

Belvide Ringing Report 2014

Introduction

After two poor years, the early indications were that 2014 would provide a hat-trick; with very deep water making access to net rides difficult and potential nesting areas remaining flooded through the early part of the breeding season. However, after very profitable discussions with the Canals and Rivers Trust, the water level was lowered significantly. As well as making access to net rides much more comfortable, it also stimulated growth of the reed-bed, and possibly generated some late breeding in the Reed Warbler population. In addition, the weather during the key months was very good which undoubtedly promoted good breeding for those species which could find suitable nesting habitat. We also managed an almost complete series of ringing sessions with strong winds and rain having a minimal effect on our efforts. There was a slight pressure on the availability of ringers for some sessions due to absences for holidays and ringing expeditions—but thanks to the dedication of some team members, no sessions had to be abandoned, even though the scope of the sessions was sometimes curtailed as explained later.

Table 1: new birds ringed at Belvide 2014 compared to recent years

Species	Ringed in 2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Sparrowhawk	0	1	0	4	0	0	3	2
Kestrel	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Moorhen	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Snipe*	1							
Water Rail	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Lapwing	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Oystercatcher	0	(2)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common Tern	0	0	0	0	(3)	0	(5)	0
Swift	0	4	58	0	0	3	2	0
Kingfisher	11	6	3	1	2	1	7	0
Gr Spot W'peck	1	0	2	3	0	0	5	0
Sand Martin	20	0	0	45	0	0	1	0
House Martin	38	0	5	62	0	31	3	0

Swallow	1	3	0	19	0	0	0	0
Tree Pipit	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0
Meadow Pipit	142	123	2	83	72	0	0	0
Pied Wagtail	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Yellow Wagtail	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Stock Dove	0	0	0	0	0	0 + (2)	0	0
Woodpigeon	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1
Long-Eared Owl*	1							
Tawny Owl	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Robin	32	22	18	35	31	28	45	33
Redstart	3	0	0	1	0	0	2	0
Blackbird	18	6	12	15	7	25	28	32
Song Thrush	0	0	2	5	1	7	6	6
Redwing	6	2	19	16	0	0	13	1
Fieldfare	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Pied Flycatcher	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Spot Flycatcher	5	0	0	1	2	1	4	0
Dunnock	17	24	11	56	43	59	51	25
Wren	47	24	12	33	42	34	58	27
Goldcrest	31	1	7	8	15	0	22	9
Nuthatch	3	1	5	0	1	0	3	0
Treecreeper	3	4	2	9	10	4	4	1
Cetti's Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chiffchaff	274	154	89	278	359	211	251	189
Willow Warbler	45	20	20	76	136	86	143	71
G'pper Warbler	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Reed Warbler	199	93	41	138	155+(7)	104	73+(2)	56
Sedge Warbler	95	63	41	117	101	35	23	36
Lesser Whitethroat	10	8	3	3	12	8	6	22
Whitethroat	16	19	5	41	70	13	8	14
Blackcap	109	60	64	111	185	83	63	48

Garden Warbler	18	16	17	24	40	34	23	34
Blue Tit	91	109	69(14)	92	155+(161)	121+(156)	110	37
Great Tit	55	57	47(19)	108	108+(61)	75+(59)	67	29
Coal Tit	2	3	3	1	4	6	3	0
Long Tailed Tit	31	21	13	47	111	25	26	35
Willow Tit	0	2	1	2	1	0	1	2
Marsh Tit	2	2	1	2	4	0	2	1
Bullfinch	12	6	6	19	31	11	8	15
Chaffinch	2	16	5	20	31	53	21	4
Greenfinch	6	3	11	67	27	9	17	10
Goldfinch	8	5	10	38	48	15	41	4
Redpoll	0	1	5	0	0	0	4	0
Yellowhammer	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Reed Bunting	124	25	102	280	83	63	39	19
House Sparrow	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Tree Sparrow	14	10	12	62	87	37	73	37
Jay	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Magpie	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Starling	64	0	2	12	0	0	25	32
Total	1497 of 38sp.	925 of 37 sp.	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 ringed for the first time in 2014 marked *;*

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

Results

As in previous reports, some of the more interesting results from Table 1 are discussed below. This year we have started this section by picking out some of the more interesting results by comparing the 2014 total, with 7 year highs/lows and averages. These comparative data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: How was 2014?

	High	Low	Average	2014
Kingfisher	7	0	3	11
Wren	58	12	33	47
Dunnock	59	11	38	17
Robin	45	18	30	32
Goldcrest	22	0	9	31
W. warbler	143	20	78	45
Chiffchaff	359	89	220	274
Blackcap	185	48	87	109
Whitethroat	70	5	24	16
Garden warbler	40	16	27	18
Reed warbler	162	41	95	199
Sedge warbler	117	23	60	95
Totals	2219	759	1340	1479
Species	45	31	38	38

Kingfisher: 2014 produced the highest total of Kingfishers since ringing began. The early high water levels helped a little here as nets were further out into open water than normal, but this was the case for the previous 2 years also—so there must also have been successful breeding in a nearby river/canal bank.

Dunnock/Wren/Robin: these three resident species act as useful ‘markers’ as to the state of the breeding season. Wren and Robin had almost predictable totals in line with the habitat which is in a state of recovery after two years of inundation; and both were on the way towards the highest recorded figures. However, Dunnocks appear to have had a very poor season with numbers towards the lowest ever on the site. The only suggestion we can offer is that their preferred nesting habitat in dense bramble scrub was perhaps still set in too much water at the key time in the breeding cycle. This may also have been the case for Whitethroat and Garden warbler.

Blackcap/Sedge warbler/Chiffchaff: these species appear to be showing breeding success in the recovery phase as above; as is the resident population of Long-Tailed tits.

Willow warbler/Whitethroat/Garden warbler: all show disappointing numbers, possibly for the same reason as Robin and Dunnock. Unfortunately, this explanation is not completely convincing given the close similarity in nesting habitats of these species.

Reed warbler: this species had a very good breeding season and we ringed record numbers this year. This must have been a reflection of the good weather, and the good reed growth especially as the water level dropped. Unfortunately the water was still too deep for us to do any nest monitoring, but we hope that once the new regime of lowering water levels in the Spring is activated, then we will be able to do an annual nest monitoring regime.

Goldcrest: there were records of Goldcrest through the breeding season and these undoubtedly helped generate the second highest total. However, there was a marked influx of Goldcrests into the country in late Summer as reported from ringers throughout Britain. This influx was evident at Belvide and is reflected in the total.

The final 2 rows of the table show that in terms of total numbers ringed 2014 was above average, but that in terms of number of species it was an average year; although we did add 2 new species. A very surprising Long Eared owl was presumably roosting in the hawthorns on a late August night when it popped into a net at first light—an early record for the reserve. The Snipe was flushed inadvertently when trying for Meadow pipits on the shoreline. The good total of Meadow pipits was caught in the narrow window of migration in the second half of September. The exposed shoreline offers a tempting place for them to feed and gives us an opportunity to catch this enigmatic species, the destination of which is very poorly understood. Let's hope we get some recoveries which would help shine a light on the wintering destination of the hundreds of individuals of this species passing over Belvide.

Other notes:

Spotted flycatcher and Redstart, at 5 and 3 respectively were both highest totals ringed at Belvide. The low numbers of all the finch species and Tree sparrow is more a reflection on the lack of effort put in at the Gazebo feeder due to shortage of manpower as mentioned earlier.

Although we ringed over a hundred Reed buntings, numbers roosting in the reed-bed were comparatively low this year, but operating during late Autumn/Winter in the Scott reed-bed meant that we did catch some of the Starlings which built up to around 10,000 before moving on. There is a suggestion from recoveries over the years that Starlings which roost in reeds rather than near houses are more likely to be of continental origin. A recovery from one of the Baltic countries would be exciting and informative.

Nest box results 2014:

This year has been rather disappointing given that the Spring temperatures have been some of the warmest on record. As can be seen below, the occupancy rate is no more than average compared to recent years and brood sizes and mortality seem also to be about average. There is however one caveat in that we were a little 'caught out' by how early this year's broods were—due to the warm conditions—and as a result some broods had fledged before we got to check the boxes. This means that the brood size calculations have been carried out only on those nests where we know the numbers of chicks present, so these averages are inaccurate, but we don't know by how much. I am pleased to again report that there was no evidence of interference with the boxes now that they are at chest height.

Number of boxes checked= 60 (some are now in need of replacement which is in hand)

Number of boxes with nests=30

Occupancy rate=50%

Number of Blue Tit nests=19

Number of Great Tit nests=9

Number of Tree Sparrow nests=2

Average Blue Tit brood size =7.5 (range 5-12)

Average Great Tit brood size= 5.5 (range 4-7)

Thanks to Pete, Glynn and Ben who checked all boxes for the group.

There is an increasing number of boxes that are almost of no use, so we have invested in some well-made new boxes which will be put up during the winter.

Finally, as ever we would like to thank; the West Midland Bird Club for continuing to allow us to operate at Belvide; the Belvide management team who continue to support what we do; the many volunteers on work parties whose management work helps our ringing immensely; and the many people who drop in during ringing sessions.

Colin McShane on behalf of Brewood Ringers December 2014.

2013 Nest Box Report

Although this has been one of the coldest Springs on record, the birds which use the nestboxes at Belvide have done remarkably well—in contrast to some of the reports from ringing groups around the country. The boxes were checked later than usual (2nd June) in line with the pattern around the country after such a cold Spring.

This year we have been helped by a group of Sea Scouts from Cannock who along with members of the Belvide team, put up some new boxes during the winter—and removed the old boxes at the same time. More significantly, all of the boxes were lowered so that they could be checked without the need of a cumbersome ladder. Any fears that this may have increased predation and/or interference from the public have been allayed in that there was no evidence of either potential problem. Therefore, we would like to offer a big thank you to all of the visitors to the reserve for letting the birds get on with their breeding activities.

The basic statistics are:-

Total utilisable/checked boxes= 60

Occupancy rate = 63%- the highest in recent years eg 55% in 2012; 40% in 2009

Blue Tit nests= 24

Great Tit nests=11

Tree Sparrow=2 NB these are not those in the Sparrow type boxes which have fixed lids

Robin=1 in one of the open-fronted boxes

Average Blue Tit brood Size:- 8.5 range 4 to 14

Average Great Tit brood size:- 5.2 range 5 to 7

Good occupancy suggests high survival rates over winter. Blue tit broods are bigger than in recent years suggesting good pre-breeding food supply; whereas Great tit broods were slightly down. However, the range of brood sizes in Great tits was very narrow-meaning they all had between 5 and 7 chicks showing they all are doing pretty well.

What was probably most satisfying was the very low number of both addled (infertile) eggs and/or dead chicks. With such extended cold spells both could have been the result—but in fact only 1 brood of half-grown Blue tit chicks was found dead, and only 1 clutch of 7 Blue tit eggs was completely addled.

Retraps and Recoveries

There was the usual crop of short distance interactions of Reed Warblers between Belvide, Chillington and Walscott in Shropshire, but we also had a couple of very interesting movements.

Pride of place must go to the Blue Tit carrying ring number X97597 which was ringed on 4th June 2010 in one of our net boxes. This bird had clearly not read the current literature suggesting that Blue Tits are sedentary, as its long dead remains were found 183 km away in Leyburn North Yorkshire! Why it wandered so far is anyone's guess.

Blackcap D065339 was presumably ensuring the mixing of the gene pool by spending the summer breeding at Belvide after being hatched the previous year near Swindon in Wiltshire.

There were quite a number of re-trapped birds from recent years, as we have come to expect; but there were some exceptional re-traps of birds which have returned to the reserve year after year with remarkable consistency. These data show how long-lived small birds can be once they have mastered migration, finding food, avoiding predators and surviving cold winters. The following were all re-trapped during this Summer. The combined mileage undertaken by the last three of these during migration journeys alone must be well into the hundreds of thousands of miles!

Long-Tailed Tit CEB230 first ringed July 2008

Sparrowhawk DD24039 first ringed September 2006

Garden Warbler V228105 first ringed July 2006

Reed Warbler X276346 first ringed August 2009

Reed Warbler V228021 first ringed July 2006

Conclusion:

As ever, 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. The provision of much more robust pole has been much appreciated. Long –term habitat management may mean that next years' results are difficult to compare with previous years, but should mark the development of better conditions for specialist species such as Reed and Sedge Warblers to thrive. Finally, with luck our provision of an artificial Sand Martin nest bank will encourage this species to colonise the reserve.

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 2013, on behalf of Brewood Ringers