

Belvide Ringing Report 2015

Introduction

Although the overall totals for 2015 are very similar to 2014, the make-up is rather different and reflects some of the weather conditions and other less obvious factors during the year.

The early Summer period was significant due to extended periods of cool wet weather, which undoubtedly had some effect on breeding although many of the resident species had already fledged by then as shown by decent results from the nest boxes. The most obvious implication was for the numbers of hirundines and especially Swifts held by the reservoir—clearly one of the few places locally where flying insects could be found. Even so there were regularly several hundred –if not thousands- of Swifts feeding which is many more than nest in the immediate surroundings so who knows how far afield they came from? We could at least go some way to answering that if some of the individuals we ringed would be re-captured elsewhere.

As the breeding season moved on conditions improved, reed growth was reasonable after a slow start and the number of birds about during the post breeding season was good. Reasonably dry calm conditions also meant that we were able to carry out a full programme of visits.

Towards the end of the year we would normally try to ring Reed Buntings in the reed-bed roost but this year very few came in. This phenomenon was reported throughout the country so it remains to be seen if this is a real population decline—or simply a feature of the unusually high winter temperatures making the necessity of finding a sheltered roost less important.

Table 1: new birds ringed at Belvide 2015 compared to recent years

Species	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Sparrowhawk	1	0	1	0	4	0	0	3
Kestrel	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Moorhen	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Snipe	0	1						
Water Rail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Lapwing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Oystercatcher	0	0	(2)	0	0	0	0	0
Common Tern	0	0	0	0	0	(3)	0	(5)
Swift	76	0	4	58	0	0	3	2
Kingfisher	4	11	6	3	1	2	1	7
Gr Spot W'peck	2	1	0	2	3	0	0	5
Sand Martin	9	20	0	0	45	0	0	1
House Martin	87	38	0	5	62	0	31	3
Swallow	32	1	3	0	19	0	0	0
Tree Pipit	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0
Meadow Pipit	2	142	123	2	83	72	0	0
Pied Wagtail	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Yellow Wagtail	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Stock Dove	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 + (2)	0

Woodpigeon	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Tawny Owl	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Robin	25	32	22	18	35	31	28	45
Redstart	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	2
Blackbird	3	18	6	12	15	7	25	28
Song Thrush	2	0	0	2	5	1	7	6
Redwing	0	6	2	19	16	0	0	13
Fieldfare	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Pied Flycatcher	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spot Flycatcher	0	5	0	0	1	2	1	4
Dunnock	31	17	24	11	56	43	59	51
Wren	40	47	24	12	33	42	34	58
Goldcrest	12	31	1	7	8	15	0	22
Nuthatch	4	3	1	5	0	1	0	3
Treecreeper	4	3	4	2	9	10	4	4
Cetti's Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chiffchaff	204	274	154	89	278	359	211	251
Willow Warbler	43	45	20	20	76	136	86	143
G'pper Warbler	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
Reed Warbler	169	199	93	41	138	155 (+7)	104	73 (+2)
Sedge Warbler	274	95	63	41	117	101	35	23
Lesser Whitethroat	5	10	8	3	3	12	8	6
Whitethroat	18	16	19	5	41	70	13	8
Blackcap	116	109	60	64	111	185	83	63
Garden Warbler	17	18	16	17	24	40	34	23
Blue Tit	73 (+93)	91	109	69(14)	92	155 (+161)	121 (+156)	110
Great Tit	43 (+38)	55	57	47(19)	108	108 (+61)	75 (+59)	67
Coal Tit	8	2	3	3	1	4	6	3
Long Tailed Tit	22	31	21	13	47	111	25	26
Willow Tit	0	0	2	1	2	1	0	1
Marsh Tit	1	2	2	1	2	4	0	2
Bullfinch	8	12	6	6	19	31	11	8
Chaffinch	3	2	16	5	20	31	53	21
Greenfinch	0	6	3	11	67	27	9	17
Goldfinch	6	8	5	10	38	48	15	41
Redpoll	1	0	1	5	0	0	0	4
Yellowhammer	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Reed Bunting	24	124	25	102	280	83	63	39
House Sparrow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Tree Sparrow	0	14	10	12	62	87	37	73
Jay	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
Magpie	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Starling	1	64	0	2	12	0	0	25
Total	1374 Of 38sp.	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.

NB species ringed for the first time in 2015 marked *--none in 2015

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.

Table 2: How was 2014?

	High	Low	Average	2015
Kingfisher	11	0	3.5	4
Wren	58	12	35	40
Dunnock	59	11	36	31
Robin	45	18	29	25
Goldcrest	22	0	14	12
W. warbler	143	20	75	43
Chiffchaff	359	89	234	204
Blackcap	185	48	96	116
Whitethroat	70	5	24	18
Garden warbler	40	16	27	17
Reed warbler	162	41	98	169
Sedge warbler	117	23	71	274
Totals	2219	759	1340	1374
Species	45	31	38	38

Kingfisher: 2014 produced the highest total of Kingfishers since ringing began. 2015 was much more of a 'normal' year with only 4 ringed—but still encouraging evidence that there is a pair breeding close by.

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 caught in average numbers for the site. However, Dunnocks appear to have staged a recovery after a very poor season last year.

Blackcap/Whitethroat /Chiffchaff: last year we reported that these species appeared to be entering a recovery phase. This has been consolidated and numbers this year were around average..

Willow warbler/Garden warbler: continue to show disappointing numbers at the lower end of their records. This appears to be part of the well documented reduction in breeding willow warblers in southern lowland Britain; but no such widespread data exists for Garden Warbler

Reed warbler: this species had a very good breeding season and we ringed record numbers for the second year running. 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.

Goldcrest: this species appears to have consolidated and numbers were only slightly lower than the record high of last year.

Hirundines: the higher than average numbers reflect a series of days when conditions were cool and damp giving better opportunities for catching these birds. Numbers therefore reflect weather conditions rather than any aspects of breeding success.

Meadow Pipit: a very disappointing year. Reports from birders carrying out 'vis mig' watches reported significantly fewer Meadow Pipits flying through the reservoir airspace so it was consistent that fewer were caught. No national data is yet available, nor any validated suggestions for the low numbers.

Blackbird/Tree Sparrow: these are certainly the most worrying species in that they are both well below expected with no apparent reason. Tree Sparrows especially have become very scarce even around the feeders where they have been so prominent over recent years.

Finches: the low numbers caught are in part due to the lack of ringing effort at the Gazebo feeders so we would not want too much to be read into these figures

Reed Bunting: again, a worrying decline—not so much in breeding birds, but certainly in those roosting in the reeds. Recent winters have seen scores of birds dropping into the Scott reed-bed on dusk, but this year the numbers counted were in the teens. As mentioned above this appears to be a widespread phenomenon this year, perhaps caused by the very mild weather?

The final 2 rows of the table show that in terms of total numbers ringed 2014 was slightly above average, but that in terms of number of species it was an average year; although this is the first year since we started the ringing programme that we have not added a new species.

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. On a very personal note I am really grateful for members of the team who continue to fill in for me during extensive absences abroad—thanks team!

Colin McShane on behalf of Brewood Ringers January 2016

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