

## **Wicken Fen Group Reedbed CES Results 2014**

All twelve sessions were satisfactorily completed again this year. Very many thanks to all those who got involved through the summer.

### **Results**

See the attached tables. This year we caught 407 different individual birds (153 adults, and 254 juveniles) in 507 captures from 162 metres of net open for eight hours over twelve sessions.

### **The season**

After two difficult seasons, the more settled weather of 2014 came as a welcome change; it was almost a good summer! After winter rainfall double the recent average (and all that flooding) and a wet May, things dried up and overall temperatures were a degree two above average. Harrisons duly set to its summer concrete consistency for the brief annual window of vehicle access.

### **The national picture – numbers**

The BTO has published its preliminary CES report from its early submissions (about 80%), including ours. They show a picture which is becoming increasingly familiar: sub-Saharan migrants down, short-distance migrants not so bad, and mixed ups and downs for residents.

2014 was another poor year in terms of the number of long-distance migrants returning to the UK to breed and this drop in numbers was statistically significant for Willow Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat and Reed Warbler, with fewer Willow and Sedge Warblers captured than in any year since CES began in 1983. This could be a reflection of poor recruitment following the disastrous breeding season in 2012 and a mixed breeding season in 2013, or to conditions on the African wintering grounds where rainfall during the African growing season was below average, reducing vegetation growth and therefore food availability.

Willow Warblers don't usually breed at the Reedbed. Adults caught are usually early May so there are probably no conclusions to be drawn from zero adults this year. Five juveniles caught on 6 July may suggest early dispersal of a nearby brood. Whitethroats breed occasionally along Fullers Drove.

The Acro results are more telling. Nationally, Sedge Warbler was down 20% against the five-year average; at Wicken down 38% against our previous three CESs. Reed Warbler similarly was down 39% (8% nationally). The two iconic Reedbed species were very conspicuous by their absence. And whole-season all-age-group new bird totals for both species were pitiful:

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Reed W	860	469	484	<b>293</b>
Sedge W	279	109	186	<b>81</b>

as were the numbers of 'returners' from previous years. While there were probably fewer sessions than in the bumper year 2011, Reedbed coverage in 2014 was broadly similar to that of the previous two years.

Blackcap and Chiffchaff, short-distance migrants that typically winter around the Mediterranean basin and into North Africa, displayed very different trends. While Blackcap mirrored the drop in numbers exhibited by long-distance migrants, Chiffchaff abundance was significantly higher than average. At the Reedbed, Blackcap was slightly up on recent numbers (down nationally 10%); Chiffchaff way up – 12 from an average of 5.3. But in both cases just one or two pairs either way will swing the statistics. And 2011/2012/2013 have all been such odd years that we still don't know what a normal Reedbed year would look like.

As for residents, only Wren and Robin breed in more than ones and twos in the CES area, and both species were the stand-out success stories of 2014, probably as a result of the very wet but otherwise mild winter weather. Wren was up 40% nationally (and 130% at Wicken); Robin up 22% – at Wicken 5 of the 8 adults were 'older' birds. In previous years there has been one pair along the Drove at best.

## Productivity

The mild winter weather may have improved adult condition at the start of the season, allowing parent birds to invest more energy in breeding. An earlier start than in 2013 may also have facilitated more repeat and multiple broods than in a normal year. Both the preliminary national CES and NRS figures indicate that it was thus a productive breeding season for some of the early breeders, including Long-tailed Tit, Song Thrush, Blackbird and Robin. In fact Blackbird and Bullfinch had their highest productivity (young fledged) since the CES began, and both did well at Wicken. What we didn't see was any evidence of Reed Warbler success, another species with an all-time record BTO year, and up 10% on their averages. Our rather few adults didn't produce exceptional numbers of young. The year's star performer, however, was Blackcap, which pumped out 27% more fledglings than the CES average, leading to some preposterously high autumn catches by Midlands and Southern England ringing groups, several into the thousands. There was some sign of this at Wicken, particularly apparent from the whole-Fen annual totals:

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Blackcap	650	292	242	<b>369</b>

Nothing should probably be read into the high Blue and Great Tit numbers, though both species came out well in the BTO's figures both for survival and productivity. The presence of tit-chaff flocks along the CES line is largely random. This year there were serendipitous (and thus unusual) 'strikes' on three of the later-summer sessions, with substantial fellow-traveller catches of Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tit and Treecreeper also pushing up the numbers for those three species.

Michael Holdsworth  
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2014 WFG CES	"Old" adults	New adults	All adults	2014 juvs	Total birds	<i>"Old" adults' year of ringing</i>								
						5 2014	2.4.6	5 2013	2.4.6	6.7 2012	6.11 2011	6.13 2010	6.15 2009	
Sparrowhawk			0	1	1									
Water Rail			0		0									
Woodpigeon		1	1		1									
Kingfisher	1	3	4	2	6		1							
G S Woodpecker		1	1	1	2									
Carrion Crow			0	2	2									
Yellow Wagtail			0		0									
Wren	5	5	10	21	31	3		1		1				
Dunnock	3	1	4	8	12	1			1		1			
Robin	5	3	8	20	28			4		1				
Blackbird	1	4	5	3	8				1					
Song Thrush		1	1	3	4									
Cetti's Warbler	3		3	3	6			3						
Sedge Warbler	3	8	11	3	14				1	1	1			
Reed Warbler	16	19	35	17	52		2	1	5	4	2	1	1	
L Whitethroat			0	2	2									
Whitethroat		1	1	1	2									
Garden														
Warbler			0	1	1									
Blackcap	1	15	16	26	42			3		1				
Chiffchaff	7	5	12	40	52		3	2		1	1			
Willow														
Warbler			0	7	7									
Bearded Tit	2	3	5	11	16						1	1		
L T Tit	2		2	14	16		2							
Blue Tit	7		7	33	40	2		4			1			
Great Tit	4		4	16	20	1		2			1			
Treecreeper	3		3	9	12			2		1				

<b>Chaffinch</b>	3		3		3				1	1		1	
<b>Bullfinch</b>	5	4	9	9	18	1		1	1			2	
<b>Goldfinch</b>		1	1		1								
<b>Reed Bunting</b>	2	5	7	1	8		1	1					
<b>Total:</b>	73	80	153	254	407	8	9	24	10	11	8	5	1

	Old adults				New adults				Total adults				Juveniles				Total birds			
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2011	2012	2013	2014	2011	2012	2013	2014	2011	2012	2013	2014	2011	2012	2013	2014
Sparrowhawk																1				1
Water Rail							1				1									1
Woodcock					1					1							1			
Woodpigeon							1	1			1	1								1
Cuckoo						1				1										1
Tawny Owl														1						1
Kingfisher		1		1					1			4	2	5	1	2	2	6	1	6
Gre Woodpecker														1						1
G S Woodpecker			1			1		1		1	1	1	1			1	1	1	1	2
Carrion Crow																2				2
Yellow Wagtail								1			1									1
Wren	2	5	2	5	2	2		5	4	7	2	10	13	11	12	21	17	18	14	31
Dunnock		4	2	3		1	2	1		5	4	4	4	1	3	8	4	6	7	12
Robin		1	2	5				3		1	2	8	13	12	15	20	13	13	17	28
Blackbird	4		1	1	2			4	6		1	5	2		2	3	8		3	8
Song Thrush	2							1	2			1	4	1		3	6	1		4
Cetti's Warbler	3	3	2	3	1				4	3	2	3	5	2	2	3	9	5	4	6
Grasshopper W	1								1				1				2			
Sedge Warbler	12	3	1	3	20	6	11	8	32	9	12	11	28	9	15	3	60	18	27	14
Reed Warbler	28	15	10	16	42	45	31	19	70	60	41	35	76	47	39	17	146	107	80	52
L Whitethroat															1	2				1
Whitethroat		1	1		5	2	1	1	5	3	2	1	19	2	1	1	24	5	3	2
Garden Warbler					3	3	1		3	3	1			1		1	3	4	1	1
Blackcap	2	3	5	1	10	15	6	15	12	18	11	16	32	10	12	26	44	28	23	42
Chiffchaff	4	6	4	7		2		5	4	8	4	12	21	11	9	40	25	19	13	52
Willow Warbler	1				1	1			2	1			8	4	3	7	10	5	3	7
Bearded Tit			1	2	1			3	1		1	5	1		2	11	2		3	16
Long-tailed Tit	4		6	2					4		6	2	4			14	8		6	16
Blue Tit	2	1	2	7	1				3	1	2	7	3	10	9	33	6	11	11	40
Great Tit	3		2	4					3		2	4	2	3	4	16	5	3	6	20
Treecreeper		1		3						1		3	2	2	3	9	2	3	3	12
Chaffinch		2	1	3						2	1	3						2	1	3
Goldfinch	1				1	1		1	2	1		1					2	1		1
Bullfinch	6	3	4	5		2	1	4	6	5	5	9	1	3	1	9	7	8	6	18
Reed Bunting	1	6	2	2	3		4	5	4	6	6	7	4		2	1	8	6	8	8
<b>Total:</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>407</b>