

A SUMMARY OF BIRD RINGING AT BAINTON, CAMBS

2012



By Chris Hughes

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Cover photo:

A happy trainee ringer, Michelle Househam, with an adult female Green Woodpecker

Bainton, 13 June 2012

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

RINGING BASE

Birds are brought back to my car for processing

INTRODUCTION

Bainton is one of around 120 sites in the UK primarily ringed as part of the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Constant Effort Site study (CES). Mist nets are sited in the same positions year on year and 12 visits made at roughly 10 day intervals between late April/early May and late August/early September each year to measure survival rates, breeding success and population levels of 25 of our more common bird species. Visits 1 - 6 (between April/May and June/July) generally give an indication of how many adult birds are around and visits 7 - 12, (between June/July and August/September) when the majority of young birds are on the wing, give an indication of breeding success. The data from Bainton, together with that from the other CES sites across the country, provides an excellent picture of how birds are faring. The CES scheme has been running for 29 years and 2012 was the 22nd year of CES ringing at this site.

THE 2012 SEASON

2012 will chiefly be remembered as the summer when it barely stopped raining and the impact on our breeding birds was little short of catastrophic. Every species with the exception of Blackbird suffered to a lesser or greater extent, with those nesting in 'open cups' suffering worst of all. Even young birds that managed to fledge struggled to survive the incessant rain and cold and, with their lack of experience, finding food proved difficult. Despite the appalling weather though, some young birds did fledge successfully (survival of the fittest?) but it will be very interesting to see what effect 2012 has on 2013.

14 ringing sessions were held and, unsurprisingly, a relatively low total of 778 birds were processed during the year, only the second time in a decade that the total has dropped below 1000. The reedbed became increasingly inaccessible due to high water levels to the extent that it was abandoned from early July. As a result, the overall numbers caught may well therefore be reduced, especially for Reed Warbler, but it was already clear by then that this species in particular was having a dreadful year with adult females being caught early on with feathered over brood patches – a clear sign that breeding had been abandoned for the year.

The year started very well with encouraging numbers of adult birds being caught. A trio of sparring cuckoos found their way into a net on 28th April and all three got out as I approached only for one to fly back into the same net a bit further along. An adult male was safely extracted, processed and released to resume battle! Given the scarcity of this species these days I was delighted to catch just one. All three would have been marvellous and, in support of the BTO's satellite tagging project, followed by many thousands on the BTO website (www.bto.org), I was asked to try and catch a female for tagging and given a special licence to use a tape lure. None came to the tape unfortunately – perhaps a bit too late in their breeding cycle – but, nonetheless, the whole project has certainly fired the imagination of many people and has revealed new information about the species.

Early May saw many migrants arriving including a Northern Wheatear passing through on the heath and Turtle Doves purring away from the overhead wires. Cetti's Warblers continued to sing explosively and female Blackcaps, with well developed brood patches were already being caught as were Blue and Great Tits. Optimism was running high at this time for a productive year. By mid month good numbers of birds were being caught, including Nightingales from 2007 and Cetti's were heard singing from the heath – a first for me. By month's end, two adult female Nightingales had been ringed, both with well developed brood patches, an adult male Green Woodpecker was caught in the reedbed along with a controlled Reed Warbler, three Linnets were caught and juveniles were on the wing – Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush and Long tailed Tit.

In June the weather took a marked turn for the worse. A productive session on the 13th, where adult male and female Green Woodpeckers were ringed and the first juvenile Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Willow Warblers of the year were ringed too, was punctuated with drizzle and sharp showers – a portent of things to come. A memorable 'non birding' moment also happened on this day when a young roe deer suddenly appeared out of the undergrowth as I was extracting a bird and stood there gazing at me in surprise and seemingly trying to work out what it had stumbled upon. It just stood there transfixed until I lifted up the bottom shelf of the net whereupon it trotted under the net only to swing round and stand staring at me, ears twitching. It then nipped off into the undergrowth. The whole episode took only a few seconds but will stay with me as a magical moment. Arranging ringing sessions became increasingly difficult as the rains came and on the days I was able to get on site, stiff winds certainly didn't help matters. By mid month I'd recorded in my notes how few Reed Warblers seemed to be about but other species, although down in numbers were still around, with young Wren, Whitethroat, Blackcap and Chiffchaff being caught. By the end of the month though, it was clear that open cup and ground nesting species were going to have a tough year.

The first session in July was cut short by heavy rain – not forecast – and was especially frustrating as the first juvenile Nightingale and Garden Warbler of the year were ringed. The next session was also interrupted by (again, unforecast) rain but did produce young Green Woodpecker, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Long tailed Tit and Treecreeper. Given the awful weather it is testament to the resilience of the adult birds that young were fledging at all. The last session of the month was thankfully dry, although breezy and juveniles of 16 species were ringed including 11 Blackcaps and the first juvenile Bullfinch and Reed Bunting of the year. Another highlight was a Kingfisher dashing across the lake at 05.34 hours. There do not appear to be many around these days hence the exact time was recorded!

August and September proved to be just as frustrating with much lower than normal numbers of birds being caught. Warblers carrying varying amounts of fat were ringed as they headed off south. During the month, I'd headed in the opposite direction to ring in Arctic Norway and it was surreal – to put it mildly – to have nets up at Bainton that the week before had been catching Bluethroat, Red throated Pipit and juvenile Redwing, Fieldfare and Brambling.

In summary then, a dismal breeding year both nationally and locally. Comparing Bainton's figures with those produced provisionally by the BTO, the site very much mirrored the national picture. The percentage decreases over a five year average for juveniles at Bainton are a bit scary e.g. Whitethroat – 57%, Garden Warbler – 54%, Blackcap – 62%, Chiffchaff – 41%, Long tailed Tit – 44% with many others in the - 30% range. A repeat year would be most unwelcome but I remain optimistic that species will recover, although it may take a few years.

A table of birds caught in 2012 is shown below.

BIRDS CAUGHT IN 2012

Species	Ringed	Retraps/Controls	Total
Cuckoo	1	0	1
Green Woodpecker	5	1	6
Great Sp W'pecker	2	1	3
Wren	18	9	27
Dunnock	29	35	64
Robin	43	8	51
Nightingale	7	12	19
Blackbird	17	19	36
Song Thrush	13	20	33
Reed Warbler	25	10	35
Lesser Whitethroat	11	1	12
Whitethroat	22	9	31
Garden Warbler	39	31	70
Blackcap	100	24	124
Chiffchaff	34	15	49
Willow Warbler	31	23	54
Goldcrest	2	1	3
Long tailed Tit	17	8	25
Marsh Tit	1	0	1
Coal Tit	2	0	2
Blue Tit	20	12	32
Great Tit	13	4	17
Treecreeper	6	0	6
Chaffinch	5	4	9
Goldfinch	1	0	1
Linnet	4	0	4
Bullfinch	39	15	54
Reed Bunting	7	2	9
Total	514	264	778

RECOVERIES AND CONTROLS

The following is a selection of controls of birds either originally ringed at Bainton or ringed elsewhere and caught by me here. These were either ringed or controlled in 2012 or reported by the BTO in that year.

Reed Warbler

Ring number Y077972– ringed as a juvenile on 1 August 2011 at Rutland Water, Rutland and controlled at Bainton on 23 May 2012 – 23km and 296 days after being ringed.

Ring number X146504 – ringed as an adult on 8 August 2009 at Icklesham, East Sussex, controlled at Bainton on 5 June 2010 as a breeding male and again on 31 May, 9 June and 1 July 2011. He was caught again at Bainton on 13 and 19 June 2012– 206km and 1046 days after being ringed. He has clearly taken to the site as his favoured breeding location.

Blackcap

Ring number L296904 – ringed as a juvenile at Bainton on 1 July 2011 and controlled as an adult male at Wicken Fen, Cambs on 21 July and 18 August 2012 - 57km and 386/414 days after being ringed.

Long tailed Tit

Ring number CLL482 – ringed as a juvenile at Bainton on 31 May 2011 and controlled at Bourne Wood, Lincs on 30 December 2012 – 15km and 579 days after being ringed.

NOTE

Chiffchaff

Ring number FX2329 (ICONA, MADRID). Controlled as an adult at 08.20 hours on 4 May 2011 at Bainton. The bird had a wing measurement of 59mm and weighed 7.4g. *Details of when and where the bird was originally ringed are still awaited.*

A FEW SELECTED RETRAPS

The vast majority of birds retrapped are birds from the preceding year or two but each year I also retrap a few older birds and a selection of their retrap histories are shown below.

Dunnock

Ring number V586231 – ringed as an adult male on 6 August 2007. He was retrapped on 2 and 29 May 2008, 26 April, 10 May and 21 June 2009, 1, 13 and 24 May plus 12 June 2010 and 12 and 31 May 2011. In 2012 he was retrapped on 2 May and 26 June. In 2012 he was at least 6 years old and still going strong and is the individual caught most often at Bainton.

Ring number E969967 – ringed on 27 September 2008. He was retrapped on 26 April and 10 May 2009, 24 May and 5 June 2010, 29 July 2011 and 12 and 23 May 2012.

Nightingale

Ring number V254801 - ringed as an adult male on 1 June 2007 and retrapped on 29 May 2008, 20 and 29 May 2009 and then a gap of three years before being retrapped on 12 and 23 May 2012. He was at least 5 years old in 2012.

Ring number V586996 - ringed as an adult female on 22 May 2008, retrapped for the first time almost 3 years later on 12 May 2011 and again on 13 June 2012.

Ring number X348076 – ringed as an adult male on 26 April 2009 and retrapped on 1 May and 1 September 2009, 20 April and 31 May 2011 and 2 May 2012. The dates of capture might suggest he is passing through the site although, in 2011, he may well have bred.

Blackbird

Ring number CW57560– ringed as a juvenile on 24 August 2007 and retrapped later that year on 3 November. She was then retrapped on 19 June 2008 and, after an absence of almost 4 years, on 29 May 2012.

Song Thrush

Ring number RW64418 – ringed as an adult male on 2 July 2007, retrapped 3 years later on 24 May and 5 June 2010 and, after missing a year, on 12 May 2012.

Ring number RW64496 – ringed as an adult female on 29 May 2009 and retrapped on 13 May 2010, 13 April and 12 May 2011. She was retrapped again on 2 May and 26 June 2012.

Ring number RX55383 – ringed as a juvenile on 8 October 2009 and retrapped on 21 May 2011 and 12 May 2012.

Garden Warbler

Ring number V586224 – ringed as juvenile on 6 August 2007 and retrapped for the first time on 29 May 2012.

Ring number E969532 – ringed as an adult female on 29 May 2008, retrapped on 5 and 19 June and 12 July that year and again two years later on 30 July 2010. After missing a year once more she was retrapped on 23 May and 13 June 2012.

Chiffchaff

Ring number CLL041 – ringed as a juvenile on 25 May 2009 and retrapped on 1 May, 12 and 27 June and 10 July 2010. After missing a year it was retrapped on 28 April 2012.

PLANS FOR 2013

A full CES programme is planned for 2013 weather permitting of course!

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Special thanks to Andy and Helen Nutt without whose efforts the bird populations on site would undoubtedly be the poorer.

Last but by no means least, my thanks to Michelle Househam, trainee ringer for her help during the CES season.

*Chris Hughes
Melton Mowbray, Leics
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