS RINGED IN 2015 OR EARLIER***

The following age codes are used:

**3** – definitely hatched during the current calendar year

**4** - hatched before current calendar year – exact year unknown

**5** – definitely hatched during previous calendar year

**6** – hatched before last calendar year – exact year unknown

**M or F** – male or female

#### **Wren**

Ring number EAP 104 – ringed as a 3 on 21 July 2014 and retrapped for the first time on 27 June 2017.

#### **Dunnock**

Ring number TL88866– ringed as a 4F on 15 May 2014 and retrapped on 25 May 2014, 6 June 2016 and 19 June 2017.

Ring number TL88873 – ringed as a 3 on 30 May 2014 and retrapped on 23 June 2014, 4 May and 16 June 2015 and 29 April 2017.

Ring number TK01218 – ringed as a 3 on 23 June 2014 and retrapped on 13 May and 16 June 2015, 27 May and 18 June 2016 and 4 July 2017.

Ring number TK01223 – ringed as a 3 on 21 July 2014 and retrapped on 4 and 30 May 2015, 27 May and 23 June 2016 and 10 June 2017.

Ring number TV33101 – ringed as a 4F on 13 May 2015 and retrapped on 16 May 2015, 18 June 2016 and 29 April, 27 June and 4 July 2017.

Ring number TV33103 – ringed as a4F on 13 May 2015 and retrapped on 30 May 2015 and 24 May 2017.

### **Robin**

Ring number Z070847– ringed as a 3 on 7 August 2015 and retrapped for the first time on 29 April 2017.

### **Nightingale**

Ring number Y207620 – ringed as a 4M on 22 April 2013 and retrapped on 2 May 2013, 18 and 30 April, 13 May and 23 June 2014, 6, 18 and 23 June 2016 and 19 June 2017. When last retrapped he was at least 5 years old. An excellent example of this males' site fidelity.

### **Blackbird**

Ring number CL49234 – ringed as a 3F on 14 October 2011 and retrapped on 12 May 2012, 25 June 2013 and almost 4 years later on 29 April 2017. She was 6 years old when last retrapped was the oldest known bird to be caught at Bainton in 2017.

Ring number CL15370 – ringed as a 3 on 15 July 2013 and retrapped on 4 May 2015 and 2 September 2017.

Ring number CL15371– ringed as a 3 on 26 July 2013 and retrapped on 20 August 2013, 30 May 2014 and 23 August 2017.for the first time on 25 July 2016.

Ring number LA04489 – ringed as a 3 on 6 June 2014 and retrapped on 21 June 2014 and 10 and 19 June 2017.

Ring number CW57929 – ringed as a4F on 7 August 2015 and retrapped on 25 July 2016 and 27 June 2017.

### **Song Thrush**

Ring number RT95516 – ringed as a 3 on 25 May 2014 and retrapped on 10 June and 4 July 2017.

Ring number RF37344 – ringed as a 5F on 4 May 2015 and retrapped on 6 and 28 August 2016, 27 June and 4 July 2017.

### **Garden Warbler**

Ring number Y207662 – ringed as a 4M on 16 May 2013 and retrapped on 30 May 2014, 16 June 2015 and 4 July 2017.

Ring number X777922 – ringed as a 4 on 30 April 2014 and retrapped for the first time on 19 June 2017.

### **Blackcap**

Ring number P985708 – ringed as a 4M on 28 April 2012 and retrapped for the first time, over 5 years later, on 10 June 2017.

Ring number P985739 – ringed as a 4M on 2 May 2012 and retrapped on 23 May 2012, 15 July 2014, 15 May 2014, 30 April and 18 June 2016. He was at least 5 years old when retrapped in 2016.

Both birds were over 6 years old when last retrapped, 739 being particularly site faithful.

### **Blue Tit**

Ring number Z070782 – ringed as 5F on 30 May 2015 and retrapped for the first time on 24 May 2017.

### **Reed Bunting**

Ring number Z070746 – ringed as a 4M on 4 May 2015 and retrapped on 30 April 2016 and 19 June 2017.

## **PLANS FOR 2018**

I had planned to continue ringing at Bainton, albeit with a re-organisation of the net rides to make life a little easier for me but serious family ill health will probably mean that my visits will be limited.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I'm really grateful once again to The Langdyke Countryside Trust (Richard Astle) for allowing me to ring at this site and to Ian Wakeford (Bainton Fisheries) for access to the site. I am much indebted as always to Andy and Helen Nutt for the work they put in at the site and their enduring friendship.

Last and by no means least, I have to thank my family for their support over the last quarter of a century of ringing at Bainton. Without their help I wouldn't have enjoyed the opportunities ringing has brought me around the world, not just at Bainton. This hobby has enriched my life enormously, as do birds on a daily basis and I cannot imagine a life devoid of their company. In but a small way, the data collected by me and all those who have ringed here since way back in 1988 has contributed to shaping our conservation strategies.

*Chris Hughes, Melton Mowbray, February 2018*

