

# A Ringer's Year July 2017

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

This month the wet and windy weather has disrupted a lot of ringing. However we have managed three sessions at the Howick Ringing Station; although the wind stopped us erecting all the potential nets. On the 14<sup>th</sup> we were joined by a couple of potential new trainees who saw two retrapped Bullfinches from 2014. We also had Wrens, Greenfinch, Robin and Blue Tit – representing the 'resident' birds. Migrants were represented by Blackcaps, Swallows, and two very juvenile Chiffchaffs. One of the Blackcaps caused initial confusion by being clearly a male but also having a 'brood patch' like a female bird. However, I was able to explain that this is quite normal with male Blackcaps. A total of 19 birds were captured.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> numbers went up to 31 captured, including a retrapped Goldfinch from 2016 and a Bullfinch from 2015. Most birds ringed were juveniles of the year (3J's) including Robin, Tits, Wren, a Song Thrush and a Greenfinch; migrants included both Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler (which needed careful separation in the hand). Finally, despite unpromising weather, 44 birds were captured on the 29<sup>th</sup> including a Coal Tit, first ringed (as an adult) back in October 2014. As well as a large number of juvenile Blue & Great Tits (*they have had a good breeding year this year with the fine early spring weather*) there were several juvenile Bullfinches (see picture of two probable siblings), as well as Chiffchaff and Blackcap. Robins included a juvenile just starting to moult into its adult feathers, showing the start of its red breast (see picture). Swallows have been thin on the ground this year at Howick, hinting at them having a less than successful breeding year (as the deteriorating summer weather is not good for nesting).



The weather (very specifically torrential rain over a few days at the end of June) has also curtailed the breeding of Sand Martins at Roddam. Great clods of earth and nests were washed out and the birds seem to have mostly deserted the site after only raising one brood. Let's hope for better weather next year at such a critical time.

I have received only one return from the BTO this month being a male Siskin (with a ring on) controlled near home on the 11<sup>th</sup> July. This had been ringed as recently as the 1st July at Corbridge; exactly why it was travelling *north* this time of year is not very clear! This was also one of the few 'adult' birds I captured near home as my Niger feeders and associated traps have been mostly visited by 'juvenile' Siskins. There have also been young Tree Sparrows about - although they clearly don't much like Niger seed, preferring slightly bigger seed (including that left over by budgies!)



The weather has already had an effect on those Barn Owls that started nesting later in the year. The adults that started in March have mostly done well and I am looking at a 'successful' occupancy rate of over 40% (the highest I have observed). However, some of the birds that started later, particularly in the north of the county, have failed. A few seem to be trying for replacement broods and one or two of the early breeders may have a second brood. When trying to get some owl pellets for a research student I discovered a nice larder of dead voles and mice laid out in a box (clearly a male is encouraging a female to nest again). The problem is that any young raised late in the year will not be fledging until September or even October and will not be well prepared for winter.

Anyone interesting in ringing is invited to get in touch.

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