

## Belvide Ringing Report 2013

### Introduction

The message from the table of birds ringed in 2013 is very clear and for once, relatively easy to explain. Overall, 2013 was a year of recovery after the very poor 2012. The weather was generally better—for both breeding and ringing, although water levels were still much higher than optimum for either. As a result we managed more sessions than in 2012, although all sessions were very hard work with thigh and/or chest waders essential to get to most of the net sites. Even then most net sites needed to be shortened to avoid the deepest water. In this respect the conditions, and the results can be compared closely to 2007 when similar conditions prevailed. **It cannot be emphasised too strongly what a negative impact the high water levels have on the number of passerines Belvide can support.**

The encouraging news can be seen by comparing the results with 2012. In almost all cases the number caught was higher and demonstrates the improved breeding conditions this year. However, set against the national picture—where cold but bright Spring conditions resulted in later breeding by many species—our birds have done remarkably well. Nest box species in particular did very well ( see report below), with one of our highest box uptake and productivity records so far. The protection of box nesting seemed to shield Blue and Great Tits against the worst of the cold conditions, which fortunately warmed up just in time for the caterpillar hatch so providing plenty of food for chicks.

*Table of new birds ringed at Belvide 2013 compared to recent years*

Species	Ringed 2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
<b>Sparrowhawk</b>	<b>1</b>	0	4	0	0	3	2
<b>Kestrel</b>	<b>0</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Moorhen</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	0	1	0	0
<b>Water Rail</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0
<b>Lapwing</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0
<b>Oystercatcher*</b>	<b>(2)</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Common Tern</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	(3)	0	(5)	0
<b>Swift</b>	<b>4</b>	58	0	0	3	2	0
<b>Kingfisher</b>	<b>6</b>	3	1	2	1	7	0
<b>Gr Spot W'peck</b>	<b>0</b>	2	3	0	0	5	0
<b>Sand Martin</b>	<b>0</b>	0	45	0	0	1	0

<b>House Martin</b>	<b>0</b>	5	62	0	31	3	0
<b>Swallow</b>	<b>3</b>	0	19	0	0	0	0
<b>Tree Pipit</b>	<b>0</b>	0	1	3	0	0	0
<b>Meadow Pipit</b>	<b>123</b>	2	83	72	0	0	0
<b>Pied Wagtail</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Yellow Wagtail</b>	<b>0</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Stock Dove</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	0	0 + (2)	0	0
<b>Woodpigeon</b>	<b>1</b>	0	0	1	1	0	1
<b>Tawny Owl</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Robin</b>	<b>22</b>	18	35	31	28	45	33
<b>Redstart</b>	<b>0</b>	0	1	0	0	2	0
<b>Blackbird</b>	<b>6</b>	12	15	7	25	28	32
<b>Song Thrush</b>	<b>0</b>	2	5	1	7	6	6
<b>Redwing</b>	<b>2</b>	19	16	0	0	13	1
<b>Fieldfare</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0
<b>Pied Flycatcher</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Spot Flycatcher</b>	<b>0</b>	0	1	2	1	4	0
<b>Dunnock</b>	<b>24</b>	11	56	43	59	51	25
<b>Wren</b>	<b>24</b>	12	33	42	34	58	27
<b>Goldcrest</b>	<b>1</b>	7	8	15	0	22	9
<b>Nuthatch</b>	<b>1</b>	5	0	1	0	3	0
<b>Treecreeper</b>	<b>4</b>	2	9	10	4	4	1
<b>Cetti's Warbler</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Chiffchaff</b>	<b>154</b>	89	278	359	211	251	189
<b>Willow Warbler</b>	<b>20</b>	20	76	136	86	143	71
<b>G'pper Warbler</b>	<b>0</b>	0	2	1	0	0	0
<b>Reed Warbler</b>	<b>93</b>	41	138	155+(7)	104	73+(2)	56
<b>Sedge Warbler</b>	<b>63</b>	41	117	101	35	23	36
<b>Lesser Whitethroat</b>	<b>8</b>	3	3	12	8	6	22
<b>Whitethroat</b>	<b>19</b>	5	41	70	13	8	14
<b>Blackcap</b>	<b>60</b>	64	111	185	83	63	48
<b>Garden Warbler</b>	<b>16</b>	17	24	40	34	23	34
<b>Blue Tit</b>	<b>109</b>	69(14)	92	155+(1 61)	121+(156)	110	37

<b>Great Tit</b>	<b>57</b>	47(19)	108	108+(6 1)	75+(59)	67	29
<b>Coal Tit</b>	<b>3</b>	3	1	4	6	3	0
<b>Long Tailed Tit</b>	<b>21</b>	13	47	111	25	26	35
<b>Willow Tit</b>	<b>2</b>	1	2	1	0	1	2
<b>Marsh Tit</b>	<b>2</b>	1	2	4	0	2	1
<b>Bullfinch</b>	<b>6</b>	6	19	31	11	8	15
<b>Chaffinch</b>	<b>16</b>	5	20	31	53	21	4
<b>Greenfinch</b>	<b>3</b>	11	67	27	9	17	10
<b>Goldfinch</b>	<b>5</b>	10	38	48	15	41	4
<b>Redpoll</b>	<b>1</b>	5	0	0	0	4	0
<b>Yellowhammer</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	3	0	0	0
<b>Reed Bunting</b>	<b>25</b>	102	280	83	63	39	19
<b>House Sparrow</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0
<b>Tree Sparrow</b>	<b>10</b>	12	62	87	37	73	37
<b>Jay</b>	<b>0</b>	0	2	1	0	0	0
<b>Magpie</b>	<b>0</b>	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Starling</b>	<b>0</b>	2	12	0	0	25	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>925 Of 37 sp.</b>	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 2013 marked \*;*

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

### **Results of particular interest**

As in previous reports, some of the more interesting results from the table are discussed here:

**Oystercatcher:** although this was the first time we have ringed chicks raised on the platform, the sad news is that they did not fledge. It appears that the chicks need to get onto land to start probing for invertebrates and that seems to be a step too far for them.

**Kingfisher:** there was obviously a successful breeding attempt nearby and this is one of the few species to be caught more frequently when the water levels are so high—for fairly obvious reasons.

**Hirundines:** although there were days, as always, when there were plenty of hirundines feeding over the lake, this year didn't provide any ringing days when conditions were good to catch them, so these results don't provide any indications of comparative numbers.

**Meadow Pipit:** over recent years, visible migration watching from the dam has shown good numbers of species such as Meadow Pipit passing over from around mid September. The ideal habitat for trying to catch these is on the shoreline—but no shoreline was available this year. However, we did manage to encourage a good number of Meadow Pipits over a small number of sessions to drop in to the grassy edges at the southern end of the dam—hence the good numbers caught.

**Warblers and Tits:** apart from Blackcap, all the warblers were caught in 'recovery' numbers i.e. better than 2012, but not as good as average years. With luck these birds will make the return trip next year and continue breeding and increasing the numbers. Unfortunately there is no sign that water levels will be reduced so breeding habitat looks as though it will be at a premium.

**Blackbird and Blackcap:** it is very difficult to offer a cogent explanation for the low numbers of these two species.

**Finches:** the numbers ringed here tend to reflect more the effort at catching by the feeders, than they do the breeding success. This year we generally had smaller teams of ringers at most sessions and so we were not able to net the feeders as much as some years.

**Reed Bunting:** as reported in previous years, the Scott hide reed-bed is used by large numbers of Reed Buntings as a winter roost. Unfortunately two situations prevented us from carrying out the systematic sampling of this population as we have in recent years. First, the depth of the water meant that it was very difficult to get into the reed-bed safely; and second the unusual and very large Starling roost in the reeds meant that we did not want to disturb this and spoil the spectacle for the many visitors to the reserve.

### **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 (2<sup>nd</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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