

## Chippenham West 'Standards' Results 2014

### Rationale

The BTO's *Constant Effort Sites (CES)* scheme, the national standardised ringing programme, has been running since 1983. However, it is very demanding of time and resources, since it requires the completion of twelve standardised sessions at ten/eleven day intervals between May and the end of August. CES was clearly going to be impractical at Chippenham, since Peter Bircham and I were already committed to two CES programmes at Wicken Fen. We nevertheless wanted to give some structure to summer ringing at Chippenham so that year-on-year comparisons might be made, both of adult abundance and survival; and of breeding season fledging productivity.

### Methodology

The programme we devised – a sort of CES-Lite – owes much to the old WFG Standard Sites Sessions which used to run at Wicken Fen. For Chippenham, we cut this down even further to just three mornings, one each in the middle of May, June and July. The first two would focus on adult abundance, and the last two would measure productivity, hopefully before juvenile dispersal started to confuse the picture. The area chosen was Snailwell Pools Fen, around Malcolm's Pond, the eastern part of Compartment 4.

For the three sessions, 171m of net – easily managed by one person, even in July – was erected in advance and furled. On the three mornings (21 May, 10 June and 15 July in 2014), nets were opened for six hours from sunrise, providing 18 hours of ringing in total. No sound-lures were used (except for the pre-dawn Cuckoo). The ringers involved were Michael Holdsworth, Peter Bircham and Matt York.

### Results

The weather was kind to us for each of the three sessions. We caught 219 different individual birds (108 adults, and 111 juveniles) in 230 captures.

The results are shown in the table below. The numbers are of limited interest, given that it is just the one year, but hopefully they will provide an excellent base-line for the future.

The numbers certainly look like a good representation of the breeding bird communities we observed on the ground. We would have been lucky on just three mornings to catch some of the larger species which we know to breed in or close-by this area: such as Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Water Rail, Woodpigeon or Great Spotted Woodpecker. Some absent smaller passerines – Dunnock (3), Song Thrush (2), Whitethroat (0), Lesser Whitethroat (0), Garden Warbler (1), Willow Warbler (6), Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Greenfinch and Goldfinch (all 0) – are probably genuinely not breeding within this sector. The numbers in parentheses are the totals of these species caught in our first two summers of west-side ringing, some of which will have been early or late-season (August-September) dispersing transients. In addition, two local species were not represented: Grasshopper Warbler (8), present (maybe two pairs), but difficult to catch without a sound-lure; and Bearded Tit (2), which was not recorded by us on any of our total seven west-side sessions this year.

	<i>"Old"</i> adults	<i>New</i> adults	All adults	2014 juvs	Total birds	<i>"Old" adults' year of ringing</i>			
						5 2014	2.4.6 2014	5 2013	2.4.6 2013
<b>Cuckoo</b>		1	1		1				
<b>Kingfisher</b>				2	2				
<b>Wren</b>	2	13	15	14	29			1	1
<b>Robin</b>	1	1	2	5	7			1	
<b>Blackbird</b>		1	1		1				
<b>Sedge Warbler</b>	1	8	9	5	14		1		
<b>Reed Warbler</b>	2	31	33	16	49				2
<b>Blackcap</b>	1	3	4	7	11				1
<b>Chiffchaff</b>	3	12	15	12	27		1	1	1
<b>Goldcrest</b>				2	2				
<b>L T Tit</b>		12	12	16	28				
<b>Marsh Tit</b>	2		2	1	3			2	
<b>Blue Tit</b>	4	2	6	22	28			3	1
<b>Great Tit</b>		2	2	7	9				
<b>Treecreeper</b>				2	2				
<b>Reed Bunting</b>	1	5	6		6				1
<b>Total:</b>	17	91	108	111	219	0	2	8	7

Some further comments might be useful. Kingfishers most likely do not breed actually within the Chippenham NNR, as there are probably no suitable nest-sites; the two juveniles will no doubt have been dispersing from a nearby waterway. With one caught in May (they breed early) and the second in July, they were probably not siblings. The absence of Dunnocks is perhaps surprising, but reminds us that the species is in decline and now amber-listed. Spotted Flycatchers were recorded in this part of the Fen during the summer, but not by us.

The astonishing Reed Warbler numbers, and particularly the constant arrival (and presumably departure) of new-for-the-year adults, are as baffling here as at Wicken Fen. There does seem to be a continual churn – possibly of late arrivals, unmated birds and failed breeders. It also needs to be borne in mind that Reed Warblers only defend a very small territory right in close proximity to the nest, while foraging more widely and non-competitively on 'common land' – often drier scrub and bushes – some way from their actual nests, where we may have been intercepting them.

As for the Blue and Great Tit numbers, the July session witnessed the catch of a significant tit-chaff flock, which also included fellow-traveller species such as Chiffchaff, Marsh Tit, Long-tailed Tit and Treecreeper. Most of these birds will have come from outside the immediate vicinity of Compartment 4. We can't rely on experiencing tit catches on this scale every year.

Three birds ringed elsewhere were captured in 2014. A Chiffchaff (10/2011) from Icklesham, Sussex (but very likely a Chippenham breeder) ; plus a Sedge Warbler (8/2011) and a Reed Warbler (8/2009) relocated from Wicken Fen.

Provisional dates for 2015 are Tuesdays 19 May, 16 June and 14 July.

Michael Holdsworth  
23 December 2014