

# A Ringers Year January 2017

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(Hancock Museum)

**M**y ringing year started with the receipt of a Ringing Recovery Reports from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). The first was to tell me that one of a brood of Tree Sparrows ringed in its nest near Whinnyhill Farm, Longhorsley; on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 2016 was subsequently controlled (very much alive) by another ringer at Druridge Links on the 29<sup>th</sup> October. So it's clearly joined a flock of Tree Sparrows on the coast for its first winter. As you will know the weather has been somewhat mixed and since I need calm dry weather to catch birds ringing has been a bit uncertain. However, on the 6<sup>th</sup> I managed a small catch of 17 birds in a couple of hours. Eight of these were new including a couple of Tree Sparrows; together with 9 retraps. These included a Great Tit first ringed in 2014 and a Tree Sparrow also ringed in 2014. The next day, with two trainees present, we managed 34 birds including a new female Bullfinch. However we did not see my favourite winter bird until the 21<sup>st</sup> January when we captured four Siskins (*I had actually seen the first Siskin feeding on Niger seed in the garden on the 18<sup>th</sup> Jan*). One of the birds was a new male but the three others already had rings (see picture). One had been ringed back on the 7/10/15; another on the 31/1/16 and the third was a completely unknown bird (a Control); which I will have to wait for the BTO to tell me about.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan; 27 birds were captured including (amongst the Blue, Great and Coal Tits; Tree Sparrows, Chaffinch and Goldfinch) another retrap Siskin. This one had been ringed first on the 7/10/15 and then in every month (several times) up to and including March 2016. On the 26<sup>th</sup> a further three new birds were captured in a feeder trap that was not even set! I find the Siskin and its predilection for 'travelling' to be fascinating and have personally both ringed and controlled birds that have gone to/come from every corner of England, all over Scotland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, France and Belgium.



The Siskin is something of a success story and although 90% of its 'European' population breeds in Fennoscandia and the neighbouring areas of the Baltic States and Russia; the breeding population has been increasing in the British Isles for the last few decades. They typically start nesting in April (which is early) in Spruce and Pine trees and usually have a second brood before starting to disperse. If there is still local food available then they will not go far but if food is scarce then they may undertake what may appear to be erratic migrations generally south and west. In Britain they frequently appear feeding on river side Birch and Alder. However, it's on returning north that we most notice them (in the New Year) as they come searching for food in our gardens. While they will eat Peanuts its safer to feed them Niger seed (*because damp peanuts do go mouldy if not eaten quickly*) and a quick check of my ringing records show 52 captured in Jan 2013; 64 in 2014; only 2 in 2015; and 8 to date. We will see if numbers build up over the next few weeks. Perhaps the most fascinating feature of these irruption migrations is that some birds habitually return to the same wintering areas in subsequent years (but may not be seen every year!).

I have not been checking on Barn Owls this month but have just used up all my remaining wood to make two new owl boxes and went just south of Rothbury to put one of these up, in a disused Hemmel, last Friday; and then to the coast to replace a worn out box, yesterday (Monday).

Anyone interesting in ringing is invited to get in touch. I will mostly be ringing near home this winter and then starting some Barn Owl work in March. E-mail: [tytoalbas@btinternet.com](mailto:tytoalbas@btinternet.com)