

Bird Ringing at Paxton Pits Local Nature Reserve 2008

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The Constant Effort Scheme (CES) is run by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) as part of the Trusts scientific programme to monitor the trends in bird populations and investigate the causes behind increases or decreases in abundance of key species. CES has been running across the British Isles for 25 years, and is specifically designed to monitor changes in the abundance of adults and juveniles between years and over the long-term. It also monitors changes in productivity. Since the conception of this scheme a maximum of 142 sites in one year have taken part, although this has fallen slightly to 115 sites in 2007. Nevertheless, this scheme provides high quality data on changes in adult survival rates and productivity, to complement the other scientific work of the BTO and other bird conservation organisations.

Paxton Pits forms one of the sites, which are involved in the Scheme. It is focused on a small area within the Reserve comprising dry scrub with reed fringed lakes alongside. This is the second year that bird ringing has taken place here recently, although the exact placing of the nets changed considerably from 2007. While this compromises the 'constant effort' data analysis, this decision was taken after consulting the BTO in order to reposition the nets to ensure the maximum data was collected. 2007 should therefore be considered a pilot year, with the main project beginning in 2008. The nets will remain in the current positions for the rest of the project duration.

The methodology requires 12 evenly spaced visits between the start of May and the end of August. A small number of extra visits are permitted within the CES season. The same number of nets are erected and approximately the same amount of time is dedicated each year to allow for comparable data. Similar to the Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) monitoring that the BTO also run, it is very difficult to analyse the data collected at a local site scale. However, this data is fed into a much wider analysis at a national scale and has been successfully used to monitor changes in adult survival and productivity; see the BTO website for more details www.bto.org/ringing/ringinfo/ces/index.htm.

Fourteen visits were completed in 2008, with 114m of standard mist nets erected for each session. Occasionally one or two additional nets were also erected. The season was a frustrating one with few periods of suitable calm and dry weather during weekends. A few sessions were shorter than the ideal 6 hours starting at dawn due to increasing wind which made the catching of birds potentially dangerous. In spite of this, it was a very successful season with 469 new birds of 28 species captured during the CES period, Table 1. Additionally, 33 birds originally captured during the CES season in 2007 were recaptured during the same period in 2008. This is an increase in both the number of birds and species captured compared to 2007.

While the scientific focus is on the more commonly caught species such as wren, robin and blackcap, there were a few interesting captures. This includes a juvenile kingfisher in July, a moulting adult water rail in August and a series of adult house sparrows, which seemed to be flying in from the direction of Great Paxton to feed alongside Heronry North presumably to find food for their chicks. Due to the change in positioning of nets, a direct comparison with 2007 is not possible but several species do appear to have been more abundant in 2008 (lesser whitethroat, garden warbler, blackcap, greenfinch and bullfinch) and to have had good breeding success (robin, garden warbler, blackcap and chiffchaff).

Table 1. The number of birds caught during CES ringing (May – August).

Species	Adult		Juvenile		Unknown age		Nestlings		Total number of new birds ringed		Retraps from previous years	
	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>
Water Rail	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Woodpigeon	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Kingfisher	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Green	1	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	3	4	0	1
Woodpecker												
Great-spotted	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
Woodpecker												
Wren	4	7	16	13	0	0	0	0	20	20	0	2
Dunnock	11	6	13	14	0	0	0	0	24	20	0	5
Robin	11	8	39	45	0	0	0	0	50	53	0	4
Nightingale	6	5	1	4	0	0	0	0	7	11	1	1
Blackbird	15	9	1	4	0	0	0	4	16	17	0	3
Song	4	6	2	3	0	0	0	0	6	9	0	0
Thrush												
Reed	6	4	2	8	0	0	0	0	8	12	0	1
Warbler												
Lesser	5	14	5	11	0	0	0	0	10	25	0	1
Whitethroat												
Whitethroat	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	0
Garden	5	22	15	20	0	0	0	0	20	42	0	1
Warbler												
Blackcap	13	24	24	30	0	0	0	2	37	56	0	1
Chiffchaff	5	9	9	38	0	0	0	0	14	47	0	0
Willow	13	18	21	17	0	0	5	0	39	35	0	1
Warbler												
Long-tailed	9	3	16	7	0	7	0	0	25	20	0	6
Tit												
Blue Tit	14	10	12	11	0	0	0	0	26	21	0	2
Great Tit	10	6	7	10	0	0	0	0	17	16	0	1
Treecreeper	2	0	6	5	1	0	0	0	9	5	0	1
Jay	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
House	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0
Sparrow												
Chaffinch	4	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	0	0
Greenfinch	0	15	3	2	0	0	0	0	3	17	0	0
Bullfinch	9	14	6	5	0	0	0	0	15	19	0	2
Reed	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Bunting												
Totals	148	202	206	254	1	7	5	6	361	469	1	33

Bird ringing also took place during the early winter and autumn, with particular focus on the autumn migration during September and early October. In total, 861 new birds of 34 species were caught in 2008, Table 2. Large numbers of migrating warblers in particular were caught, the high numbers of chiffchaffs being a highlight. Once again, a few unexpected species were caught including a juvenile spotted flycatcher and two juvenile siskins in September, both clearly migrating through the pits. The high number of goldcrests was also unexpected, with all but one caught in the autumn and late winter.

Table 2. The total number of new birds ringed during 2008 with comparison against the ringing activities of 2001/2002 and 2007.

Species	2001	2002	2007	2008
Water Rail	-	-	-	1
Woodpigeon	-	-	-	1
Sparrowhawk	-	1	-	-
Turtle Dove	1	1	-	-
Kingfisher	1	-	-	2
Green Woodpecker	1	-	3	4
Great-spotted Woodpecker	-	-	1	2
Wren	29	11	24	29
Dunnock	26	10	27	27
Robin	28	10	62	61
Nightingale	17	4	8	14
Blackbird	16	5	39	38
Song Thrush	8	2	12	16
Redwing	-	-	2	1
Sedge Warbler	9	6	-	1
Reed Warbler	17	6	9	36
Lesser Whitethroat	15	11	15	32
Whitethroat	7	10	5	5
Garden Warbler	20	9	24	43
Blackcap	50	16	172	165
Chiffchaff	30	15	30	99
Willow Warbler	25	13	35	45
Spotted Flycatcher	-	-	-	1
Goldcrest	1	-	-	17
Long-tailed Tit	17	17	34	35
Marsh Tit	-	-	2	1
Blue Tit	13	45	39	58
Great Tit	25	21	21	31
Treecreeper	-	9	9	5
Jay	-	-	1	2
House Sparrow	-	-	-	9
Chaffinch	5	4	6	10
Greenfinch	5	5	7	32
Siskin	-	-	-	2
Bullfinch	21	19	17	33
Reed Bunting	2	2	1	3
Totals	390	252	605	861

One of the most interesting aspects of bird ringing for many people is the dispersion or migration movements that birds make. Details have been received from the BTO regarding several birds that passed through Paxton Pits in 2007 and 2008. Three blackcaps, originally captured elsewhere, were recaptured at the Pits. One of these was reported in the 2007 Bird Ringing Report, but all three are reported here for completeness. The Norfolk and Scottish birds may have been migrating 'normally', i.e. southwards, but the Kent bird may have been a continental blackcap coming into Britain to winter, Map 1.

T694723	3	Blackcap	03.08.2007	Trabboch Loch, Ayrshire
	3F		22.09.2007	Paxton Pits, Cambs 50 days, 451km, SE
V378184	3M	Blackcap	08.08.2007	Pensthorpe, Norfolk
			09.09.2007	Paxton Pits, Cambs 32days, 94km, SW

V482294	3M	Blackcap	04.09.2007	Sandwich Bay Bird Obs., Kent
			06.09.2007	Paxton Pits, Cambs 2 days, 157km, NW

Also reported is a juvenile robin that dispersed locally only to be found dead near Bedford and the only Sedge Warbler caught in 2008 was recaptured at Titchfield Haven near Southampton.

V440632	3J	Robin	23.06.2007	Paxton Pits, Cambs
	Dead		18.10.2007	Great Barford, Beds 117 days, 14km, SW

V942786	3	Sedge Warbler	23.08.2008	Paxton Pits, Cambs
			08.09.2008	Titchfield Haven, Hants 16 days, 174km, SSW

Finally, no ringing report at Paxton Pits is complete without mention of the nightingales. This species was the subject of an intensive study this year as part of Katherine Fraser's MSc, in conjunction with Chas Holt from BTO. This, along with normal CES ringing, resulted in 17 new adults and 4 juveniles being caught. All were colour ringed, so please look out for them in future years. In the 2007 Bird Ringing Report we reported on the grand-daddy of Paxton nightingales. In 2008 another long-lived bird was recaptured, but again frustratingly just short of the BTO longevity record.

P689663	4	Nightingale	05.05.2001	Paxton Pits, Cambs
			03.05.2008	Paxton Pits, Cambs 2555 days, 0km

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Map 1. Movements of Blackcaps to Paxton Pits in September 2007.

