

*A SUMMARY OF BIRD RINGING AT BAINTON, CAMBS*

*2009*



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# ***SUMMARY OF RINGING AT BAINTON - 2009***

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*Cover photo: Nightingale at Bainton – Chris Hughes*

## ***TERMINOLOGY***

Readers may appreciate an explanation of the abbreviations used in this report

### **BTO**

The British Trust for Ornithology

### **CES**

Constant Effort Site

### **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 eg reported by a member of the public

### **WALK BACK**

My phrase to describe the first net clearance of the day. This is always after I've finished putting up all the nets and I reverse the route to ensure I check all the nets as I return to the ringing base. More often than not, there are few birds caught on this round.

### **RINGING BASE**

Birds are brought back to my car for processing

## *INTRODUCTION*

This report summarises bird ringing at Bainton in 2009. Historically, the site has seen ringing activities take place at least since 1988 (I have recently acquired ringing records from that year) and, since 1991, the main effort has been directed to Constant Effort Site (CES) ringing under the auspices of The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). For many years, Richard Wakeling was the main ringer at the site and I first set foot there in 1993 when I moved home from Lincolnshire to Leicestershire. Looking for somewhere to ‘park my pliers’, I hooked up with Richard and have enjoyed many, many ringing sessions with him since our first meeting some 18 years ago. I ringed intermittently with him from 1995 to 2001 (whilst also running my own CES at nearby Ferry Meadows Country Park) then took on full responsibility following his retirement in 2002.

The CES scheme is a vitally important part of the BTO’s Integrated Population Monitoring Programme and measures population levels, breeding success and survival rates of 25 species of birds. The other strands to IPM are the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), Nest Record Scheme (NRS) and general ringing. CES is the only one of the strands to provide data across the three areas mentioned above. That is why it is so important.

The logistics of CES is that nets are set in the same positions year after year and 12 visits are made at broadly ten day intervals between the end of April/early May and the end of August/early September each year. The early visits tend to catch arriving adult migrants and early breeding resident species, the later visits generally catching mainly juveniles. Data from Bainton is added to that of around another 120 CES sites around the country and this enables the BTO to produce figures each year which identify short and long term trends, some of which I have to say are pretty alarming. It is well documented that many of our once common species have been declining at a rapid rate so unless we monitor what is happening, we can’t begin to understand the causes. The BTO and RSPB are currently researching why many of our once common migrants are finding life so difficult and the latest research (Out of Africa, now more catchily entitled A2B [Africa to Britain]) is about to start producing some results. Bainton contributes to this research as I am specially licensed to remove a small portion of one wing feather of adult Willow Warblers, a species in massive decline in the south of England. These samples are sent for isotopic analysis at the universities of East Anglia and Strathclyde (one researcher ‘guest’ ringed with me at Bainton in 2008) and it may be possible to identify whether different populations spending their summers in Britain actually overwinter in different areas of Africa. It may then be possible to determine whether the conditions where the birds overwinter contributes to the declining numbers returning to the UK.

Bainton has been operated as a CES site since 1991 and, as mentioned above, I have recently acquired all the CES ringing records since then. These are in paper format and will require a good deal of effort to computerise but as 2010 sees the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it would seem to be a good time to produce a report on two decades of CES ringing - a task for next year. I hope it will give an insight into how things have changed over the years. The site ringed has two distinct trapping areas – the damp scrub adjacent to the pits consisting of willow carr, sedge and reed and the dry scrub

area characterised by low bushes and low ground vegetation. Around the margins of both areas are trees and more dense scrub. Whilst over the years I've seen the damp scrub slowly dry out (seral succession with the reedbed slowly moving round the edge of the pond), the dry scrub is little changed overall due I believe to the low nutritional value of the soil. I understand the dry scrub area was originally a pit filled in with rubble from the London blitz (which perhaps explains why I keep finding lots of bits of pot, glass and metal excavated by the local mammals), topped off with ash when the area was used by the railways. Although I do occasionally catch them in the damp scrub, the dry scrub is the more favoured area for the Nightingale, a *very* special bird indeed.

## ***THE 2009 SEASON***

After two so-called summers, 2009 presented more favourable weather for breeding and this was reflected in the number of birds caught – 1075. For comparison, 822 birds were caught in 2008. 12 CES sessions were completed with two other sessions in late September and early October. Details of birds caught are shown in the table below. Some highlights include:

- 26 April** – male Nightingale and a Garden Warbler, both ringed in 2005 retrapped
- 10 May** – Sparrowhawk ringed, the first since 2006. Also, the first retrap of a Blackbird ringed here in 2003
- 20 May** – male Reed Warbler from 2004 and a female from 2006 retrapped
- 29 May** – sudden arrival of female Garden Warblers and the first young Blackcap ringed
- 8 June** – a Song Thrush, ringed as a juvenile in 2007 retrapped and the first young Long tailed Tits of the year ringed. The first year I've not caught any in May
- 21 June** – first juvenile Nightingale ringed and lots of other juveniles around
- 30 June** – stunning adult male Hobby caught – a first for Bainton (and me!)
- 25 July** – juvenile Green Woodpecker ringed and 24 juvenile Chiffchaffs
- 31 July** – adult male Green Woodpecker ringed – surprisingly caught in the reedbed
- 9 August** – Long tailed Tit, ringed in 2004 retrapped
- 18 August** – 15 juvenile Blackcap and 11 juvenile Bullfinches ringed
- 30 August** – 20 juvenile Blackcaps ringed. Garden Warblers, putting on fat reserves, also caught.
- 24 September** – 23 juvenile Blackcaps ringed with a variety of weights ranging from 16.1 to 27.3g, the latter ready for the off.
- 8 October** – Reed Warblers now packing on fat and a Belgian ringed Blackcap caught.

The number of Nightingales ringed represents 71% of all those ringed in Cambridgeshire and 11% of all Nightingales ringed in the UK in 2009. Given that this species is getting towards the northern edge of its range at Bainton, the stronghold being in the south east, it underlines the real importance of this site for this species. Relative to the county annual totals, 25% of Green Woodpeckers, 20% of Lesser Whitethroats and Bullfinches, 19% of Song Thrushes and Willow Warblers, 17% of Chiffchaffs and 16% of all Blackcaps were ringed at Bainton. Just for the record, the single Hobby represented 50% of the county total and with just 11 free flying birds caught out of 137 ringed nationally (the vast majority ringed each year are ringed as

pulli) it indicates how unusual it is to catch one of these magnificent little falcons in a mist net. Extracting this delightful bird from the net and ringing it was considerably less arduous and painful than doing the same thing to a Blue Tit, not called 'Billy Biter' for nothing!

### ***BIRDS CAUGHT IN 2009***

<b>Species</b>	<b>Ringed</b>	<b>Retraps/Controls</b>	<b>Total</b>
Sparrowhawk	1		1
Hobby	1		1
Green Woodpecker	3		3
Wren	52	14	66
Dunnock	33	24	57
Robin	57	15	72
Nightingale	15	12	27
Blackbird	44	19	63
Song Thrush	29	8	37
Sedge Warbler	12	2	14
Reed Warbler	71	24	95
Lesser Whitethroat	12	2	14
Whitethroat	27	1	28
Garden Warbler	37	9	46
Blackcap	150	27	177
Chiffchaff	85	18	103
Willow Warbler	30	9	39
Long tailed Tit	21	18	39
Marsh Tit	3	4	7
Blue Tit	38	5	43
Great Tit	30	4	34
Treecreeper	7	1	8
Chaffinch	16	1	17
Greenfinch	9		9
Bullfinch	49	17	66
Reed Bunting	6	3	9
<b>Totals</b>	<b>838</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>1075</b>

## ***RECOVERIES AND CONTROLS***

The following is a selection of recoveries or controls of birds either originally ringed at Bainton or ringed elsewhere and caught by me here.

### **Nightingale**

Ring number E969564 – ringed as an adult female on 5 June 2008 and controlled by French ringers at Plaisance, Saint-Froult, Charente-Maritime, France on 31 August 2008. An outstanding recovery and only the 10<sup>th</sup> ever British ringed Nightingale to be recovered abroad in 100 years of ringing in Britain. The bird made the local and national press and I was interviewed by Radio Cambridgeshire where, it seemed to me, the interviewer seemed more interested in drawing me into commenting on twitching. Thankfully my media training came in handy so I could spot what he was trying to do i.e. generate more of a story when there was enough of interest anyway. Still don't quite get why the media persists in describing anyone with even a passing interest in birds as a twitcher! And on that note, when/if I catch anything out of the ordinary, the arrangement I have is that I inform the relevant landowners/managers who can then decide whether to release the information or not as the ringing site is private property and access strictly controlled.

### **Blackbird**

Ring number CW57790 – ringed as a juvenile on 8 October 2009 and taken by a cat at Downend, Bristol, Avon on 7 February 2010 – 194 km.

### **Reed Warbler**

Ring number X348692 – ringed as a juvenile on 18 August 2009 and controlled at Rutland Water CES on 13 September 2009 – 23 km

Ring number X348725 – ringed as a juvenile on 30 August 2009 and controlled at Icklesham, Sussex on 10 September 2009 - 206 km

Ring number V637470 – ringed as a juvenile on 25 August 2009 at Icklesham, Sussex and controlled by me at Bainton 5 days later on 30 August.

This latter record is most interesting as the bird headed north north west instead of south as one would expect. In conversation with Dorian Moss at the BTO's Ringing Unit there were several records of young Reed Warblers heading off in the wrong direction and the theory is they went for a wander until conditions for migration were more favourable. Also of interest is the Bainton juvenile undertaking a more typical journey and being controlled at the same site where the errant bird had been originally ringed. Maybe V637470 rebooted its sat nav and tagged along.

### **Garden Warbler**

Ring number X348442 – ringed as a juvenile on 30 June 2009 and controlled by Landguard Ringing Group at Orfordness, Suffolk on 25 July 2009 – 145 km

### **Blackcap**

Ring number BLB11237701 (Bruxelles, Belgium). Controlled at Bainton on 8 October 2009. Details are still awaited from the BTO via the Belgian ringing scheme.

### **Long tailed Tit**

Ring number 7H5998 – ringed as a juvenile on 12 July 2008 and controlled at Flag Fen Archaeology Park, Peterborough on 28 February 2009 – 14 km

Ring number CDC817 – ringed as a juvenile on 7 August 2008 and also caught at Flag Fen, in company with 7H5998 on 28 February 2009.

Ring number BHX962 – ringed as a juvenile on 6 August 2007 and found alive and released at Castle Dyke Bank, New York, Lincs on 10 March 2009 – 49 km.

## ***PLANS FOR 2010***

2010 will bring up 20 years of CES ringing at Bainton and the site remains one of the longest running and most productive sites within the scheme.

## ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

My sincere thanks to all the land owners and agents (Lafarge Aggregates, Bainton Fisheries, National Grid, Langdyke Trust) for permission to ring at this superb and extremely important site. In particular, my thanks to Tim Deal (Lafarge), Ian Wakeford (Bainton Fisheries), Stuart Irons and Richard Astle (Langdyke Trust) and especially to Andy and Helen Nutt for their support, encouragement and management of the site over many years.

Finally, I must thank the birds themselves. It is an immense privilege to be able to catch and study these magnificent creatures and I hope I treat them with the respect they deserve.

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