



## Wicken Fen Group - Report for 2019

### Administration

The administration by the Steering Group has been effective during the year with decisions taken on a variety of issues. Chris Quy has remained Group Leader and Neil Lerner has been Ringing Secretary.

A break-in at the Piggeries hut resulted in the loss of the red tin box which has been used to store rings and equipment since the beginning of the Group. Recently the box was discovered in a ditch at a local farm, some rings were missing but many were recovered and will be usable. The equipment, however, was damaged beyond restoration.

### Ringing

The Group has continued to contribute to the BTO's Constant Effort Scheme (CES) (twelve visits using the same net sites and net lengths for a set period of time). Given the effort involved it is good to report that all the sessions at all three sites were carried out. These are on St. Edmund's Fen (Compartments 30-35), the Reedbed (Compartments 51-53) and North Field/Gallops (Compartments 20-23).

### Ringing Sessions and results

129 sessions were run, with 30 people attending, totalling 1750 man-hours (or person-hours), with Mark contributing over 260 hours, and ChrisQ contributing over 190, a further 4 contributed over 100 hours each. These hours don't include all net setting sessions prior to CES days, or nest box checking/repairing sessions, which would add at least another 200+ hours to the total.

Over 44,500 foot on net was open for 620 hours.

Piggeries approx. 13,300 foot for 220 hours

Gallops approx. 15,600 foot for 250 hours

Reedbed approx. 14,700 foot for 155 hours

3373 new birds of 56 species were ringed with an additional 489 retrapped from previous years, making a grand total of 3862 individuals handled. The most unusual was a Wheatear otherwise unusual birds were the result of pulli ringing.

Species with over 100 ringed were:

Blue Tit 416

Blackcap 338

Chiffchaff 269

Yellow Wagtail 153

Reed Warbler 258

Wren 141

Reed Bunting 257

Meadow Pipit 123

Swallow 204

Robin 122

Great Tit 196

Blackbird 101

Of these Blackcap, Wren, Robin and Blackbird were the only species caught randomly but all the others were targeted at times; either in nest boxes, with food or at roosts.

## **CES**

The Group carried out the three site CES sessions as before. Detailed analysis has yet to be undertaken but the reedbed results indicated poor numbers of Reed and Sedge Warblers - in fact the lowest since the reedbed CES began.

## **Nests Report 2019. Ann Beeby.**

Monitoring of various nests continued again this year, as part of the demographic work of the Group. Certain correlations can be seen with the CES results, which give a measure of productivity, but no species have enough nests found to set up a better study. All nests monitored have been submitted to the NRS at the BTO.

Nest monitoring comprised three groups -

The large boxes are monitored by Neil Larner and Chris Quy, with the main species involved being barn owl, stock dove & jackdaw. They also checked the tern-raft.

The small boxes, for blue tits and great tits, were this year monitored on St Edmunds Fen by Neil, with help mainly from Sergio. The number and distribution of these boxes is under review. Mark Peck has monitored the Gallops boxes, but unfortunately the Reedbed boxes were not accessible this year.

The third group is the open nests, of a wide range of species, concealed in various habitats, monitored this year by Ann and Carl, with help from Carole Davis and Chris Quy when pulli could be ringed.

## **Wicken Fen big box report 2019. Neil Larner.**

There is too little data and too many changes to make any meaningful analyses, but the totals are lower than in some recent years, apart from the owls:

Barn Owls: 6 nests, 5 successful, 19 chicks

Jackdaws: 4 nests, 2 successful, 9 chicks

Stock Doves: 1 nest, 2 chicks

Common Terns: 1 nest, 2 chicks.

## **Wicken Fen small nest box report 2019. Neil Larner.**

On St Edmund's Fen, 53 nest boxes were visited. 19 of 22 Blue Tit nests were successful, fledging 139 birds. Just 5 of the 14 Great Tit nests came to fruition, with at least 34 chicks fledging. Of the 171 fledglings ringed, 25 Blue Tits and 5 Great Tits have been re-discovered as free flying entrants to the population.

Wicken nest box data, together with weather records from the William Thorpe building, have been passed to Lynne Barnett, a PhD student who is studying the effects of weather events on bird breeding and fledging. Results of her work are anticipated this year.

Gallops Area has 12 "Tit" boxes and 1 open fronted box. In 2019 nests were built in 8 of the Tit boxes. These comprised 4 broods of Great Tit and 4 broods of Blue Tit. One Great Tit nest was predated when it had 7 pulli "in pin" and a second Great Tit nest was found with 3 dead pulli but proved successful by a subsequent retrap. The other 6 boxes all successfully fledged. 6 Great Tits and 4 Blue Tits have been retrapped post fledging.

Success rates in terms of fledging were relatively good this year. We have devised a slightly different way of showing the success rates, using success vs failure for each nest, independent of brood or clutch size. We have adapted Carole's tables and included some of her data in the interests of continuity and consistency.

#### Open nest report 2019. Ann Beeby.

Open nests are the concealed nests built by many species in a variety of habitats, hard to find but very rewarding with a combination of watching and searching.

84 nests were found, mostly on St Edmunds Fen. The table below shows species totals compared to the previous two years.

	2017	2018	2019
Buzzard			1
Moorhen			1
Woodpigeon	5	4	2
Collared Dove	1		3
Swallow	1	1	1
Treecreeper		1	2
Goldcrest			1
Wren	4	8	6
Dunnock	1	6	1
Robin	1	2	1
Blackbird	6	7	9
Song Thrush	1	2	
Great Tit		2	
Long-Tailed Tit	2	4	5
Reed Warbler	1		1
Blackcap	1	6	4
Garden Warbler		1	

Whitethroat	2	2	1
Lesser Whitethroat			1
Chiffchaff	19	11	27
Willow Warbler	1	1	2
Chaffinch	1	2	1
Greenfinch		1	
Goldfinch	3	3	9
Bullfinch	1		3
Linnet	7	7	2

A frustrating watching exercise was the pair of buzzards on the northern edge of St Edmunds Fen, with distressed calling every time anyone passed along the northern path, and a big platform built up at the sides, but no bird actually seen sitting, nor signs of young, despite copious whitewash below.

We nearly had a full house of Sylvia warblers this year, with several blackcaps and one each of whitethroat and lesser whitethroat, but for garden warbler only a cock's nest or song platform (fledglings were seen, so they did have a nest).

Swallows again nested in the tractor shed and boatshed, so were inaccessible for ringing. Looking up through binoculars at a mirror on the end of a 4 metre pole is a weird optical experience!

### **Colour-ringed chiffchaffs 2019. Ann Beeby.**

This was the 4<sup>th</sup> year of our ongoing study of the breeding biology of chiffchaffs on St Edmunds Fen, based on accurate monitoring of as many nests as possible, combined with associated observations. To this end we are greatly helped by the ringers applying unique colour-combinations of light plastic colour-rings to adults as soon as possible after arrival. Males are easier to catch than females, by attraction to tape lures for the use of which we have special permission.

23 birds were marked this year, 5 of them female, and 2 marked males returned for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years respectively. 16 of the 25 males (64%) stayed on the Fen and were observed regularly, apparently breeding. 2 males were caught several times at Gallops, so probably nesting there. 4 males and 1 female were found nesting on the Poores' Fen or more central areas of St Edmunds. On the 15 territories in the normal ringing area there were 10 marked males and 2 females. 3 had been ringed as juveniles, and so are of known age and would be especially valuable for comparing age-groups.

#### **Acknowledgements**

The Group is very grateful for the continued support of the National Trust and the staff at Wicken Fen.