Results of a Ringing Expedition to the Parque Ambientale, Vilamoura, Portugal

5th-13th October 2012

Colin McShane (A); Dave Clifton (A); Paul James (A); Chris Hughes (A); John Hodson (A); Glynn Middleton(C); Scott Petrek (C); Lloyd Park (C); Michelle Househam (T); Howard Morgan (T); Charlie Sargent (T)

Introduction:

This expedition builds on the five very successful trips since 2007.

Although fewer new birds were ringed than for any previous trip, the trip was successful in that the third highest range of species was caught, and a very important new species was added to the list of species caught at the site (see below). The main disappointments were the inaccessible 'tip' site; poor roost numbers; the poor response of birds to our sound systems, and the lack of an influx of 'new' birds to replace migrants which left early in the week.

Two new species were added to the overall species list, with a couple of unexpected surprises finding their way in to the nets, in the form of two Wrens (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) and a magnificent Aquatic warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*), which is a globally threatened species with only a handful of ringing records in Portugal.

Our roost netting efforts were very disappointing. Most of the hirundines moved on early in the week, and although our sound systems brought many Corn buntings (*Emberiza calandra*) into the trees reeds and bushes near the nets, very few actually entered the netting area on their way to roost.

No sessions were lost due to adverse weather, the conditions being hot and settled during the whole period. However, bright sunshine and strong onshore winds reduced the daily catch by increasing net visibility.The absence of any periods of overnight rain, or heavy cloud cover certainly reduced the number of birds 'grounded' on migration. Although the data show arrivals of certain species during the week, there were no obvious 'falls' of migrants. There was a general 'clear out' of many migrant species during the week which was not replenished by equal numbers of incoming birds.

Once again, our visit was well supported during the planning and implementation stages by our friends and contacts in Portugal; Nuno Grade, Ana Luisa Quarema; Vitor Encarnacao, Michael Armelin, to whom we owe, as always, an immense debt of gratitude. The provision of a heavy duty undergrowth 'strimmer' by the Parque authorities, was particularly useful in quickly opening up traditional net rides.

Methodology:

Catching used on average 13 Japanese/Polish mist nets, set at fixed positions, practically identical to those set in previous years. The site is close to the observation hide and has become the main core area for the operation, and therefore provides some good comparative data.

The northern edge of the marsh, (aka the 'Tip') which has been netted in all previous years except 2010, proved impossible to get into due to dense growth of bramble in particular.

However the interesting area we opened up for ringing in 2011; an area of scrub and young olive bushes adjacent to the water treatment works proved a useful additional ringing site, producing a third of the catch on most days. Although access is tricky, we put in place a wooden 'bridge' and a rope for hauling up the side of the ditch. Visiting Sylvia and Phylloscopus warblers in particular were caught in good numbers and we are still of the opinion that as the season develops this site would get even better for Blackcaps and Song Thrush because of the available small olives.

Extra nets were set in the fields to target groups like finches, wagtails, pipits, and hirundines but these proved very disappointing compared to previous years, for which we have no plausible explanation. One evening trip to dazzle Red Necked Nightjars (*C. ruficollis*) was also unsuccessful and special efforts to catch raptors resulted in only one Kestrel (*F.tinnunculus*). The usually abundant raptors were much less obvious this year.

Nets were erected around 07.00 hrs each day, with sunrise around 07.20 hrs. They were manned continuously and checked every 20 – 30 minutes. Weather conditions were generally good and ringing carried on continuously, with nets being furled around 18.30 hrs for the first three days. However, as the week wore on the afternoon conditions deteriorated into gale force onshore winds so ringing was halted around 13.00. Only two attempts at roost netting were attempted with very modest results. The Hirundine species had largely moved on before we tried to net them them at roost, and of the hundreds of Corn Buntings in the area and roosting in the reedbeds, very few could be attracted using sound lures.

All birds were ringed using CEMPA rings and all were processed to record; age, sex, weight and maximum-chord wing length. Migrant species were scored for fat, using the 5-point Euring scale.

Results:

Species	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	**Total**	**2011**	**2009**	**2008**	**2007**
Ixyobrychus minutus							2		**2**	2	3		1
Bulbulcus ibis													1
Rallus aquaticus													1
Actitis hypoleucos													4
Tringa ochropus		1							**1**				2
Gallinule chloropus												1	
H. pennatus										1			
Falco tinnunculus			1			1			**2**	4			
Columba livia										1			
Streptopelia turtur										1			
Tyto alba										1			
C. ruficollis										6			
Upua epops				2		1			**3**	8			
Estrilda estrild		3		1			1	1	**6**	46	264	120	279
Plo. Melanocephalus		2	1	2					**5**		0	25	53
Alcedo atthis		4	4	1		3			**12**	36	18	25	31
Picus viridis										2			
Jynx torquilla										1	1		

Hirundo rustica			3	3	6			7	**19**	140	29		
Delichon urbica				2	2			1	**5**	199			
Hirundo daurica			3	2	6				**11**	334	6	3	8
Riparia riparia				1	1				**2**	163	15		
Motacilla flava		4		1					**5**	84	4	19	19
Motacilla alba										2			
Motacilla cinerea			1						**1**		1		1
Anthus trivialis										2	1		
Anthus pratensis												11	
Galerida cristata											1		2
*T. troglodytes**			1										
Erithacus rubecula		3	1	1	3	2	2	1	**13**	1	16	73	14
Luscinia svecica		3	4	3	3	1	1		**15**	40	41	12	33
L. megarhyncos		1							**1**	2	1		
Phoe. Phoenicurus										1	2	1	2
Oenanthe oenanthe										1	3	1	1
Oen.oen.leucorrha										1			
Saxicola rubetra			1						**1**	28	13	3	13
Saxicola torquata		3	1	2	2		1		**9**	9	25	19	35
Turdus merula		1	17	6	7	6	7	1	**45**	44	48	63	47
Turdus philomelos												7	
Turdus torquatus													
Sylvia atricapilla		12	21	18	25	11	15	9	**111**	38	44	258	32
Sylvia borin		7	3	4	1	1			**16**	18	10	11	8
S. melanocephala		8	9	2	3		3	1	**26**	61	35	23	28
Sylvia communis	1	2	2						**5**	26	30	1	9
S. conspicillata										1			
Sylvia cantillans		3		4	4	1			**12**	32	32	2	27
H.polyglotta										2	1		
Acro.schoenobaenus		1	1						**2**	10	7	3	13
*A .paludicola**								1	**1**				
A. scirpaceus	4	43	33	11	10	4	5		**110**	206	109	86	160
A. arundinaceus				1					**1**	4	1		
Cisticola juncidis		10	5	2	4	1	2		**24**	32	26	33	62
Locustella naevia		2	3	2		1			**8**	5	14	10	17
Cettia cetti		13	11	5	4	2	2	1	**38**	93	86	40	64
Phyl. trochilus	2	27	15	14	10	8	2	2	**80**	91	116	19	67
P. collybita		25	23	16	32	39	26	22	**183**	29	65	304	136
Ficedula hypoleuca		3							**3**	9	5	4	1
Muscicapa striata										1			
Parus major			2		2	1			**5**		1	2	
Remiz pendulinus					1				**1**			6	
Lanius senator										2			
Cyanopica cyanus			2	4	1	1			**8**	8	8	5	8
Garrulus glandarius							1		**1**				
Sturnus vulgaris			1						**1**		1		
Sturnus unicolor			3						**3**	38	3		
Passer domesticus										16	31	11	4
P. hispaniolensis	1	5	6	8	11	5		1	**37**	2	4	2	5
Passer sp.													

Passer montanus													
Fringilla coelebs													
Carduelis carduelis										10	4		11
Carduelis chloris		1		3	4	3	3		**14**	70	14	9	35
C. cannabina						1	1		**2**		11	4	
Serinus serinus		1	1	2	3	2			**9**		7	12	6
Carp. erythrinus													
Emb. schoeniclus												1	
Emberiza calandra		6	8	7		3		1	**25**	8	44	76	16
Geothlypis trichas													
ANNUAL Sp. TOTALS									**45**	**54**	**47**	**38**	**39**
ANNUAL TOTALS									**886**	**1941**	**1202**	**1312**	**1269**

(Species marked * were ringed for the first time in 2012)

For comparison, the dates of previous visits were:-

2007, 3rd-9th Oct; 2008, 15th-21st Oct; 2009, 30th Sept-7th Oct; 2011, 20th-28th Sept

Analysis:

As has been mentioned already, this was the 5th such visit, and covered dates overlapping those from previous years. The intention throughout has been to construct a picture of migration through the Parque during the autumn passage period. Although use was again made of the fine nets and sound systems reported last year, for some reason these proved much less effective this year and contributed in some part to the smaller total caught.

NON-PASSERINES

No new non-passerine species were added this year—in fact the numbers caught were very low. Strangely, we failed to attract any Little bittern (*Ixyobrychus minutus*) during the period even using sound, and then, on day seven we caught two new individuals and one re-trap from a previous year. A Green sandpiper(*Tringa ochropus*) was a welcome capture since the previous two in 2008.

Undoubtedly the most disappointing species in this group was Kingfisher(*Alcedo atthis*). We have become accustomed to ringing around 30 new birds on these trips, regardless of the timing of the visit, but this year with the same ringing effort we ringed only 12 new birds. Given that the usual number of re-trapped adult birds was caught, the results point to a poor breeding season for Kingfisher in the Algarve and surrounding catchment area.

HIRUNDINES

There were many swallows and martins around in the initial days of the trip, although unlike last year these did not appear in the early mornings. Instead they appeared over the stubble fields later in the afternoons prior to roosting. We made a tactical error in postponing our efforts for these so that when we did try later in the week, numbers had dropped off considerably. Although there were a few more birds around on the last day, it would appear that the peak time for hirundines

gathering/roosting and migrating from this area is at the very end of September/beginning of October.

CHATS and BLACKBIRD

Overall these groups were poorly represented this year, even given the low numbers caught generally. Only one Whinchat (*S. rubetra*) was caught, consistent with them passing through the area earlier, but only nine Stonechat (S. *torquata*) were caught which is significantly less that the numbers during the same dates previously.

The low number of Bluethroats (*L.svecica*) caught is difficult to explain, although we have not had reports of the breeding fortunes in Europe. We caught less than half the expected number suggesting breeding has not been very successful. In addition, comparing these results with those of 2007 and 2011 (both earlier) also suggests that although some Bluethroats undoubtedly spend protracted periods in the Algarve during Autumn and Winter—many seem to pass through quickly towards the end of September.

The daily pattern of Blackbird (T.merula) numbers is relatively easy to explain. We suggest that the Blackbirds caught at this time of year are relatively local, and settled in the area. (there will no doubt be an influx of birds from more northern populations during November). The big catch on 17th was due primarily to the fact that we managed to open the nets well before dawn on this and subsequent days, meaning that we intercepted the birds as they left the overnight roost in the reeds. Numbers levelled off as birds became aware of the net site.

WARBLERS

The patterns shown by the 2 'resident' warblers, Cetti's (*C.cettia*) and Sardinian (*S.melanocephala*), are complex, as always , but suggest differing fortunes for the two species. Sardinian warbler numbers were very similar to previous years, but Cetti's were well down, pointing to a poor breeding season for this species. Similarly Subalpine warblers (S. cantillans) were in short supply, although the pattern here may be complicated by our suspicion that this species tends to pass through rather earlier.

Blackcap (*S.atricapilla*) were caught in good numbers, given that this is relatively early in the season, and the figures show that new birds were arriving consistently. The new ringing site in the olive grove also proved successful so perhaps previous year's counts would have been even higher had this site been in use then. Garden Warbler (S. borin) numbers were twice our usual catch although numbers are too small to be significant.

The results for Chiffchaff (P. collybita) are typical. Last year's report suggested that they begin to arrive in late September, and the results show a continuous influx throughout this year's visit. Similarly, Willow warbler (P. trochilus) followed a typical pattern of numbers trailing off during the week as birds continued their migration south with fewer birds replacing them as the main body of the population has already moved on. None of the Willow warblers showed characteristics of any of the most northern races.

The pattern for Reed warbler (*A.scirpaceous*) continues to be one of the most complex to explain. The pattern of movements outlined in last year's report was apparent with some birds 'new in' during the period, while the large numbers in earlier weeks had presumably moved south. However, weather conditions in northern Europe during the Summer appear to have had a very significant effect on reducing Reed warbler breeding success and this was certainly reflected in the low numbers caught. We had no records of birds ringed in other countries this year.

OTHERS

Catching wagtails and pipits is not easy, although monofilament nets make this a more viable possibility. However, we have not shown any definite patterns from ringing results to support the observations suggesting strong passage of these groups, especially in the surrounding fields which provide superb habitat for these birds. Wagtail numbers were very low this year—measured in single figures, and there were no sight or aural records of Tree or Meadow pipit (*A. trivialis/pratensis*)

Lastly, the appearance of a single immature Aquatic warbler (*A.paludicola*) was as exciting as it was significant. Only a handful of records exist in Portugal of this globally threatened species, although numbers do appear to be increasing due to efforts at promoting their breeding areas. This may be a sign of that success, especially if further birds are caught in subsequent years. It is also a further indication of the potential importance of the Parque in the event of any future threats from development.

Finally, we would like repeat our thanks to the management of the Parque Ambientale for allowing us access to the site during our stay, and to Vitor Encarnacao and Michael Armelin for providing us with the necessary permits and rings. We are immensely grateful also for the support during the planning stages and when on site from Nuno Grade, and Ana Luisa Quaresma, who again made us very welcome and helped in a great many ways to make our visit successful.

Colin McShane (on behalf of the ringing team); October 2012