

A Ringer's Year April 2017

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April has continued to be busy with a passage north of Siskins, Goldfinch and, for the first time this year, a small number of Redpolls (notice I make no distinction between Common and Lesser since genetic research has now confirmed that any differentiation is trivial- a fact which I have always believed.(see pic below) However, not all these birds are migrating north – quite a number of the Siskins are stopping to breed and the females are developing clear brood patches (with which they warm their eggs). A few hours on the 1st of the month netted 30 new birds and 35 retraps including the first Chiffchaff of the year; very unusually this showed a very clear block of 5 Old Greater Coverts (that is juvenile feathers) in its wings thus indicating that it was hatched last year and had probably just arrived back from Senegal or The Gambia. Another session on the 14th captured just short of 100 birds; including the retrap of a Siskin originally ringed as a new juvenile in 2013. Birds starting to breed included Siskin, Robin, and Tree Sparrow. Greenfinches, Dunnock and Chaffinches were also noted as starting to breed on the 20th.



Redpoll

I also started to explore a new study site this month near Longhorsley where the rare Willow Tit seems to breed. However, the first ringing sessions actually captured some Blue Tits, Chaffinches and a rather nice Willow Warbler (just returned from the Ivory Coast or Ghana). The attached picture shows a size comparison with a rather more sedentary Chaffinch!



Size comparison

Meanwhile one of 'my' Siskins ringed in February was recently controlled by another ringer in West Lothian, and I controlled another bird already ringed in Chilworth, Surrey both clearly heading north to nest. Sadder news came with a return from the BTO telling me that Female Barn Owl FS85696 that was originally ringed as an adult nesting near Wooler in 2014 had been found dead, also near Wooler in April. This bird raised young successfully in 2014, 15 and 16; and was already settled in her nesting site, with her mate, in March this year. Similarly Barn Owl FH79952 originally ringed as an owlet near Longhoughton

in 2014 was found dead on the A1 near South Charlton in April. However, this was first I had heard of this bird since it was originally ringed.

A recent survey of the River Aln in Hulne Park for nesting Dipper produced only one definitive nest (*perhaps they will be late this year*) but another regular nest site near Ingram had five healthy pulli on the 22nd, which a trainee enjoyed

ringing (see pic). Throughout the whole proceedings, *which required waders and a large step ladder*, the adult pair waited more or less patiently with beaks full of insect food to feed then as soon as we got out of the way! The other



birds which always nest this time of year are Tawny Owls and these look to be having more success than last year with the first brood ringed on the 24th.



Anyone interesting in ringing is invited to get in touch. I will generally be ringing on Fridays & Saturdays.

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