

Thorndon Birdlife, September 2020

I am very pleased to take over from Stephen Dean who has been a good friend of mine for several years and like Stephen we are both members of Waveney Bird Club based in Bungay. I've always been interested in nature and I remember at the age of eight knocking on Percy Edwards door, he was our neighbour in Trimley, with an injured bird. This was my first step into ornithology.

I wanted a more scientific approach to birds and through the British Trust Ornithology I trained to be a bird ringer. I plan to include ringing reports in my monthly article. During lockdown, the sites I normally visit at RSPB Minsmere and Dunwich Heath have been closed, but solo garden ringing was permitted. The BTO introduced a CES project for passerine birds for garden ringing only. This consisted of 12 sessions during the breeding season starting in May and finishing in August. I have now completed eleven with one to go.

Ringing generates information on the survival, productivity and movements of birds, helping us to understand why populations are changing.

Ringing birds is essential if we are to learn about how long they live and when and where they move, questions that are vital for bird conservation.

Placing a lightweight, uniquely numbered, metal ring around a bird's leg provides a reliable and harmless method of identifying birds as individuals.

Although we have been ringing birds in Britain and Ireland for over 100 years, we are still discovering new facts about migration routes and wintering areas. However, the main focus of the Ringing Scheme today is monitoring bird populations.

Changes in survival rates and other aspects of birds' biology help us to understand the causes of population declines. Such information is so important for conservation that the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) runs two special projects to collect the information.

The Constant Effort Sites (CES) scheme provides information on population size, breeding success and survival of bird species living in scrub and wetland habitats

The Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) project gathers survival data for a wide range of species, particularly those of current conservation concern.

Using the government's guidelines during Covid 19, I was ringing at a site in Bawdsey, Suffolk. On Tuesday, we caught 36 birds including three Pied Flycatchers (*Ficedula hypoleuca*). These are one of the best studied passerines (perching bird) in Europe, yet we know little about their migratory timings or even where populations winter. We are now starting to find out.

Pied Flycatchers, like Blue Tits *Cyanistes caeruleus* and Great Tits *Parus major*, mostly breed in nest boxes at high densities which enables large numbers to be monitored, so making them good model systems for all manner of studies. But an important difference between tits and flycatchers is that flycatchers migrate. Despite knowing a huge amount about Pied Flycatcher breeding ecology, we actually know little about their migration timings, migration routes or the locations of their West African non-breeding grounds. This is important to find out, as the UK population has declined by 53% since 1995 and has declined in other parts of their European breeding range. The decline is linked to changing conditions on wintering grounds and migration.

We know so little about the non-breeding and migratory ecology of Pied Flycatchers partly because we have been unable to follow individuals. It is a breeding summer migrant; it arrives in May and departs September. In the UK we have around 24,000 pairs. The Pied Flycatcher occurs in all counties throughout the UK, but mainly in the West. It does not breed in Ireland.

The male is a conspicuous black and white to a female a dull brown.



Juvenile Pied Flycatcher caught at Bawdsey.

I haven't been able to do much bird watching in the village due to 'Lockdown' but garden viewing has been quite

fruitful, Common Whitethroat, Blackcap, Garden warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Willow warbler, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Treecreeper, Swallow, House martin, Swift, Nuthatch heard but not seen. Raptors include Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, Red Kite, Osprey and the White-tailed Eagle. I ringed male and female Kestrels, and a Sparrowhawk in the garden.

A female Moorhen had secretly bred in the reeds around the pond and fledged four chicks, one chick has survived! My fifteen tit boxes have been quite productive with breeding success in ten, bees occupied the others.

I know of a failed Spotted Flycatcher nest in the village, it built the nest on top of a downpipe and after a deluge of rain the chicks were washed away.

New butterflies to the garden have been Clouded Yellow and a Grayling also six spot Burnet moths, I counted five, the red spots indicate to predators that they are poisonous, they release hydrogen cyanide when attacked!

On the migration front, adult Cuckoos have gone, Swifts have almost gone (I saw five yesterday) Wood warblers, Nightingale, Spotted and Pied Flycatchers are moving South with Turtle Doves.

Sightings around the village please contact me;

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