

## Warblers on Holt Island in 2020

The year 2020 has been a strange year with first the floods for several weeks in January and February followed by lockdown. This latter was a real setback putting a stop to ringing on the Island for a period but once we were allowed to ring again on the Island we made good use of the time catching 290 warblers of nine species, over 100 more than last year.

The number of all warblers seems to have been higher this year and there are a number of possible reasons. The lockdown in Spain and Italy reduced the numbers that were shot, there was much less general disturbance during the breeding season and the birds seemed to make good use of this.

Species	New Birds	New Juveniles	New Adults	Re-trap Birds	Re-trap Juveniles	Re-trap Adults	Total
Cetti's Warbler	3		3	2		2	5
Sedge Warbler	11	6	5	30	4	26	41
Reed Warbler	61	26	35	41	9	32	102
Garden Warbler	5		5	1		1	6
Blackcap	76	44	32	28	8	20	104
Whitethroat	3	2	1				3
Lesser Whitethroat	2	1	1				2
Willow Warbler	1	1					1
Chiffchaff	26	21	5	2	1	1	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>	101	87	<b>104</b>	22	82	<b>292</b>

What has surprised us most is the number of new Blackcaps and Reed Warblers that were caught. One of the Blackcaps was first ringed in 2014 and has returned each year since but the competition must be strong with 32 new adult birds being caught, many must have been moving through on their way to other sites, but there must have been 10 to 12 pairs breeding on the Island.

The Reed Warblers were also caught in large numbers with 35 new adults and nine re-trapped. It was, however, noticeable that many more Reed Warblers and Sedge Warblers were nesting along the Back Water in the new reed beds along the edge of the river. Again there must have been at least ten pairs, probably more nesting. Many very young birds were caught, including some hardly able to fly.



Juvenile Reed Warbler



Juvenile Sedge Warbler



Garden Warbler

There was a small but stable population of Sedge Warblers, many of the adults were ringed two, three or four years ago. There were probably only five or six pairs breeding.

The Garden Warblers were all caught in the spring and they appeared to pass through and did not breed on the Island, none were caught in the autumn.

Chiffchaffs are present most months of the year, they were singing and calling most of the time but stayed high up in the tree canopies. There were probably more pairs breeding than the number of adults caught. A lot of the juveniles that were caught appeared to be moving through. They were still present in October.

Only one juvenile Willow Warbler was caught in the autumn, on passage.

The Cetti's Warblers were again all caught in September and were adults, some moving through but at least one stayed into the middle of October. One or two were heard singing in the spring. They did not breed on the Island, but did breed on Fen Drayton Gravel Pits, nearby.



Cetti's Warbler



Juvenile Lesser Whitethroat

The Whitethroats were probably from the other side of the river, being caught in the reed bed, very close to the river. The Lesser Whitethroats were a new species for the Island and the first to be caught there. They may have been moving through, one was a juvenile, but both species were caught at the time when the hay was being cut.

From the above totals it is evident that the Island can and does sustain a significant population of warblers and must be able to provide suitable food for them. This is mostly in the form of aphids and other small insects. Without the various habitats of reed beds and tree canopies this would not be possible.

It is hoped that next year we will again be able to target warbler through the whole season and complete the story that is emerging.



Whitethroat



Juvenile Willow Warbler



Juvenile Chiffchaff

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