

# Results of the second ringing expedition to the Nesseby ringing site in the Varanger region of northern Norway

See <http://varangerringing.blogspot.co.uk/> for photos and day to day accounts of the trip

## Introduction

The scale and scope of this second visit was limited by the availability of resources to fund accommodation, so only 4 British ringers ( compared to 16 in 2012) were recruited to support Anders Maeland, our Norwegian ringer in charge. These were:- Colin McShane (A), Fergus Henderson (A), Dave Clifton (A) and John Hodson (A)—a small but very experienced team.

The 2012 expedition felt that migration of pipit and bunting species was looking strong during their last few days—so the team this year decided to use their time to explore this and so the dates of the trip were 22<sup>nd</sup> August to 4<sup>th</sup> September, with the first and last dates used for travel.

Anders Maeland was able to spend a couple of weeks prior to this, trapping in the 'Marsh' area and was successful in ringing around 600 birds on his own.

## Methodology

Most of the kit from the first visit was still serviceable, although several of the metal poles are bent/rusting or damaged, although there are still sufficient for an extensive netting regime to be deployed ( see later recommendations). Overall, the net sites used were almost identical to those used in 2012 so some comparisons can be made; however, in the species accounts we explore some of the apparent differences. The weather during this visit was very good for ringing and we only lost 1 day to rain, and some sessions were cut short as the wind picked up on some late mornings. Earlier in the year Varanger experienced some extremely good weather with high temperatures which many reported as having been good for breeding in many diverse species—again we explore this in the results section.

Again sound systems were deployed extensively and undoubtedly helped especially with such species as Repoll and Meadow pipit.

Two attempts were made for Storm and Leach's petrels—one at Nesseby and the other at Vardo. Although unsuccessful, this does not mean the species are not present and we hope that future attempts will be made under more suitable weather conditions—on both nights the wind was quite strong.

Afternoon ringing activity was centred on Kate's garden, which was not attempted in 2012, and this led to two new species being ringed –Waxwing and Magpie which were unlikely to have been caught in the main area.

## Results

The daily and cumulative totals are shown in the Table 1 , with comparative totals for the species from 2012. However, Table 2 below may be more instructive as it compares totals of the same species, over the dates 22<sup>nd</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> August ie the only 'repeated' dates from the 2 trips. Even here caution is needed because in 2013, the 23<sup>rd</sup> August was a 'rain day' with minimal ringing, so the totals for this year are somewhat lower than they should be.

Table1

Species	22-Aug	23-Aug	24-Aug	25-Aug	26-Aug	27-Aug	28-Aug	29-Aug	30-Aug	31-Aug	01-Sep	02-Sep	03-Sep	TOTAL	2012 total
Little Stint	6					3								9	19
Dunlin	11			1	17	16	10	19		2	3	3		82	359
Ringed Plover	3			2	1	1		1		2	2	1		13	76
Curlew Sandpiper					1	2				1				4	3
Ruff								1						1	n/a
Merlin												1		1	3
White Wagtail	3		1	1		6	3	3	2		2			21	23
Yellow Wagtail						1						1		2	6
Meadow Pipit	91	76	9	88	94	149	175	76	58		58	95	192	1161	335
Red Throated Pipit	4	1	1	4	1							1		12	48
Dunnock	4	1		7	11	14		5	4		12	3	4	65	6
Waxwing	1												1	2	n/a
Willow Tit		1		3	2	2		1		1	1			11	2
Willow/Siberian Tit hybrid											1				1
Great Tit	4	1			1		1	2	1	8	2		11	31	16
Spotted Flycatcher					1									1	n/a
Wheatear													1	1	3
Redstart	1				1	1			1					4	8
Thrush Nightingale		1												1	n/a
Bluethroat	48	12		13	14	13	6	6	3		6	5	9	135	194
Fieldfare	5	1		12									1	19	21
Redwing	10			6	2	1	1					3	2	25	29
Song Thrush				1										1	n/a
Willow Warbler	44	20	5	71	34	22	40	22	11	5	20	9	21	324	481
Chiffchaff									1	1	1			3	n/a
Sedge Warbler	2			1									1	4	2
Garden Warbler				1			1						1	3	n/a
Greenfinch	4	1			2	1	1				4	2	3	18	130
Redpoll	39	21	13	144	38	45	85	62	29	1	58	43	18	596	415
Arctic Redpoll	47	7	1	60	4	13	19	10	7		5	5	10	188	9
Brambling	9	7		34	23	25	32	24	10		13	16	44	237	125
House Sparrow		9								1	1		1	12	2
Reed Bunting	29	22		57	58	24	40	62	10	2	78	51	73	506	100
Lapland Bunting		1		1	5			18	1		2	1	6	35	53
Little Bunting					1									1	2
Rustic Bunting											1			1	n/a
Magpie													1	1	n/a
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>3532</b>	<b>2480</b>

Table 2 showing comparative totals for selected species ringed between 22-27<sup>th</sup> August in both years

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>2012 Total</b>	<b>2013 Total</b>
Little Stint	3	9
Dunlin	45	45
Ringed Plover	12	7
Meadow Pipit	234	501
Red- throated Pipit	27	11
Bluethroat	53	87
Willow Warbler	129	196
Brambling	16	97
Redpoll	122	300
Arctic Redpoll	4	162
Reed Bunting	27	190
Lapland Bunting	33	7

## Discussion

- 1) **Waders:-** all observers in the area reported that waders had a much better breeding season than in 2012; so why was this not reflected in the results this year? There are 2 suggested reasons. First the smaller number of ringers this year reduced the amount of effort devoted to catching waders. Second the later arrival of the team coincided with a general exodus of waders such that by the last few days of the visit there were virtually no waders in the catching area.
- 2) **Pipits:-** it's difficult to explain why so few **Red-throated Pipits** were ringed given all reports about a good breeding season for passerines. Sound systems were used as last year so this remains a mystery. Not so with **Meadow Pipits**. They were very obvious on all days with large numbers seen and heard migrating over. Sound systems were used intermittently and with continuous use there is little doubt that the numbers caught would have been significantly higher than recorded. What we don't know as yet is the breeding area from which these birds originate—but wherever it is this species has had a good season with the vast majority of the birds being juveniles. A further intriguing observation was that the pipits always seemed to be moving into the wind –no matter if the direction of flight seemed to us to be taking them in the 'wrong' direction.
- 3) **Bluethroat:-** the numbers of this bird continue to delight and surprise. We suspect that the range of juvenile plumages we saw—from birds with well developed bib colours to those which appeared to have very recently left the nest—supported the notion that Bluethroats had managed at least 2 broods this year.
- 4) **Willow Warbler:-** another species enjoying good breeding success, but the puzzle remains about why only a couple of individuals of this species ringed showed the grey, cold tones of the subspecies 'acredula' which is supposed to be the dominant form in northern Scandinavia. Almost all the Willow warblers ringed were indistinguishable from those ringed well to the south of Nesseby.
- 5) **Brambling:-** there were many more around and migration movements apparent on some days. The numbers this year may well have been higher if we had had a feeding station in operation as last year, at which many Brambling were caught in 2012.
- 6) **Redpoll/Arctic Redpoll:-** the situation with Redpoll was very similar to Meadow Pipits in terms of the potential numbers available for ringing if more sound luring had been used. The massive difference in the number of Arctic Redpoll identified compared to 2012 is slightly more complex, and is a function of undoubtedly better breeding, but also of better

identification by the ringing team. The numbers last year may have been under recorded, and there still remains an opinion that the situation is by no means clear-cut. We suspect considerable inter-breeding based on the vast range of morphological variations in Redpoll sp. we caught. This is worthy of more research.

- 7) **Buntings**:- the difference between the numbers of **Lapland** and **Reed Buntings** ringed is as marked as it is difficult to explain. Massive numbers of Reed Buntings were apparent on most days both in the nets and migrating over the site, and even without sound lures big numbers were caught. Their origin is a mystery; they are regular breeders on the Varanger peninsula, but not in the numbers we experienced. The number of Lapland Buntings ringed was disappointing but was not entirely reflective of the numbers in the trapping area. On many days birds were migrating over, and many were flushed from the trapping area without finding their way into the nets.
- 8) **Other species from Table 1**:- for ringers from Britain the notion of **Dunnock** as a migrant is a novelty, but the numbers clearly show this species was on the move—as were the calls of birds flying over the site. **Waxwings** are exciting birds for British ringers so being able to try (and ring) some of these in the garden of our accommodation was a real bonus. Let's hope that during the next invasion into Britain, the large effort put into catching this species will recover one of 'our' birds. Yet another hybrid **Willow/Siberian tit** was ringed suggesting that such hybridisation is rather more common than we think. Feather samples were taken for DNA analysis from this birds as well as one of the same type ringed in 2012 but recaptured in Kate's garden this year.
- 9) **Rarities**:- species outside their normal range are always interesting and exciting even though their impact on discussions about conservation are usually minimal. However, the fact that **Thrush Nightingale** had never been previously recorded in the area; that this trip ringed the first **Rustic Bunting** and the third **Little Bunting** in the area reinforces our view that the Nesseby ringing site has the potential to attract a wide range of rare species in addition to very large numbers of individuals of more common species on migration.
- 10) **Non-ringing observations**:- leading on from the above, there was at least one **Citrine Wagtail** in the ringing area at the end of our trip and at least one fly-over **Two barred Crossbill**. Also more obvious than in 2012 were regular sightings of **Merlin**—often involving more than one individual suggesting the remnants of family groups; and **Goshawks** were more in evidence. Perhaps the fact that both species are primarily hunters of avian species accounts for their presence in the face of a good breeding season for waders and passerines. Small mammal feeders such as owls and **Rough legged Buzzard** were notable by their absence, coinciding with what appears to have been a poor breeding season for small mammals. Perhaps the long dry summer days have had more complex effects than we can easily predict.

## **Conclusion**

Although this is only the second such expedition in recent times, the evidence is overwhelming on two important counts, which re-inforces the feelings we had after our initial visit in 2012. The evidence points to:-

- 1) The Nesseby ringing site attracts large numbers of common migrants on passage and could be a major site for the study of their regular migration,
- 2) The site also has the capacity to play its part in re-writing the ornithological records of the Varanger area by turning up scarce and very rare birds.

This report is significantly shorter than last year, because most of the 2012 report was devoted to issues relating to the establishment of the ringing site. We believe that many aspects of this are established now, and the project is ready to move to its next phase, whatever that may be, arising out of discussions between interested parties. We again would like to thank Tormod Amundsen and Elin Taranger, for their continued support in so many ways, to Kate Utsi for her support also in many ways (not least in handing over her newly built bungalow for our accommodation!!); to Anders Maeland for enabling any ringing to take place, and for his good company and ferry service, and last but not least, thanks to Alonza Garbett for the loan of his apartment and for the sack of bread.....

Colin McShane, Fergus Henderson, John Hodson and Dave Clifton September 2013.