

Bird Ringing at Paxton Pits Local Nature Reserve 2009

Ian Dillon, Alan Bull & Rosemary Dillon

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 over 25 years and is specifically designed to monitor changes in the abundance of adults and juveniles between years and over the long-term and can also be used to monitor changes in productivity. The 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 Pits, comprising dry scrub with reed fringed lakes alongside. This is the third year that bird ringing has taken place here recently.

The methodology requires 8 to 12 evenly spaced visits between the start of May and the end of August. A small number of extra visits are also 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.

Eleven visits were completed in 2009, with 114m of standard mist nets erected for each session. The season was much better than 2008 weather wise, with prolonged periods of fine settled weather resulting in all sessions reaching the ideal 6 hours starting at dawn. It was a successful season with 378 new birds of 24 species captured during the CES period - see Table 1. Additionally, 53 birds originally captured during 2007 and 2008 were recaptured during the breeding season in 2009. The total number of birds captured during the 2009 breeding season was 431, compared to 502 in 2008 and 362 in 2007. This is a decrease in both the number of birds and species captured compared to 2008.

While the scientific focus is on the more commonly caught species such as Wren, Robin and Blackcap, there were a few interesting captures which included a juvenile Kingfisher and Goldcrest, both caught in July. A few species appear to have been more abundant in 2009 than 2008 (Dunnock & Blue Tit) and four species (Dunnock, Reed Warbler, Blue Tit & Great Tit) appeared to have had a good breeding season. Species that were noticeably less abundant included Lesser Whitethroat and those that potentially suffered as a result of poor breeding success were Robin, Garden Warbler, Blackcap & Long-tailed Tit.

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

Species	Adult			Juvenile			Unknown age			Nestlings			Total number of new birds ringed			Re-traps from previous years		
	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009
Water Rail	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Woodpigeon	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Kingfisher	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Green Woodpecker	1	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	0	0	1	0
Great-spotted Woodpecker	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0
Wren	4	7	5	16	13	20	0	0	2	0	0	0	20	20	27	0	2	1
Dunnock	11	6	15	13	14	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	20	39	0	5	4
Robin	11	8	5	39	45	34	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	53	39	0	4	3
Nightingale	6	5	6	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	11	6	1	1	1
Blackbird	15	9	9	1	4	4	0	0	0	0	4	0	16	17	13	0	3	4
Song Thrush	4	6	3	2	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	9	7	0	0	4
Reed Warbler	6	4	5	2	8	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	12	18	0	1	0
Lesser Whitethroat	5	14	3	5	11	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	25	5	0	1	4
Whitethroat	1	0	1	2	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	9	0	0	0
Garden Warbler	5	22	14	15	20	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	42	20	0	1	5
Blackcap	13	24	16	24	30	10	0	0	0	0	2	0	37	56	26	0	1	1
Chiffchaff	5	9	1	9	38	41	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	47	42	0	0	0
Willow Warbler	13	18	16	21	17	18	0	0	0	5	0	0	39	35	37	0	1	5
Goldcrest	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Long-tailed Tit	9	3	4	16	7	4	0	7	0	0	0	0	25	20	8	0	6	3
Blue Tit	14	10	8	12	11	28	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	21	36	0	2	6
Great Tit	10	6	5	7	10	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	16	19	0	1	4
Treecreeper	2	0	0	6	5	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	9	5	5	0	1	1
Jay	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
House Sparrow	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0
Chaffinch	4	5	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	3	0	0	0
Greenfinch	0	15	3	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	17	5	0	0	0
Bullfinch	9	14	11	6	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	19	12	0	2	7
Reed Bunting	0	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	0
Totals	148	202	133	206	254	243	1	7	2	5	6	0	361	469	378	1	33	53

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, 693 new birds of 28 species were caught in 2009 – see Table 2. Once again substantial numbers of migrating warblers in particular were caught, although in smaller numbers than 2008. The number of Whitethroats caught was unexpectedly high, possibly indicating a good breeding season elsewhere as these birds were captured whilst migrating through the Pits. Linnet was the only new species caught in 2009 and was an expected addition to the capture list, as small numbers roost on site during the autumn and winter. No ringing took place during November and December which may explain the low number of Blackbirds caught in 2009, as large numbers of continental immigrants arrive in the UK during these months.

Table 2. The total number of new birds ringed during 2009 with comparison against the ringing activities of 2001/2002 and 2007/2008.

Species	2001	2002	2007	2008	2009	Retraps
Water Rail	-	-	-	1	-	-
Woodpigeon	-	-	-	1	-	-
Sparrowhawk	-	1	-	-	2	-
Turtle Dove	1	1	-	-	-	-
Kingfisher	1	-	-	2	1	-
Green	1	-	3	4	-	1
Woodpecker						
Great-spotted	-	-	1	2	1	-
Woodpecker						
Wren	29	11	24	29	30	1
Duncock	26	10	27	27	43	4
Robin	28	10	62	61	53	5
Nightingale	17	4	8	14	6	1
Blackbird	16	5	39	38	19	4
Song Thrush	8	2	12	16	12	4
Redwing	-	-	2	1	1	-
Sedge Warbler	9	6	-	1	-	-
Reed Warbler	17	6	9	36	26	-
Lesser	15	11	15	32	10	4
Whitethroat						
Whitethroat	7	10	5	5	18	-
Garden	20	9	24	43	26	4
Warbler						
Blackcap	50	16	172	165	153	1
Chiffchaff	30	15	30	99	78	1
Willow Warbler	25	13	35	45	39	-
Spotted	-	-	-	1	-	-
Flycatcher						
Goldcrest	1	-	-	17	2	-
Long-tailed Tit	17	17	34	35	20	14
Marsh Tit	-	-	2	1	1	-
Blue Tit	13	45	39	58	76	11
Great Tit	25	21	21	31	32	5
Treecreeper	-	9	9	5	6	1
Jay	-	-	1	2	-	-
House	-	-	-	9	-	-
Sparrow						
Chaffinch	5	4	6	10	5	2
Linnet	-	-	-	-	2	-
Greenfinch	5	5	7	32	8	-
Siskin	-	-	-	2	-	-
Bullfinch	21	19	17	33	26	10
Reed Bunting	2	2	1	3	2	-
Totals	390	252	605	861	693	73

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 or were found dead in 2009.

LA32759 (dead, road casualty)	5F 4F	Blackbird	21.07.2008 20.02.2009	Paxton Pits, Cambs Great Paxton, Cambs 214 days, 1km, E
V502176	4 4F	Reed Warbler	26.08.2007 10.05.2009	Icklesham, E Sussex Paxton Pits, Cambs 623 days, 163km, NW
T900306	3J 4	Garden Warbler	25.07.2008 17.08.2009	Priory CP, Bedford Paxton Pits, Cambs 388 days, 18km, NE
CCT793	3J 4	Chiffchaff	07.07.2008 13.04.2009	Paxton Pits, Cambs Wicken Fen, Cambs 280 days, 36km, E
CJC733	3 4M	Chiffchaff	19.09.2008 26.04.2009	Icklesham, E Sussex Paxton Pits, Cambs 219 days, 163km, NW
Age codes:	3J	hatched during calendar year of ringing and still partly in Juvenile plumage		
	3	hatched during calendar year of ringing		
	4	hatched before calendar year of ringing, but exact year unknown		
	5	hatched during previous calendar year		

M = male, F = female

All birds, with the exception of the Blackbird, were re-caught (alive) by ringers at Paxton or elsewhere. A Spanish ringed Garden Warbler was also caught at Paxton Pits in May 2009, but we are still awaiting the original ringing details of this bird.

No long-lived Nightingales were caught during 2009, nor were any juveniles caught despite very recently fledged juveniles being observed close to the ringing area.

If you find a dead or injured bird which is ringed please report the ring number to the address on the ring or via the web-site www.ring.ac Please bear in mind that dead birds can carry diseases, so please wear gloves whilst handling the bird to read the ring number and address, and wash your hands thoroughly afterwards.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Graham Uney, Elisabeth Charman and Neil Gates for their help during the 2009 CES season. Also thanks to Paxton Pits LNR for permission to continue this project in 2009 and beyond.