

Belvide Ringing Report 2012

Introduction

After the really successful few years we have just had, 2012 was a great disappointment. As can be seen from the results table below, this has been our poorest season so far, with the prime suspect being the terrible weather conditions during the summer period in particular. This appears to have had a dramatic negative effect on breeding success—particularly of summer visitors, a pattern which has been reflected throughout much of England and Wales where the BTO nest recording and constant effort ringing scheme both provide confirmatory evidence to our patch at Belvide.

Not only did the weather reduce breeding success directly, but it also indirectly affected our ability to ring whatever birds were around. We had fewer ringing sessions this year as the very wet and often windy conditions resulted in many abandoned sessions; and the extremely high water levels in the reservoir meant that significant section of our standard netting sites were inaccessible.

Fortunately it wasn't all doom and gloom, but the few glimmers of a positive nature were few and far between:—Swift, Reed Bunting, Blue and Great Tit breeding (see later), though these were all outside the main post breeding survey period. Only one new species was added to the ringing list for the reservoir this year. The fact that it was a Magpie did provide some ethical problems, but it was ringed and released as per ringing regulations.

Table of new birds ringed at Belvide 2012 compared to recent years

Species	Ringed 2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Sparrowhawk	0	4	0	0	3	2
Kestrel	0	1				
Moorhen	0	0	0	1	0	0
Water Rail	0	0	0	0	1	0
Lapwing	0	0	0	0	1	0
Common Tern	0	0	(3)	0	(5)	0
Swift	58	0	0	3	2	0
Kingfisher	3	1	2	1	7	0
Gr Spot W'peck	2	3	0	0	5	0
Sand Martin	0	45	0	0	1	0
House Martin	5	62	0	31	3	0

Swallow	0	19				
Tree Pipit	0	1	3	0	0	0
Meadow Pipit	2	83	72	0	0	0
Pied Wagtail	0	0	1	0	0	0
Yellow Wagtail	0	1				
Stock Dove	0	0	0	0 + (2)	0	0
Woodpigeon	0	0	1	1	0	1
Tawny Owl	0	0	1	0	0	0
Robin	18	35	31	28	45	33
Redstart	0	1	0	0	2	0
Blackbird	12	15	7	25	28	32
Song Thrush	2	5	1	7	6	6
Redwing	19	16	0	0	13	1
Fieldfare	0	0	0	0	1	0
Pied Flycatcher	0	0	0	0	0	1
Spot Flycatcher	0	1	2	1	4	0
Dunnock	11	56	43	59	51	25
Wren	12	33	42	34	58	27
Goldcrest	7	8	15	0	22	9
Nuthatch	5	0	1	0	3	0
Treecreeper	2	9	10	4	4	1
Cetti's Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chiffchaff	89	278	359	211	251	189
Willow Warbler	20	76	136	86	143	71
G'pper Warbler	0	2	1	0	0	0
Reed Warbler	41	138	155+(7)	104	73+(2)	56
Sedge Warbler	41	117	101	35	23	36
Lesser Whitethroat	3	3	12	8	6	22
Whitethroat	5	41	70	13	8	14
Blackcap	64	111	185	83	63	48
Garden Warbler	17	24	40	34	23	34

Blue Tit	69(14)	92	155+(161)	121+(156)	110	37
Great Tit	47(19)	108	108+(61)	75+(59)	67	29
Coal Tit	3	1	4	6	3	0
Long Tailed Tit	13	47	111	25	26	35
Willow Tit	1	2	1	0	1	2
Marsh Tit	1	2	4	0	2	1
Bullfinch	6	19	31	11	8	15
Chaffinch	5	20	31	53	21	4
Greenfinch	11	67	27	9	17	10
Goldfinch	10	38	48	15	41	4
Redpoll	5	0	0	0	4	0
Yellowhammer	0	0	3	0	0	0
Reed Bunting	102	280	83	63	39	19
House Sparrow	0	0	0	0	1	0
Tree Sparrow	12	62	87	37	73	37
Jay	0	2	1	0	0	0
Magpie*	1	0	0	0	0	0
Starling	2	12	0	0	25	32
Total	759 of 37 sp.	1941 of 43 sp.	2219 of 39 sp.	1401 of 31 sp.	1299 of 45 sp.	833 of 32 sp.

*NB species marked * were ringed for the first time in 2012;*

Numbers in brackets refer to chicks (pulli) ringed in the nest.

Results of particular interest

It's perhaps simplest to approach these from the top of the table above:-

Swift: these are generally difficult birds to catch given their obvious aerial nature. However, on cool damp days they often fly very low over water to find their insect prey. Luckily one of the many days when this was the case, coincided with our availability, and one of our new very fine nets proved really successful and 58 birds were ringed in a couple of hours before the weather cleared and the birds lifted too high. The chances are that most of these birds were local breeders, but an incident which happened quite a few years ago, illustrates that this may not necessarily be the case. We were ringing Swifts on just such a day at a local sewerage works; a few weeks later we had news from the BTO that a bird we ringed and

released in mid morning had been recaptured by some ringers at a sewerage works near Manchester a couple of hours later! So who knows where our Belvide Swifts are nesting.

Hirundines: our most productive catches of Swallows and Martins have typically been on cold early Autumn mornings along the shoreline. The fact that there was no shoreline this year accounts for the low numbers of these species, and for the almost complete absence of Meadow Pipits.

Thrushes: Blackbird and Song Thrush numbers were disappointingly low after our positive signs from 2011. They tend to be one of the groups which benefit from wet summers in that it makes worms more available for them. However we suspect that the benefits were counteracted by the fact that much of the rain was torrential and probably washed out many nests; not only of thrushes. There was a big autumn influx of Redwing and Fieldfare, but a couple of attempts at catching them proved frustrating.

Warblers: all species fared badly, with numbers down dramatically in most cases. Reed Warblers in particular were badly hit—not only were their numbers ringed even lower than the last wet summer in 2007, but what the table of results does not show is that only a handful of the birds caught were juveniles, showing how poor their breeding season was. Early nests tend to be quite low down in the reeds and we suspect these got washed out from below as the level rose very quickly—while later attempts higher up the reeds were almost certainly victims of the torrential rain already mentioned which washed them out from above. However, with any luck—as was shown after 2007 they can recover quickly given a better summer next year.

Sedge Warblers fared a little better— but only comparatively. More chicks were caught so they did manage to get some broods off, probably because they tend to nest a tad earlier than Reed Warblers, and in dense brambles further from the shoreline so didn't get hit so badly by the early water rise.

As the late summer wore on the proportion of summer visitors in the dwindling catches fell, suggesting that birds gave up on thoughts of a second brood, concentrating instead on moulting and feeding when they could between showers in order to build fat reserves for migration. Our evidence suggests that many birds left early this year, which in the medium term may not be such a bad thing if they successfully migrate then numbers should build quickly over the coming years.

Titmice: as the figures below demonstrate, Blue and Great tits were comparatively successful this year. The following is a short report produced for the management group earlier this year:

The nest-boxes were checked on the evening of 16th May—in an unusually quiet period of weather within a long period of grime!

Despite the poor weather, and despite poor results from such schemes nearby, the results were quite encouraging. It seems as though most of the birds have waited and managed to hatch broods just as the weather (we hope) is getting slightly better for feeding.

Overall take-up is a little down on last year—as is brood size; but only 2 nests contained dead chicks, which was pleasingly much fewer than anticipated based on reports from elsewhere. A small number of nests had been used early and appeared to have fledged successfully, and one brood fledged on our arrival, but most of the others had recently hatched chicks which were too young to ring. The Tree Sparrows are busy building, with only 2 of their nests having eggs—although not yet complete clutches. The new banks of nest-boxes for this species are working well. One bank of 5 boxes has 3 sparrow nests and the other two banks of 3 have at least one sparrow each.

Results:-

80 nest-boxes checked, of which 66 were available for occupation—11 were damaged and 3 were playing host to nests of wood mice.

Of the 66 available boxes 37 were used—55+%

Of these, 22 were occupied by Blue Tits; 10 by Great tits and 4 by Tree Sparrows

Average brood sizes were:-

Blue Tit 7.5 (range 3-14) Great Tit 6 (range 1-7).

Finches and Buntings: unfortunately the same patterns are shown here. However, the results are perhaps not quite as bad as at first sight. Although breeding success was undoubtedly affected by the weather, the low numbers also reflect the reduced effort at catching these species at the feeding stations. We only tend to attempt this when we have plenty of ringers on site, and for significant periods this year we were down to a skeleton team, so it is best not to read too much into these numbers.

Reed Bunting results are interesting. The 2011 report showed large numbers of this species caught at roost in the reed-beds during the last months of 2011. The birds kept on coming into 2012, hence the decent numbers shown. Taking the 2011/12 winter period as a whole we ringed almost 350 new Reed Buntings, demonstrating how valuable the reed-beds are as a safe haven for this species to roost. Surveys of the reed-beds this winter shows large numbers of this species roosting again unsurprisingly. Sadly our hope of finding out the degree of site fidelity; i.e. how many of last year's birds would come back and use the roost this year, were dashed by the fact that the reeds are so deep under water that it is impossible to operate any ringing activities.

Some interesting movements: studying population dynamics is one aim of our ringing scheme, but it is always interesting to know where 'our' birds go or come from. Sadly the rate of recapture or finding of ringed birds is low, but the following gives a flavour of what

happened to some birds in 2012. (We have not included those controls we have already reported in the 2011 ringing report)

Reed Warblers Y223096, and Y223253, were ringed at Belvide on 13th and 23rd July 2011 respectively. They were recaptured on 28th and 22nd August 2011 in the Gironde area of France about 850 km from Belvide, both obviously on their way to Africa. They were both juvenile birds –i.e. hatched that year, and serve to demonstrate how early some birds set off. Their parents were probably busy rearing another brood of siblings.

Sedge Warbler Y709670 was hatched at Belvide (one of the lucky ones!) this year and was ringed on 7th August. It was recaptured on 16th August, also in the Gironde area, again demonstrating the prodigious innate capacity these birds have of finding their own way to distant winter areas. There should be a better supply of such records in future as the French ringing scheme has established a number of large scale ringing camps at major estuaries such as the Seine and the Gironde to monitor migration.

Nearer to home, Goldfinch R576329 was ringed as a juvenile at Belvide on 27th August 2008. It was still going strong and clearly knows its way around local feeding stations when it was recaptured at the feeder at Chillington on 28th October 2011.

Willow Warbler ECH463 made the annual BTO report as one of the furthest movers within England last year. We recaptured it at the res on 18th August 2011 and it had been originally ringed at Steyning in Sussex on 30th August 2010 as a juvenile. This was almost certainly a bird on its first migration when first caught in Sussex; but where had it come from? Was it a bird which hatched near us and we re-caught it just before it left again—or was it a bird from further north on its way back south after breeding. Until we have technology to fit tiny geo-locators on very small passerines we can usually only speculate.

Finally, Chiffchaff BDV326 was ringed by us at Belvide on 15th September 2011. This could have been a local breeder, but equally could have been a bird passing through. The fact that it was found “long dead” by a member of the public in Faro, Portugal on 3rd November 2011 suggests it may have been the latter. This bird also provides tantalising evidence that one day during our annual ringing expeditions to southern Portugal, we may one day recapture a Chiffchaff or Reed Warbler or Blackcap which we have ringed at Belvide.

Conclusion:

We hope that all those connected in any way with Belvide have enjoyed both having our group operate at the site, and reading this report. We are very grateful to the management committee, especially Steve Nuttall and Rob Swift for their generous help and support in many ways. Thanks also to the West Midlands Bird Club for allowing access to ring at Belvide. We hope the results continue to be helpful in some way to the management of the reserve, and at least provide an interesting supplement to the systematic sight records.

Colin McShane, December 2012, on behalf of Brewood Ringers