

# A Ringer's Year February 2017

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### Natural History Society of Northumbria Ringing Group (Hancock Museum)

February started with some mixed weather but I managed some ringing near home with a new trainee on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. She was lucky enough to 'Control' two Siskins (D380019 & D229645) together with a Tree Sparrow I had originally ringed back on the 24/4/13 and a dozen new birds (mostly Siskins but including one each of Goldfinch, Great Tit, Black Bird, Tree Sparrow and a House Sparrow). The BTO's newly improved Ringing Recovery Report system quickly told me that D380019 had been ringed originally back in 2013 at Thetford in Norfolk as an adult, so it must be at least 6 years. The other Siskin (D229645) was also ringed back in 2013 but as a second year bird, so it must be 5 years old; from Alderton, in Suffolk.

Several further ringing sessions confirmed the arrival (and continuing passage) of quite a few Siskins, together with some Goldfinches (more of whom are resident). However, some of the *always resident* also proved interesting with the recapture of a Dunnock that is at least 6 years old; a Blue Tit that can be accurately aged to 6 years; and a Goldfinch that was originally ringed (as a juvenile) in 2012 and has been recaptured a total of twelve times since! I may have mentioned before that Blue Tits can often be the bane of a ringer's life (because they show no fear and peck viciously!) but I have attached a photograph of a particularly well-marked bird ringed on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the month.



'Vicious' Bluetit



Siskin with overgrown top beak

Meanwhile getting back to the travelling Siskins; the other picture is of an entirely healthy Siskin (S649107) ringed on the 24/2/17 which has an unusually 'overgrown' top beak mandible. This looks unusual but is clearly not handicapping the bird in its feeding. Another Controlled Siskin was captured on the 24<sup>th</sup>; and D380019 (from Thetford) is still regularly feeding on Niger seed in my garden.

The latest Barn Owl news comes courtesy of two birdwatchers (*Alan Hall and Steve Rippon*) that were out for a walk on Holy Island on the 15/2/17 and found a dead owl that looked as though it may have been blown against a building in a violent storm. The bird was carrying a ring and the information came back from the BTO that it had been ringed in its

nest on the 5/8/16 at Landbeach in Cambridgeshire; that's 401 kilometres away! So please, please, if you see a dead bird (of any species) just pause and check its legs for rings. If it is ringed, what the BTO needs is the number (usually one or two letters followed by some numbers) the date it was found and the location (you don't even have to identify the species). Send it into the BTO; you can do this via its website or post the information (the ring is optional) c/o the British Museum for Natural History in London; or give it to the nearest bird ringer – and they can put it in with their regular returns to the BTO.

I have not been purposefully checking on Barn Owls this month but have put up one new box near Chatton and replaced another (that was worn out) near Rennington. I am a bit short of money and time to make any more boxes just now.

Anyone interesting in ringing is invited to get in touch. I will mostly be continuing to ring near home but will gradually be starting to work with owls as we move further into the spring. Tawny Owls start nesting now and will have young in April.

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