



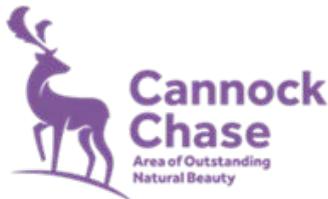
# WMRG

WEST MIDLANDS  
RINGING GROUP

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

# WMRG

The West Midlands Ringing Group 2021 Annual report would not be possible without the support of our partners



J&J Roberts  
R. Tomlinson  
G. Clay  
Leedham  
Lower Drayton Farm

[www.westmidlandsringinggroup.co.uk](http://www.westmidlandsringinggroup.co.uk)

# WMRG

West Midlands Ringing Group

## Foreword



*Paul Hopwood*

**Paul Hopwood**

Secretary,  
West Midlands Ringing Group



### Welcome to the fifth annual report for the West Midlands Ringing Group.

As I reflect on the last year, and take myself back to writing the 2020 report, I had hoped that 2021 would have been far more positive, but sadly that wasn't to be. On the ringing front there were so many positives and hopefully you will see that we have gone from strength to strength within this report.

On the 19th February 2021 we lost one of our nature friendly farmers. Dave Roberts was a huge part of the Lower Barns Farm team in South Staffordshire. Dave and his father John, and his brother Andy made a huge impact on farmland birds in the area and he will be sadly missed.

On the 27th October my father, Richard Hopwood passed away unexpectedly. My dad was a huge part of my life and I credit him with introducing me to the natural world, the outdoors and to my love of birds. As a child I spent many hours birding and nest finding with my dad, and until recently we had spent time out and about bird watching. We spent many hours at Wetland and Wildlife Trust reserves with my own kids and had lovely times watching our favourite bird, Short eared Owls in the Midlands. My father inspired me to appreciate wildlife and I will be

forever grateful for this. Sleep tight Dad x

As a group we need to repeat our thanks to the NHS for their continued work during the pandemic, for their phenomenal efforts over the last years.

2021 has seen positives, we have been joined by Ferg, Jess, Anita and Clare which is a real positive for WMRG and we have taken on several new trainees. Paul Smith gained his C permit and is continuing to develop.

We have secured further funding which will see our work grow and hopefully allow us to gain better understanding of birds.

However the highlight of the year was being nominated for the Marsh Charitable Trust award (BTO) for innovative ornithology in respect of our thermal imaging work. In October 2021 we found out that we had won this coveted award. This is an honour and a privilege and we will continue to share and develop our knowledge across the ornithological world. It is a huge legacy for our group, and something that we never expected in 2016 when Ben Dolan and I came up with the idea in a field at Marsh Lane! I hope you enjoy this report!

*Paul Hopwood*

# Contents Page

Content	Page Number
Partners	2
<b>Foreword by the secretary of WMRG</b>	3
Contents	4-5
Bird ringing in the UK	6
<b>WMRG 2021 Marsh Award Winners for Innovative Ornithology!</b>	7
<b>Focus on Farming</b>	<b>8 - 25</b>
Farming focus	9
Overbury Enterprises	10 -11
Breach and Oatenfields farms	12 -14
Burleydam Farm	15
Aston Hall Farm	15
Ringing in change for farm birds	16 -17
Lower Drayton Farm	18
Lower Barns Farm	19 - 20
Hedge Funds	21 - 22
Trent Meadows	23
<b>Cuckoo Bank and surrounding area</b>	<b>24 -25</b>
<b>The WMRG Skylark Project</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Staffordshire Nightjar</b>	<b>27-30</b>
Nightjar ringing in 2021	28
Nightjar in Staffordshire	29 - 30
<b>Cannock Chase</b>	<b>31 - 33</b>
Cannock chase report 2021	32 - 33
<b>Severn Trent</b>	<b>34</b>
Our work with Severn Trent	35
Year of the owl	36 - 38
Roundhill	39
Shifnal	40
Penkridge	41
Minworth	42
Leek	43
Marchington	43
<b>Thermal Imaging Surveys</b>	<b>44-45</b>
<b>WMRG Stonechat Colour Ringing Project</b>	<b>46 - 51</b>
WMRG Stonechats	47
Project updates & Sighting guidance	48 - 51
<b>WMRG Urban Dipper colour ringing project</b>	<b>52 - 54</b>

<b>New Encounters in 2021</b>	<b>55 - 58</b>
The Eurasian Dotterel	56
The Little Bunting	57
Common Quail	57
Red Kite	58
Siberian Chiffchaff	58
<b>Covid, mental health and wildlife</b>	<b>59 - 60</b>
<b>So why bird ringing?</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Funding for 2021</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Farmland bird competition sponsored by Focus Environmental</b>	<b>63 - 64</b>
<b>Marsh Lane Nature Reserve</b>	<b>65 - 78</b>
Marsh Lane 2021 update	67 - 70
Marsh Lane Common Terns	71- 73
Marsh Lane - Lapwing Project	74
Marsh Lane - in other news....	75
Marsh Lane - Black-headed Gull Project	76
Black-headed Gull sightings 2021	77 - 78
Blithfield Common Terns	79
<b>WMRG Peregrine Falcon Project</b>	<b>80 - 81</b>
<b>Staffordshire Pied flycatcher and Redstart</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Community Engagement</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>WMRG pin badges</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Vosker trail cams</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Ringing data</b>	<b>86 - 92</b>
Ringing Recoveries	87 - 88
Lithuanian Starling & Russian Woodcock	89
Ringing Totals 2020	90 - 92
Subsequent encounters	92
Colour Ringing Projects	93
<b>Contact us</b>	<b>94</b>
Shropshire Ornithological Society	95
West Midlands Bird Club	95
Staffordshire Wildlife Trust	96
British Trust for Ornithology	96
FWAG South West	97
The Green Farm Collective	97
Team4Nature	98
Thanks and credits	99
<b>WMRG Stonechat poster</b>	<b>100</b>

# Bird Ringing in the UK

The British and Irish Ringing Scheme is organised by the BTO. Over 900,000 birds are ringed in Britain and Ireland each year by over 2,600 trained ringers, most of whom are volunteers.

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

Ringing data makes a major contribution to the study of population changes and to our understanding of species declines.

Bird populations are determined by the number of fledglings raised, the survival of both juveniles and adults, an movements of birds into or out of an area.

Whilst ringers collect data on

survival, volunteers for the Nest Record Scheme collect information on productivity. Ringing can also provide valuable data on movements and productivity, based on the proportion of juveniles that are ringed each year, which can tell us more about what happens after young birds leave the nest. This can identify challenges such as a reduction in juvenile survival after fledging, or the numbers of young birds that survive to join the breeding population.

The results can be analysed in combination with

population trend data, such as that collected through the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey, to determine at which stage of a bird's life cycle there might be a problem. This enables scientists and conservationists to target appropriate mitigation measures.

**For further information on bird ringing in the UK, or for details on the other BTO projects please visit the BTO website**

**WWW.BTO.ORG**



## Did you know?



Common Cuckoo

**Bird ringers in the UK are volunteers, conducting ringing activities in their own time and at their own cost.**

Ringers are licenced annually and are required to renew their membership with the scheme yearly.

Ringing is not cheap. Licences and specialist equipment are expensive. Ringers are also responsible for the purchase of all the rings that they use.

Additional projects which include colour marking schemes also attract further costs.

If you would like to make a donation to support our work please contact us at

Our trainees have written their experience of ringing which you will find later in this report.

[wmrg.contact@gmail.com](mailto:wmrg.contact@gmail.com)

# WMRG 2021 Marsh Award Winners for Innovative Ornithology!

**This Award is run in partnership with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and celebrates an important contribution which takes forward our understanding of avian ecology or conservation science.**

## MARSH Charitable Trust



The Marsh Charitable Trust was founded in 1981 with the sum of £75,000 by its current Chairman, Mr Brian Marsh OBE. His aim was to create a sustainable way to give something back to society, by supporting the organisations and people who are making a difference, as best he could.

The Trust supports around 350 charities every year through the Grants Programme and gives around 80 different Awards to individuals and groups from across the charity sector, who make a difference to a cause that they believe in.

This Award is run in partnership with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and celebrates an important contribution which takes forward our understanding of avian ecology or conservation science.

The Award is presented to an individual or group who has made a recent publication

or revealed a new finding which substantially advances our understanding of ornithology.

It may also be presented to an individual or group whose work positively reflects this new research, or other pioneering work in the field, to the wider public.

Nominations are judged by an independent panel of experts who consider each application against agreed judging criteria.

In 2021 the winners of this award are West Midlands Ringing Group (WMRG)

The WMRG have pioneered the use of thermal technology for ringing and surveying birds and are sharing their experiences and knowledge openly and widely around the world. They support other ringers and work with landowners, demonstrating their

technology so that it can be shared and utilised effectively to improve surveying.

The data collected is critical to aid wildlife-friendly farming, ecology, and land management.

WMRG use social media effectively to reach wider audiences and as a platform for learning. They are currently working to make their technology more accessible to other groups.

The group has significantly added to the bank of knowledge with regard to declining farmland bird species, roosting birds and those that become active after dark.

This information has only become available as a result of WMRG's effective use of technology and comes at a crucial time in the fight to halt biodiversity loss in the UK.



Focus on Farming

# Farming focus

**In this article Paul Hopwood shares his thoughts on farming in the UK, and despite farmer's daily struggles how farmers in the region are still supporting nature.**

I have a romantic dream of becoming a farmer, but it is just a dream. For one, I struggle with early mornings and two, the pressures UK farmers are under would simply be unbearable.

There have been many issues that have impacted on our farmers in recent years, Government policy, trade deals, Brexit to name but a few but these are just the tip of the iceberg.

For those that watched Clarkson's farm, you will have an understanding of the bureaucracy, red tape and legal restrictions placed on farmers making it a real struggle to make ends meet.

This is further compounded by our desire for cheap food and further driven by supermarkets who control, and in some cases hold farmers over a barrel. A farmer will sell a whole sack of potatoes for about the same price we pay for a large bag of chips!

Faced with all of the above, farmers are also blamed for the decline in farmland birds, but in reality our desire for a bargain is a major contributor to this. Farmers need to be productive, but at the same time are expected to protect the environment, they are our guardians of the countryside.

So should farmers be the whipping boys and girls for



all conservation issues? Of course more can be done, but are the public actually aware of the great work being conducted by farmers for the environment and nature.

Media reporting in the 21st century focusses on the negative. Can you remember the last time you saw a positive farming story on the news apart from a few lambs being born at Easter?

Does regenerative agriculture ever feature on news channels, or the work that many farmers are doing to improve soil quality or to encourage birds to their farms? Yet this is happening daily across the region.

However if a cow passes wind, then its easy to blame farmers for global warming!

So what is the answer? A meat free diet? Salads grown in vast greenhouses in Spain which have a negative environmental impact? Or buying cheap meat from outside of the UK, whose animal welfare standards fall far short of ours, or result in

vast swathes of the Amazon being deforested and turned to pasture?

The term 'Rewilding' seems to be the answer to everything, but is the term being misused? We recently watched a presentation about the Knepp estate in the South Downs, and to be fair it was impressive. However their farmland species didn't seem to be fairing as well as others. Yes Rewilding can be good, but not all models will produce the variety of food we want at a price we are prepared to pay at the same time as looking after key farmland species.

We are ardent supporters of nature friendly farmers in the region. If we want farmers to do more, then we need to support our local farmers, only by doing this will they be able to do more for our wildlife because looking after wildlife and running a productive farm is an expensive business. If we want to protect our farmland birds we need to start by protecting and supporting our UK farms.



# Overbury Enterprises

West Midlands Ringing Group were kindly invited to Overbury in summer 2020 and in this article Paul Hopwood details his year on the estate, which has been quite remarkable.



**Overbury Enterprises sits on the Gloucestershire/Worcestershire border and covers an area just over 2,000 Ha from Cotswold brash soil on Bredon Hill over sand and gravel and lias clay into the Vale of Evesham.**

I don't know where to begin when talking about our time at Overbury, but I will start by thanking Penelope Bossom, Jake Freestone, Mark Frost, Paul & Rod Gillett and the rest of the team for allowing us access over the last year. We are extremely grateful to the estate for making us so welcome and being so enthusiastic and interested in our work.

Over 1000 birds of 46 species were encountered during the year, which accounts for around a fifth of the group's annual totals.

After lockdown restrictions eased we started ringing on the estate concentrating on Stonechat and coloured ringed 5 in March.

March also saw the start of our farmland survey and in four weeks we had ringed 189 birds of 12 different species.

Considering that we missed prime time due to Covid in January and February these figures were excellent.

April saw the start of Wheatear and Chat passage and we ringed four Wheatear, two of which were Greenland types.



Overbury Wheatear

April also saw us move into a new area of the estate which contained an area of scrub and reed bed, this is a private area with no public access. It was hoped that we would encounter warbler species here, and that Reed and Sedge Warbler would arrive.

Over 300 birds were processed in this area, with 70 Reed and 60 Sedge Warblers encountered. It is amazing to think that a small reed bed, measuring approximately 3/4 of a

hectare can hold so many birds. Other notable catches included Redstart and Grasshopper Warblers. At the same time Fergus ran another team in an area of woodland and bramble where 80 Blackcap were ringed together with 18 Common Whitethroat and 10 Garden Warblers.

The warbler season produced 592 birds of 28 different species!

Eight Barn Owl boxes were monitored and of the five that were accessible we ringed 14 chicks.

At one nest location where birds had been noted we found a Kestrel and Barn Owl nesting metres apart. Both nests were successful, with 4 out of 5 Kestrel chicks being ringed.

In late summer, trainee Nick Berry built an internal Barn Owl box which was fitted into one of the estates properties.



Top Left - Overbury reed bed  
Bottom right - Barn Owl chick

Two of the Barn Owl nests were less than 600 metres apart. During the summer we witness these birds hunting silently across the estate.

A highlight of our season was ringing a Red Kite chick on the estate (Sch.1 Licence) We have to thank the gamekeepers for all of the information they provided in helping us locate nests across the estate.

It is possible this bird represents one of the first successful breeding records in the West Midlands area. At this point I need to thank our climber Jim for all his efforts.



We hope to install further bird boxes, covering a range of species in the new year.

August saw autumn migration on the estate and Bredon Hill's height makes it a key spot for passage birds. A further 13 Wheatear and 11 Stonechat were ringed during the autumn. Whilst we did not ring Whinchat this year 8 birds were noted.

After spending an evening



Farm manager Jake Freestone

on the hill in August I spent a few hours surveying with our thermal camera for Skylark. However this turned into a very special evening for me as I ringed my first Dotterel. This was recaptured in a different area of the farm a week later, followed by another new bird in September.

Large numbers of pipits were seen on Bredon Hill in the autumn and 18 birds were ringed.

As we moved towards the winter months, focus changed to night time thermal surveys.

During this period we ringed over 100 birds using the thermal camera, including 20+ Woodcock, 3 Golden Plover and nearly



Golden Plover ringed on Overbury Estate

100 Skylark. Again these figures are impressive as not many sessions were conducted.

There have been many highlights over the last year at Overbury. Curlew were noted in the spring, when we also heard the distinctive song of the Nightingale.



Skylark on Bredon Hill

However the highlight for me was the small reed bed and area of scrub left wild by the estate.

This was an area full of flora and fauna, hundreds of Bee and Pyramidal Orchid flowered and the area was alive with insects and many breeding birds. This relatively small area of approximately 7 hectares was as impressive as many nature reserves, yet was on a working farm.

I must also mention farmer Jake's daughter Jorja, who was a great help during our ringing sessions, both in the daytime and when she helped with our thermal work at night. I hope that one day she may start ringing with us.

It has been a fantastic year and we cant wait to get back in 2022.

# Breach & Oatenfields Farms

**Chris Millward, co-founder of Team4Nature and honorary secretary of the West Midland Bird Club shares some early positive news from the Bibbey family's farms that have only just entered Countryside Stewardship.**

What started from a conversation with John Bibbey about "why Green Woodpeckers don't visit bird feeders" has led to an exciting collaborative project on the West Midlands – Worcestershire border and urban fringe.

The two farms entered mid-tier stewardship on 1st January 2021, but nature friendly plans were created by observing nature over several years before that, at landscape level and then working with passionate farmers to create positive change.

As a result of this work a wide range of wildlife habitats have now been enhanced, established and protected.

With regard to winter feeding provisions for farmland birds there were three main strategies



Time to feed, a cold spell at the farm



Firstly, blocks of bird seed crop were proposed at the extreme north and south ends of the farms to attract birds from as wide and diverse an area as possible, with the northern crop aimed at serving the urban fringe and the southern plot attracting birds from deeper into Worcestershire.

Secondly, it had been observed that finch and bunting flew low over high points on the two farms during migration periods. The aim here was to provide resources near these locations in order to persuade birds to stop off, refuel and consider staying with others!

Lastly, we worked closely with Bright Seeds to offer a variety of bird food crops across the farms aimed at attracting a range of species, whilst also taking into account different soil types.

The added advantage of this strategy was that we have been able to quickly learn more about the suitability of the different mixes, whilst also monitoring how the finch and bunting flocks interact with them.

A game-changing moment came in December 2020 when I contacted Ben Dolan from WMRG and invited him to look at the farms.

In three years of daytime surveying, I had not seen a single Woodcock on the farms and yet, during his initial visit, Ben forecast that his thermal-imaging equipment would produce some and sure enough, his gut-feeling was right.

Ben's vast experience, from recognising the value and then pioneering the use of this technology for nocturnal surveying, is helping us to understand where birds are roosting and feeding at



Stock Dove from Breach and Oatenfields farm



Yellowhammer

night on the farms and aiding delivery of informed conservation measures.

Our first year in stewardship has brought some incredible results already.

Voluntary measures brought an "Arctic" Redpoll and 10+ "Mealy" Redpoll to the farms in March 2021 and 1,250 finch and bunting were recorded on 28th November 2021, breaking all records for recent years by a country mile!

The passion and commitment of Jess Stuart-Smith and the rest of the ringing team is already starting to provide insights into the lives of our farmland birds that could never have been obtained by simply being out in the fields with a pair of binoculars.

By way of example, it was a deeply emotional moment when Jess informed me that our first Redpoll of the autumn was a young male that had returned to the

exact location, where he had been ringed in the spring.

I want to finish this positive news story by acknowledging the work of the Nature Friendly Farming Network and especially to all those farmers who, despite all of the uncertainty in the industry at the moment, are passionately delivering for farmland birds and other wildlife. It is a movement that's a great source of hope for a future in which we can all witness the mass-restoration of nature across the UK for the happiness, health and wellbeing of all.



**Chris's great report is now followed by an article by Jess Stuart-Smith from WMRG who has been ringing across the Bibbey family Farms in 2021.**

**In this article Jess describes her experiences from this great farm.**

Earlier this year we had great pleasure in joining forces with the team at Breach and Oatenfields farms on the West Midlands / Worcestershire border.

The farms collectively comprise 300 acres, and form part of the countryside stewardship scheme, encouraging nature-friendly farming to conserve, and restore wildlife habitats.

We are now entering the second winter on the farm, and with 4 hectares(!) of wild bird food crop planted and established this year, we are already witnessing a massive shift in the number of birds present on site.

At the tail end of last winter, we concentrated efforts on ringing redpoll which occupied the site in good numbers, culminating in a total of 30 Lesser Redpoll ringed.



Middle & bottom right Linnet the most prevalent species at the farm

As the linnet flocks have been continuously building on site since October, we have shifted effort onto this species, which has rewarded us with a grand total of 103 being ringed, to date. Other species ringed at the farms this year, include meadow pipit, reed bunting, Yellowhammer, and Woodcock.

It is important to note that 8 out of the 12 species currently captured and ringed at the site (over 60%), are listed as Birds of Conservation Concern.

Even at this early stage in the project, it is clear to see how vitally important the site is for our most vulnerable overwintering bird species. Feeding certainly attracts and supports birds in the area during the hungry gap



Lesser redpoll from the farm

We were also lucky enough to have our first onsite retrap earlier this month, with one of our previously ringed Lesser Redpoll turning up within the Linnet flock.

It is fantastic to see the first evidence of site loyalty for this species - further testament to the amazing effort by Chris and the team to create and provide such a plethora of wild bird feeding habitat!

We are really excited to be part of such a fantastic project and cannot wait to see how the farms evolve throughout the winter.

We will be out with the thermal imaging camera to get a better understanding of how the farms are utilised by birds and night, and the imminent provision of supplementary bird feed is guaranteed to turn things up another notch, on an already thriving site!

We would like to thank Chris and the farm for all of their support in 2021.

## Breach & Oatenfields Farm ringing totals

SPECIES	BoCC Status	Total Ringed	Retrap
Blue Tit	Green	4	
Dunnock	Amber	1	
Great Tit	Green	1	
Lesser Redpoll	Red	30	1
Linnet	Red	103	
Meadow Pipit	Amber	5	
Reed Bunting	Amber	3	
Robin	Green	3	
Stock Dove	Amber	1	
Woodcock	Red	1	
Wren	Green	6	
Yellowhammer	Red	8	
<b>Totals</b>		<b>166</b>	<b>1</b>

**\*BoCC: Birds of Conservation Concern**

(see <http://britishbirds.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/BoCC4.pdf>).

# Burleydam Farm

**An update on this Shropshire/Cheshire border farm brimming with nature!**

One each of Barn and Tawny Owl were caught early in the year and Short-eared Owls were seen in the area.

The Barn Owls were seen through the thermal imager to actively target Snipe, flying higher than they normally do when hunting rodents, before hovering over the intended target at perhaps four or five metres before dropping vertically onto it.

Woodcock and Snipe were present as usual, but no Jack Snipe were caught.

In June we supported Richard for a farm walk and talk for the Whitchurch branch of Shropshire Wildlife Trust.



Richard gave a fascinating illustrated talk about regenerative agriculture and we helped by pointing out the birds that are attracted to the different habitats and crops that Richard manages.

After the guests had left a Turtle Dove was heard calling from a mature tree on a hedge that runs adjacent to the Cheshire/Shropshire county boundary.

We intend to conduct some thermal imaging sessions in the not too distant future. This is always an exciting prospect as the fields on the farm are full of birds.

# Aston Hall Farm, Stone

**Paul Hopwood from WMRG provides an update on the season at Aston that has been hampered by the weather and time!**

There have been few opportunities to visit Aston this winter to target the Snipe that frequent the Trent flood meadows due to weather.

During the summer months the majority of the farmland was planted with maize, which is harvested late on, making thermal work impossible. We find that maize crops do not hold many farmland bird species.

During late summer, we had two attempts at catching wading birds on the flash. Greenshank, Common Sandpiper and Little Ringed Plover were present. A Wood Sandpiper was seen to drop into the flash, but it did



A Little Ringed Plover caught at Aston during August

not hang around.

In early September we were joined by South Manchester RG who found a Willow Tit which is a great record for the site. Wheatear and Whinchat were also noted.

On the same day a hot air balloon was seen very low

over the meadows, at one point we expected it to hit the trees. This caused significant disturbance to the birds along the meadows, flushing good numbers of Lapwing. It is also resulted in 27 Green Sandpipers swirling around the large flash. Whilst this was a great spectacle it was a shame that the birds were spooked, ruining a ringing session.

We caught Snipe and a Barn Owl from the meadows, together with a Little Ringed Plover which was a first for me!

I hope that the weather eases soon so we can target the many Snipe present.



## COLLABORATION

# Ringling in change for farm birds

Perhaps now is the time for wildlife groups to work in a more positive way with the industry, writes Paul Hopwood from the West Midlands Ringing Group.

**Edited: Oliver Cartwright**

**N**FU members will be well aware of the pressures on farmland birds but despite the doom and gloom recent figures indicate that positive changes may not be that far away.

Most farmers don't need reminding about the issues there are when it comes to farmland birds and actually there needs to be more recognition of the work they do to support habitat, species and bird populations.

The West Midlands Ringing Group (WMRG) acknowledges the decline in farmland birds has continued at a slower rate more recently, and even more encouragingly the decline decreased significantly between 2013 and 2018 - it is our view that this is the start of the seeds of change. As a group we continue to see and hear generalisations that all farmers don't care about wildlife and that productivity is a farmer's only concern, and for us this is unjust and unfair. We see real positivity and enthusiasm from the farmers in respect of wildlife and a desire to improve and, where possible, do more.

We are not naïve enough to think that all farmers have the same passion, however the tide, in our experience, is turning and we have numerous requests for our services!

The Government's Environment Bill sets out to tackle the biggest environmental priorities of our time, and reward farmers for the work they undertake for the environment.

In some quarters this may not have gone far enough, but WMRG feels it is a step in the right direction. What we do know is that even before the proposed Government legislation, positive action was already being conducted by the farmers we work with, and in some cases this represented a cultural change, but a change some farmers have embraced. But we also can't forget the few who quietly did all they could for the environment often at their own expense. We work with regional NFU members who have a passion for wildlife and the environment. These are farmers who are proud of their farms, of their soil, of their birds and have real passion and enthusiasm for what they are doing, coupled with a thirst to share their knowledge with others.

We hear their excitement over worm numbers, soil quality, the numbers of farmland birds seen and their ideas to do more. Now is the right time, rather than dwelling on a past we can't change, to increase partnership working with farmers to encourage their actions, support British farming and ensure the positive steps continue for the benefits of a future we can shape. Only by working together are we going to reverse decline.



**The iconic lapwing on farm**

Reversing the fortunes of declining farmland birds is dependent on adequate provision of three things; safe nesting areas, access to invertebrate-rich habitat for feeding chicks during the breeding season and sufficient food to sustain populations through winter.

Countryside stewardship aims to meet these broad requirements and our findings do highlight the difference that these schemes make.

In my view farm efficiency and technological advances have been a double-edged sword in some ways.

While it has increased productivity it has also resulted in the loss of available crop seeds to farmland birds, mainly due to greater harvest efficiency and better storage.

## **NOW IS THE RIGHT TIME, RATHER THAN DWELLING ON A PAST WE CAN'T CHANGE, TO INCREASE PARTNERSHIP WORKING WITH FARMERS**

Long gone are the days when grain was stored temporarily as bundles of sheaves or 'stooks' in the field but instead it is whisked off quickly to secure stores. I think it would be a backward step to revert to these methods today so instead stewardship has come up with the solution of providing designated crops left entirely for wildlife. These can take the form of unharvested parts of regular field crops or bespoke mixes sown specifically to provide a range of seeds. Wild bird seed covers, pollen and nectar margins and supplementary feeding are all designed to provide year round food for farm species. When combined with sensitive tillage methods, managed hedgerows and reduced disturbance these appear to be making a difference. For several years we have surveyed farms across Staffordshire, Shropshire, West Midlands and now Worcestershire. Ringing data supports farmers with real time quantitative and qualitative data and we would suggest that the data we collate offers excellent baseline data both now and in the future. Ringing activities cover a range of species and take place throughout the year. We target a range of species from skylark and wading birds to key farmland bird index species. Our surveys and findings show there are key areas that have a positive impact. In isolation each has benefits, but where combined and balanced they significantly benefit bird populations. Balance is vital.

The last two years have been challenging, with reduced effort due to



**Ringing a woodcock captured on farmland**

Covid-19 restrictions during key parts of the year.

As restrictions lifted we did get out and managed to conduct surveys across the Midlands region and we offer support and advice to farmers in respect of getting the best out of the farms and the schemes that they are in.

So for us, it makes sense that supplementary winter feed is provided in areas near to wild bird seed covers, close to hedgerows and away from tall trees or structures which provide perches for raptors and corvids.

We tend to favour feeding tracks and field margins which allow birds to access to find the food and find cover near should they be disturbed.

We also recommend a rotation of feeding areas to prevent disease.

As well as the commonly known farmland bird species we find we also find red list birds and now and again rare and scarce birds are encountered utilising winter feed.

In early 2021 we caught and ringed a Little Bunting in Worcestershire, see the main picture for an example.

This bird (*Emberiza pusilla*) has a large range but usually can be found from Scandinavia to Eastern Siberia.

Only 240 of these have been encountered in the UK, with most records being from the far north of Scotland and coastal bird observatories.

This was a county first and it was taking advantage of the feed supplied by the farm. Other sightings in the UK of this species are often in wild bird seed covers.

This goes to show the importance of these schemes for a range of species, both common and rare.

We have met up on farm with the NFU and its members, good work is being done and we are keen to keep this going and to hear from you.

I would urge any interested NFU members out there to get in touch with us and we can talk about surveying your farm and seeing what birds are out there!

**+** For further details on the work of the ringers go to [www.westmidlandsringinggroup.co.uk](http://www.westmidlandsringinggroup.co.uk) online; @ringerswm on social media or [wmrg.contact@gmail.com](mailto:wmrg.contact@gmail.com) by email.

## **CAPTURE, RECORD, RING, RELEASE**

The ringers go out on farm and use a technique very similar to lamping or spotlighting - birds are identified through a hand-held thermal imager, the ringers then approach shining a torch on the bird before scooping it up into a net. The technique is not as simple as that though and the ringers display real efficiency, skill and care in what they do.

Different techniques are used, but the ringers often move slowly towards their target and then separate, one keeping the bird illuminated with the other using the net to capture it. Details including measurements are then recorded and the bird is ringed and released.

# Lower Drayton Farm

**Paul Hopwood & Paul Smith provide an insight into wild bird seed ringing during the autumn and winter where large numbers of farmland birds took advantage of the wild bird seed covers.**

Lower Drayton farm was my first ringing site, and I have been ringing there since 2014.

This is a mixed farm with both arable land and livestock, and across the farm there is a large variety of habitats, from arable fields, woodland, pasture, flood meadows and farm buildings.

Last year we ringed excellent numbers of farmland birds on



the farm, and we hoped that this could be repeated in 2021.

The wild bird crop that had served us so well in 2020 sadly didn't materialise as well as hoped, however all was not lost as Richard and Ray Bower had planted several other areas, and the sunflower crop was quite spectacular.

Skylark and Grey Partridge were in good numbers in the autumn, but the real



highlight of the year started in the second week of October when new C permit holder found the start of what was to become an excellent farmland bird flock.

In early November 2020 the flock was feeding on sunflower, sweetcorn and fat hen, and the numbers of cold days were very impressive. We tend to find that the majority of flocking farmland birds are Linnet, and this is repeated across the region, however this was not the case at Lower Drayton. Linnet were present, with 2-300 birds being noted, but the most numerous species present were Chaffinch and Greenfinch. Over 100 Brambling were noted over several days, but they were very mobile. The highest estimated count came in mid November when over 2000 birds were present, again Chaffinch and Greenfinch made up the majority of the numbers.

Between October and December we ringed nearly 600 birds, which included over 250 Greenfinch and over 100 Chaffinch.

Several Tree sparrows were also ringed which was lovely to see. Despite efforts to find more of these highly endangered birds no more were located.

Two Sparrowhawks were present keeping the flock mobile together with Kestrel that was focussed on birds.

What was of interest in October, was despite the farm running a PYO pumpkin event, the flocks of birds present were not displaced. In fact we watched Greenfinch and Linnet landing amongst members of the public!



# Lower Barns Farm

Paul Hopwood provides an insight into the ringing that took place early in year where farmland birds species were targeted using a variety of methods.

Lockdown arrived again in early January resulting in reduced ringing effort at the farm. Even when restrictions were eased, we were still cautious and ringing was conducted by on my own.

Yet again Andy's hard work and efforts had paid off, and good numbers of farmland species were present on the farm. A stunning wild bird seed cover crop had attracted large numbers of birds, and this crop was still providing sustenance into 2021.

Of the birds present, Linnet were most prevalent, with Goldfinch numbers being higher than we had experienced in previous years. The Yellowhammer numbers remained high.

Brambling didn't appear in early 2021 as they had done in previous years which was disappointing, but this is not likely to be as a result of farming.



Corn buntings (my nemesis species) were present throughout late winter and spring with bird numbers in the high 20s.

There was a change in ringing location in 2021, with supplementary winter feed being moved further from the farm. This was beneficial as the area was often quieter and also had a large holly bush which offered our mist nets protection from the wind.

The spectacle of hundreds



of feeding finches coming to the feed is a sight to behold and one that I won't ever tire of experiencing, even if I can't catch the Corn Buntings amongst them!

Our experience of supplementary winter feeding at Andy's has taught us so much, especially around the feeding habits of the birds and the pecking order

Linnet and Reed Bunting are usually first to the feed followed by Chaffinch and Yellowhammer. Corn Bunting often wait for a large gathering of birds to be present before having the confidence to feed.

Sadly the first to the feed, more often than not the Linnets are also the first to be disturbed and their departure often spooks other species.



Scattered ground feeding is by far the most attractive option to birds. Whilst some birds will use ground hoppers, in our experience this is limited to tit species and Chaffinch unless there is an absence of food elsewhere.

We have also utilised feeding tables additional to feeding schemes and these too are more effective than ground hoppers. The benefit of tables is that they can prevent rodents, partridges and pheasants getting an easy meal but we limit their use.



Certain species favour certain seeds, and the mix used covers a wide range of species. Corn Bunting feed on barley, so this is supplemented to the feed.

Despite the restrictions our ringing sessions still produced a good number of birds. From the restrictions easing until April we processed 552 birds from the supplementary feed area.

This included over 200 Linnet, 99 Yellowhammer and over 70 Goldfinch.

I also caught 50 Dunnock during this period, perhaps not everyone's most favoured species this was quite an impressive catch from less than a hundred yards of hedgerow.

A Wheatear was ringed in early April. These birds love formed potato crops and newly cultivated land. It is hoped that we can commence a colour ringing project for this species in 2022. Wheatear regularly pass through the region yearly, heading to breeding grounds, the closest being in the Staffordshire moorlands.

We think that it would be interesting to see where these birds travel to and from to breed and the routes that they travel. These are a popular bird and are often reported by coastal bird observatories and birders across the country.

Another visitor to the potato fields are Yellow Wagtails and these were present again in the spring. A Channel Wagtail (*flavissima x flava*) was present for a few days, and this sub-species has been recorded on the farm



on several occasions of the last few years.

As we entered the breeding season we were pleased to find the farms Kestrels breeding near to their old nest box. Their usual box had been taken over by Jackdaws but farmer Andy had mitigated against this and had installed a new box a short distance away.

The birds took to their new box readily and successfully raised five chicks.

Owl and raptor nest boxes are unpleasant places, full of faeces, but in this

particular box, large numbers of prey items were found.

Considering the chicks insatiable appetites we were amazed at the amount of untouched food present including small mammals, I just wonder if they were full! They were certainly healthy birds of a good weight.

Skylark were targeted during autumn and winter, and we managed to ring good numbers of birds, however our catch was reduced, perhaps due to our favoured fields having had non cereal crops planted.

Woodcock and Snipe were also ringed and at the time of writing I have just located a flock of Golden Plover in one of their favoured fields.

I must take this opportunity to repeat my sincerest condolences to Andy and his family following the passing of Dave in January.

Dave was a huge part of the farm and he will be sadly missed but not forgotten.



# Hedge Funds

**In this article farmer Andrew Roberts talks about hedgerows. Often a controversial topic, especially across social media, however with careful management hedgerows can provide food and shelter for a wider variety of species throughout the year. However did you realise that the management of hedgerows comes at a cost?**

Hedgerows have been part of the fabric of our countryside since the bronze age when lines of trees were left to mark field boundaries and many more have been planted purposefully since.

The enclosures act in the 18th century saw a big increase in planting enabling fields to be divided up and hedge laying was adopted in order to create stock-proof boundaries.

This management of hedgerows has diminished over the years however with the introduction of barbed wire fences, the flail and the reduction in the labour force in the countryside.



A hedge at Andy's farm in South Staffordshire. These hedges are home to a vast amount of insects and birds.

Top right - winter feeding along one of Andy's hedgerows

The loss of mixed farming has reduced the need for stock-proof boundaries in large parts of farmland so hedgerows have ceased to be an asset from a farming point of view but have become an inconvenience.

Our farm is mostly arable now but a look at some of the field names reveals a more pastoral history. Fields such as 'Night Pasture', 'Bull Meadow' and 'Rudge Meadow' have been in arable for many years but would have held livestock once upon a time.

The hedgerows around these fields are no longer needed to keep stock but they still occupy land without creating any income.

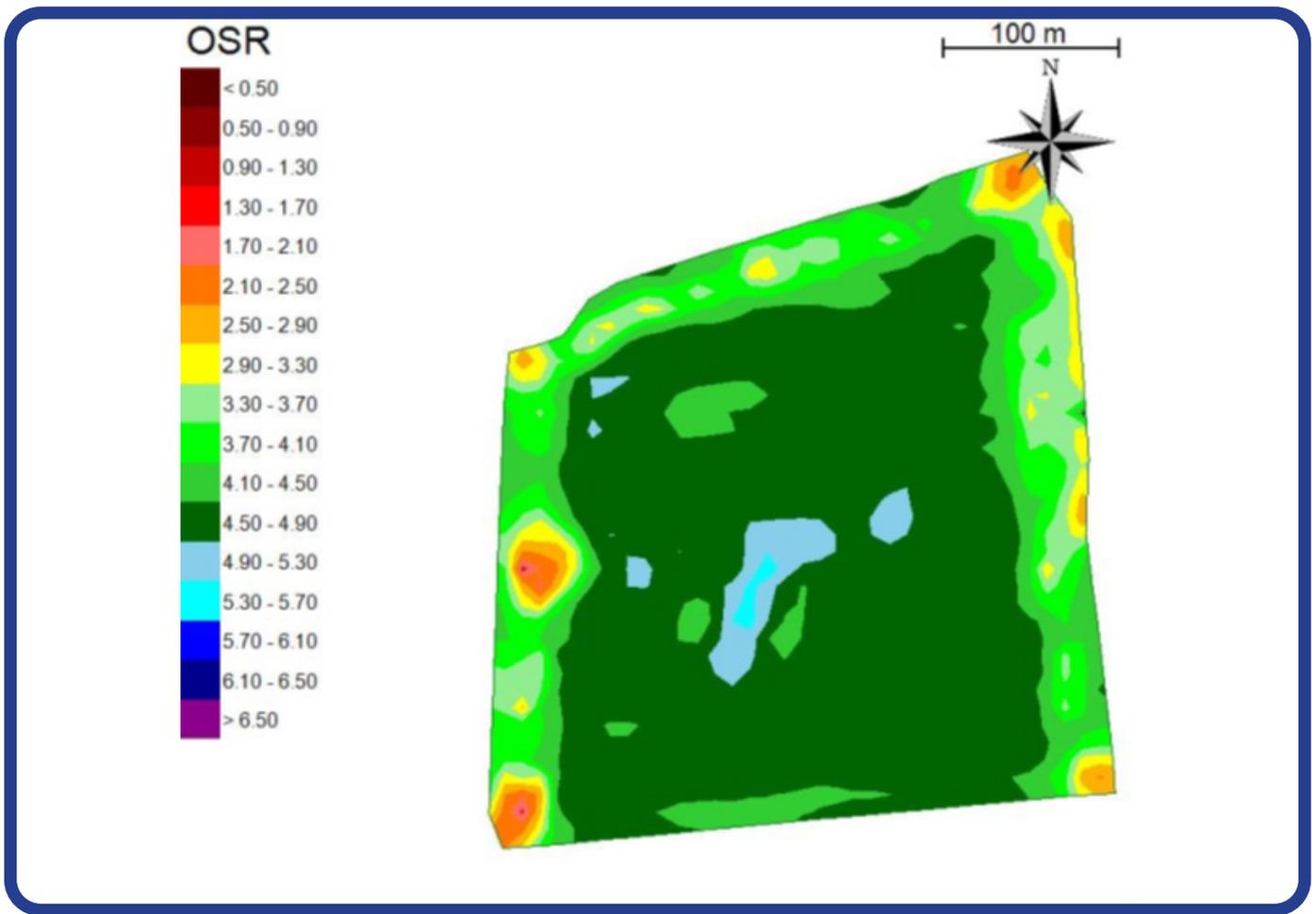
They also have an impact on the yield of adjacent crops. Tractors have to turn when they reach a hedge when working the land and this causes compaction leading to lower yields on headlands. This shows up clearly on yield maps we produce with the aid of satellite GPS and yield monitors on the combine harvester. This incompatibility with mechanical agriculture was a key driver in the removal of hedgerows in the post-war era.



The tide turned with the introduction of stewardship schemes in the late 90s. We started to view hedges for their ecological benefits and grants for planting halted the net loss of our hedgerows.

We came to appreciate the benefits they provide for wildlife such as nesting cover, food for pollinators and for birds in the winter.

Our hedgerows provide breeding habitat for species such as Yellowhammer, Whitethroat and Dunnock and with the adoption of rotational cutting they are producing more flowers and more berries to benefit a wider range of species. They are still a costly feature to maintain on the farm however. Our hedge trimming bill is over £3000 per annum and we don't receive any payments to



(above) Yield of an oilseed rape field in tonnes per hectare showing lower yields on the three turning headlands bordering hedgerows.

to cover this.

Less frequent cutting should in theory help us reduce this but allowing hedges to get bigger does encroach on productive land and this is most significant on smaller farms with smaller fields, more hedgerows and therefore more turning headlands.

If you continue to let hedgerows grow out, eventually they require coppicing or laying which can incur large costs.

As we enter a new era of farming subsidies based on payments for public goods we need to fund our hedges

properly if we want to keep them and enhance their ecological status. Up until now stewardship schemes have not compensated farmers enough in my opinion for the work required to maintain them and the land they occupy.

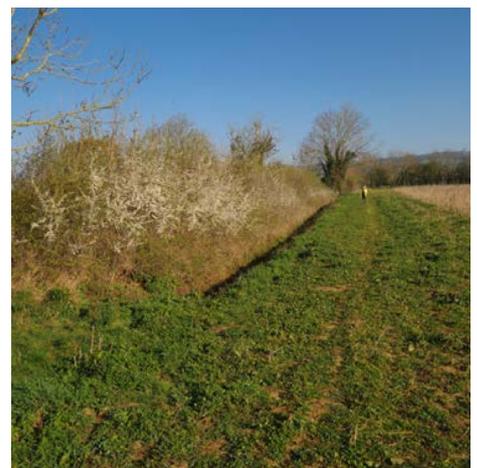
Other less ecologically valuable features such as beetle banks and grass margins have been funded better

This should be a new golden age for hedgerows as regenerative farming comes to the fore.

Hedgerows can play a part in helping to prevent soil

erosion and with new carbon markets becoming available they may have a lot to contribute as carbon stores themselves.

With these new opportunities and the right incentives put in place for planting and management, hedgerows can once again become an asset to the farm.



# Trent meadows - King's Bromley

**Paul Smith who recently obtained his C permit for ringing, talks about his small farmland sites located in the Trent valley. The site has surprised with some special birds!**

I have been ringing with WMRG for three years now. I started helping Paul Hopwood but after a few sessions I was keen to become a ringer, so I applied for my trainee permit.

Over the next few years I spent as much time as I could ringing with the group and I got to experience some brilliant birds and learned a lot.

After two years of training Paul put me through for my C permit in the summer and in August I got my licence.

Paul had told me that my development would continue when I was ringing alone, but under his supervision and I was keen to start.

My site is mainly flood meadow and unimproved grassland with small areas of scrub, woodland and a section of the River Trent



There have been lots of birds at the site, and it is common to see both Great White and Little Egrets. Wigeon and Teal use the flooded meadows in winter and Snipe are present in the marshy areas.

As for other species, I was determined to find out. We had caught a Cetti's Warbler at the site in winter which was coming to a feeding station but I was interested to see what else would turn up.

A big part of ringing is understanding birds but you have to understand how they behave and how to catch them and this site looked tricky.

We identified a row of trees along a drainage ditch that we thought would be good for a net ride. However the ditch was too deep to cross, so I made a removable bridge to allow us to erect some nets.

This proved to be a brilliant set up and the majority of warblers were caught here, including some unusual visitors. I caught Spotted Flycatcher, Whinchat (left), **10 Cetti's Warblers** (below) and a Tree sparrow.

In total this one net caught 88 birds in August/Sept of 16 species, the most numerous being Chiffchaff



I also caught 2 Kingfishers from the site, which was lovely.

After warbler passage, the site became a lot quieter, and whilst I did catch 36 Redwing things slowed down.

As we entered winter the wildfowl appears on the meadows and we caught Woodcock dazzling.

Cetti's warblers were still calling in December and I hope that these birds stay until 2022.

# Cuckoo Bank and surrounding area

**In this article local birder Ian Ward provides an overview of Cuckoo Bank, newly designated Chasewater and the Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths SSSI.**

In the early 1990s Cuckoo Bank was the site of an open cast mining development, with the loss of some of an existing heathland SSSI. The permission to mine came with conditions including the translocation and protection of existing habitats, and restoration of habitats after mining operations.

By 2001 the coal extraction had finished and the restoration of both wet and dry heath, bog/ heathland pools and acid grassland habitats had been completed.

In 2010 the site had gone full circle and was included in the newly designated Chasewater and the Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths SSSI.

With its location between Cannock Chase to the north and Chasewater to the south it forms a valuable habitat link and a wildlife corridor.



The site is a mix of many different habitats including lowland acidic heath, bogs, wetlands, willow and alder carr, scrub, hedgerows, farmland, mature birch woodland and rough grassland which provides for a rich and varied flora and fauna.

A key element of the site not always considered as a component of the habitat is the altitude. This elevated position makes it an attractive staging point for migrating birds in the spring and autumn, and a great vantage point for observing the movements of birds in all seasons.



As a local birdwatching patch Cuckoo Bank is quite large, around 350 hectares, and takes a lot of time and legwork to cover.

The Chasewater Wildlife website has a detailed map of the area and also provides a list of recent wildlife sightings.

[www.chasewater.org.uk](http://www.chasewater.org.uk)



Grasshopper Warbler

Redstart, Whitethroat, Tree Pipit, Stonechat and Whinchat are all regularly present but will be concentrated in the most sheltered sections of the fields, hedges and rough margins.

Along with the common migrants there is a chance of rarer occurrences such as Yellow Wagtail, Black Redstart, Ring Ouzel and Pied Flycatcher.

To the east and west of the arable fields and about a mile apart are 2 sections of woodland. Both woods have a good selection of breeding species, including Willow Tit (a locally declining resident).

In winter the southern section can hold large flocks of Siskin and Redpoll, roosting winter thrushes and Blackbirds, Stonechat, Meadow Pipit and Reed Bunting.

The many pools are key to the presence of the many species of dragonfly and Reed and Sedge Warblers use the reed fringes of these same pools to breed.

The arable fields and hedgerows to the north of the main track are excellent for breeding larks, finches and buntings.

Lapwing still breed in reduced numbers and there are occasional Grey Partridge.



Thermal image of Jack Snipe

In winter flocks of Greenfinch, Linnet, Meadow Pipit, Reed Bunting and Skylark accumulate in the stubble fields and rough margins, with Yellowhammer and Bullfinch frequenting the hedgerows.

On clear evenings birds can be seen flying to the arable fields to feed in the wet stubble and grassy fields.

These included Woodcock, Common Snipe, Jack snipe, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Wigeon and Teal.

It was always difficult to quantify the numbers and species involved due to the time of day and poor light conditions.

It has been great to see the results of the thermal sessions carried out by WMRG backing up my observations with accurate observations and some incredible counts, especially Skylark, Jack Snipe and Woodcock.

The information obtained by WMRG may help inform land management policy in the future.

The importance of the surrounding farmland can not be underestimated, and in 2021 the over wintered stubbles and fallow fields were found to contain significant numbers of birds, in particular Skylark and Jack Snipe, with 60+ Jack snipe seen regularly.

The fields contained many wet patches and this was clearly attractive to wading birds.

The future of this farmland is unclear, and as Cannock expands there is a possibility



Arable land at Cuckoo bank, found to be alive with birds at night



Jack snipe

the land will be earmarked for development.

Whatever the future holds for the arable section of the site, consideration must be given to the importance of this area, not only in the daytime, but also at night.

This is just a taster of Cuckoo Bank's varied set of habitats and the wildlife possibilities.

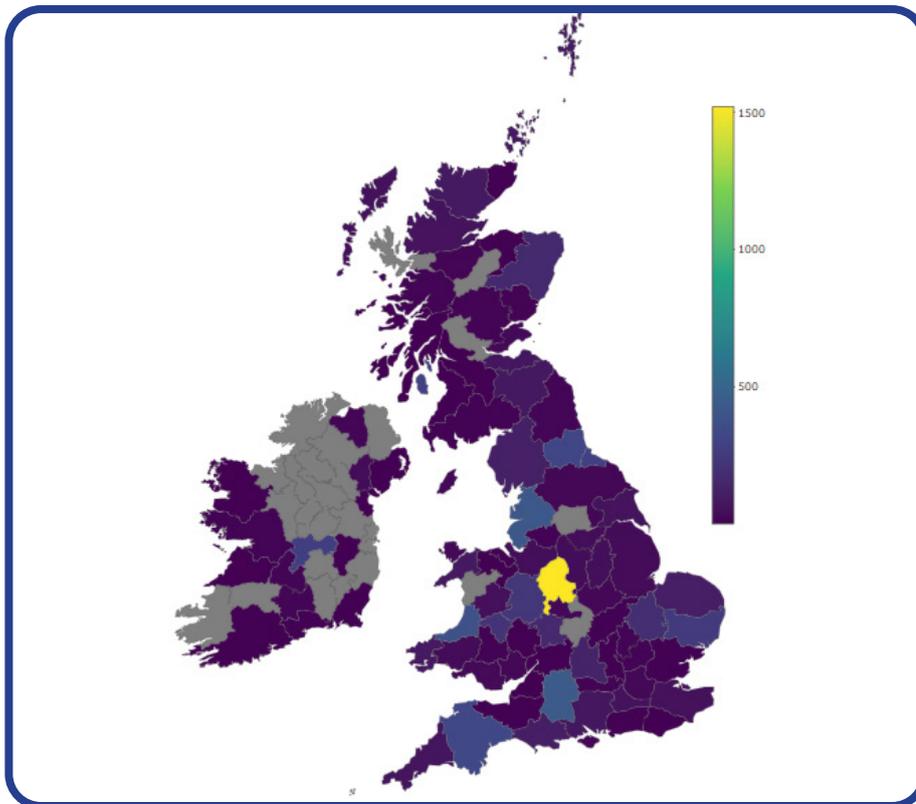
There are no hides or visitor facilities, just you, your observations and the vast array of flora and fauna present throughout the year

WMRG would like to thank Ian for all of his support during 2021.

Species	Number ringed
Fieldfare	1
Grey Partridge	2
Jack Snipe	53
Redwing	5
Skylark	95
Snipe	1
Woodcock	5
Yellowhammer	1
Grand Total	163

# The WMRG Skylark Project

Following our huge success monitoring the region's Skylark, we are now working on an exciting scientific project to further our knowledge of this species



A spatial map showing Skylark ringed in the UK 2010 - 2020  
[https://stephenvickers.shinyapps.io/ringing\\_map/](https://stephenvickers.shinyapps.io/ringing_map/)

Since 2016 we have been spending a lot of our time targeting Skylark and in this period we have ringed over 1500 birds! This is a significant figure for the UK, and was only possible due to our thermal imaging work.

The above map goes some way to show the impact that our work has had on Skylark ringing totals!

Skylarks completely moult their feathers during the autumn, which impacts on the ability for ringers to correctly age them.

Due to the numbers previously ringed across the UK we have been unable to establish the sex of a bird

unless the wing length is at an extreme end of a spectrum.

From a bird ringing aspect, these are a difficult species to age and sex. Ringing literature such as Lars Svensson's *Identification Guide to European Passerines* offers little information to inform ringers.

We have been taking more biometrics from these birds, in order to help us and other ringers across the world age and sex these birds more accurately,.

We started to identify some interesting patterns and wanted to improve on this and further develop

our knowledge. As a result we applied to the South Staffs Water Pebble Fund for sponsorship of an exciting project, and our application was approved.

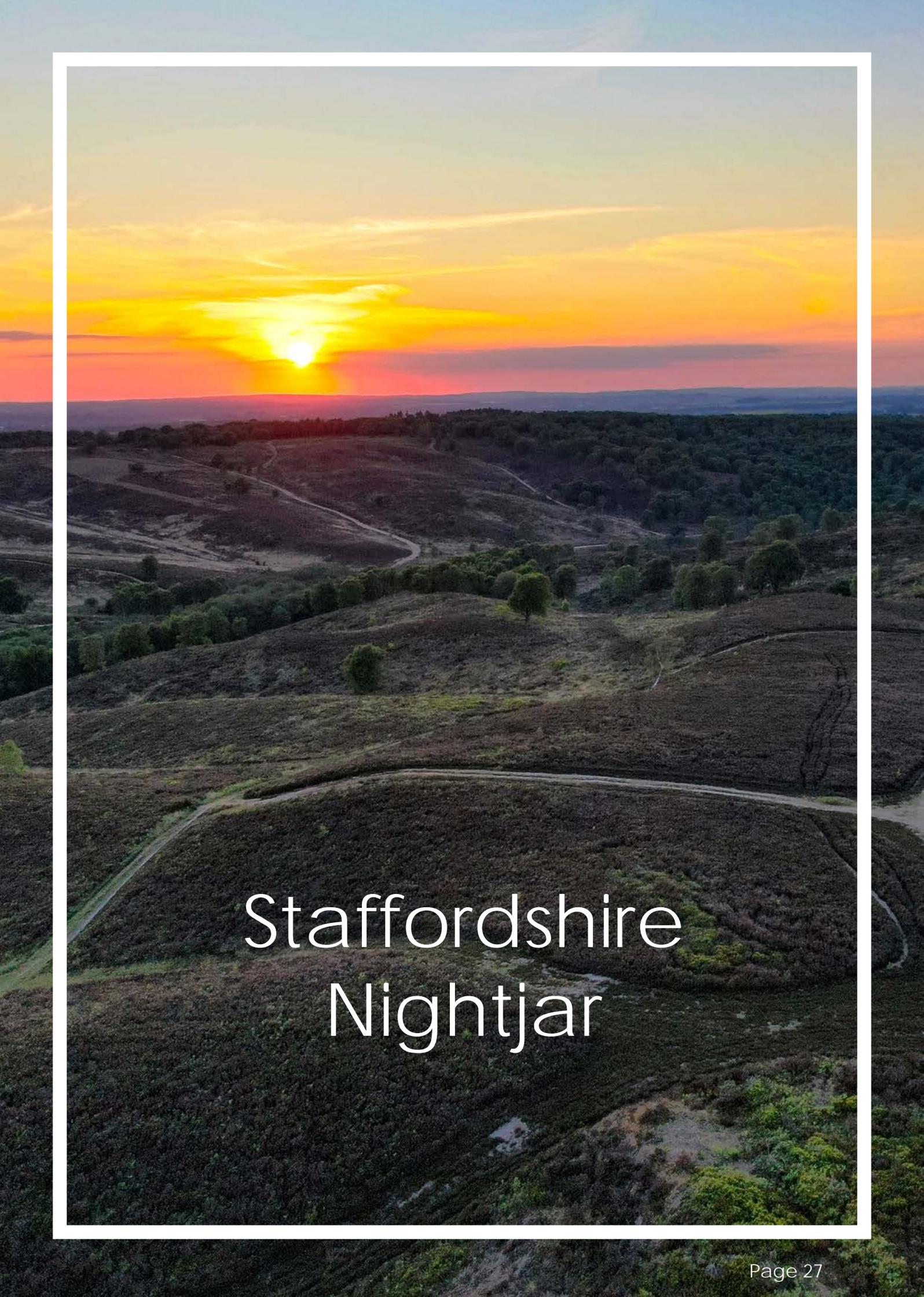
Between July and November we took a DNA sample (under strict licence from the BTO) from 150 birds

Combined with biometric data the project looks at sexual dimorphism. This involves looking at variables within the data to understand which of the biometrics show a preference for sexual dimorphism. This will then be confirmed by DNA testing.

The results will also to more accurately identify the male & female ratio, which will inform ornithological knowledge in the future.



The Skylark *Alauda arvensis* depiction of total head length measurement being taken



# Staffordshire Nightjar

# Nightjar in Ringing 2021

**2021 was a fascinating year for these birds, site fidelity was repeatedly seen across Cannock Chase, yet one bird decided to go on his travels!**

Our project aim over a two year period (2019 - 2020) was to locate up to 10 nests on areas of Cannock Chase that had been defined as disturbed or undisturbed.

The specific objectives included

- Monitor nesting success through to hatching and levels of disturbance through using appropriate technology.
- Assess fledging success through appropriate monitoring of breeding pairs through to fledging.

The project continued in 2021 and we were able to survey land across Staffordshire County Council, Forestry Commission and Staffs Wildlife Trust estates

Covid rules and the 'stay local' advice for exercise increased footfall and use of the chase.

The birds arrived as we expected in May and were spread across the whole of the chase. It was interesting to note that the heathland area numbers appeared to have increased. It is possible that this is to do with the heather management being conducted.



Nightjar nest and eggs



Trail camera footage at one nest site was obtained which provides a great insight into the unruly nature of Nightjar chicks, I would suggest they would be every parent's nightmare.

We were informed of a further nest site on Shoal Hill Common, but sadly this was predated by what appeared to be Corvids.

Whilst not in Staffordshire we also caught a Nightjar at Marsh Lane Nature Reserve. The origins of this Nightjar are unknown, but we would like to think it was one of our Staffordshire birds.

Another fantastic recovery was recapturing one a male originally ringed on Cannock Chase on the 12th August 2020 at Bishops Wood on the Staffordshire/Shropshire border on 22nd July 2021! The bird had moved 17 miles away from the Chase.

This is a really interesting recovery and one which raises many questions as to why it had not returned or had strayed from the Chase.

As we mentioned in our 2020 report there appeared to be few female birds in the UK and it is possible that this bird wasn't able to find a mate on the Chase so was prospecting habitat to improve his chances. We think it worked and that this bird held territory and potentially raised a brood at Bishop's Wood.

It's been another great season for the regions Nightjar, here's to 2022

## 2021 NIGHTJAR RESULTS



**40 Nightjar processed**

**4 nest sites monitored**

**26 new birds caught**

**14 recaptures**

**26 males**

**3 females**

**4 chicks and 9 juveniles**

# Nightjar in Staffordshire

**In this article Dr Huw Lloyd, Senior Lecturer in Wildlife Ecology explains why this is an extraordinary time for ornithologists due to the unprecedented rate of change in the ways in which birds are studied.**

The traditional forms for finding and counting birds (mist-netting, point counts, transects, spot-mapping) are now being supplemented by remote sensing technologies, such as thermal imagery and passive acoustic recorders, and with citizen science programmes.

These new technologies and initiatives have transformed the way in which we engage with birds, how we collect information, and what we traditional think of as 'data'.

Thanks to citizen science programmes, regular daily activities such as going to work, dog walking, running, cycling, shopping, a peaceful 30 minutes on a park bench having lunch, waiting at a train station – can now be considered as opportunities to collect data.

Even a simple observation of a species, or a video recording captured on a phone of a birds' behaviour, or finding a nest in your garden – represent important data points which can be used by scientists and conservation organisations.

Thermal imagery and passive acoustic recorders are changing how we are able to find birds and revealing some remarkable insights into the more secretive nocturnal habits of even some of our more



so-called better known species. The award-winning approach taken by the West Midland Ringing Group – using hand-held thermal imagery for nocturnal bird counts and mist-netting - has revealed that some field habitats that were previously considered to be very poor for birds, based on diurnal surveys, actually represent really important feeding and roosting habitats for birds. Passive acoustic recorders have captured the imagination of many enthusiasts across the birdwatching spectrum, leading to a phenomenal global network of people tracking nocturnal migration (#nocmig) and helping us learn so much more about bird vocalisations. These efforts are helping scientists quantify the enormity of nocturnal migration, revealing some astonishing new findings about not only which bird species travel at night, but also when and where!

Surprisingly, we still know so little about the birds at numerous sites across the West Midlands, even those sites that are on our doorstep.

Over the last 5 years I have been guilty of completely overlooking one of my local patches – Bishops Wood, situated near the village of Cheswardine, and only 10 minutes from Market Drayton.

On my first visit to this large forestry mosaic of habitats, I was struck by how suitable the site seemed to be for all sorts of amazing species such as Woodcock, Nightjar, Pied Flycatcher and many others – yet I could not find anyone who had spent any significant amount of time birding the woodlands and clearings, nor find any substantial bird list for the site. It wasn't until the COVID-19 pandemic, which gave me an opportunity to find out more about the birds at Bishops Wood.



Top centre - Huw Lloyd with a Bishop's Wood Nightjar  
Bottom right - Nightjar

Getting the dogs out of the car for the very first lockdown exercise period, I was greeted by the iconic song of a male Common Cuckoo – which turned out to be the first of >80 species I have noted for this site since 2020 – including some of the highest numbers of Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff I have seen in the area. Spotted Flycatcher, Redstart, Pied Flycatcher have also been recorded but are not commonly seen.

Between March and May each year, over 50 Common Crossbills can be seen daily feeding on pine cones, with large numbers of Siskin and Lesser Redpoll also present. Hobby can be seen hunting over the woods in July. Tree pipit, Treecreeper and Bullfinch can be seen daily, as are Common Raven, and Woodcock are commonly seen and heard at dusk throughout April to July.

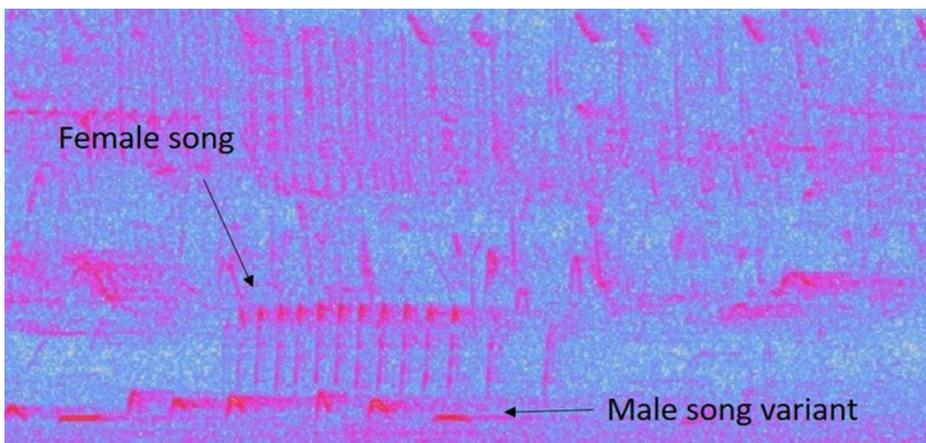
Deploying passive acoustic recorders quickly revealed that up to four different male and three different female Common Cuckoos regularly inhabit Bishops Wood, where males and females can

start singing very early in the morning (0350am) or finish singing very late at night (~2210pm). Furthermore, males display some remarkable variation in their call characteristics – they can sing from one and up to eight “cu” syllables in their “cu-coo” songs (which would make the longest calling bout “cu-cu-cu-cu-cu-cu-cu-cu-coo”), depending on the number of females and other males in their immediate vicinity. Females also sing their bubbling chuckle song regularly, but very rarely do different females completely overlap in their singing bouts. Goshawk is also present and has been recorded singing at dusk, at different times throughout the night, and at dawn. #nocmig recordings have revealed that Bishops Wood and its surrounding fields are regularly used by Quail, Barn Owl, and Mandarin Duck. Lapwing, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Common Sandpiper, Common Scoter, Little Ringed Plover and Water Rail are just some of the species that have been recorded flying over the woods at night.

But perhaps my favourite finding has to be that of European Nightjar – which I first recorded singing in late May 2020.

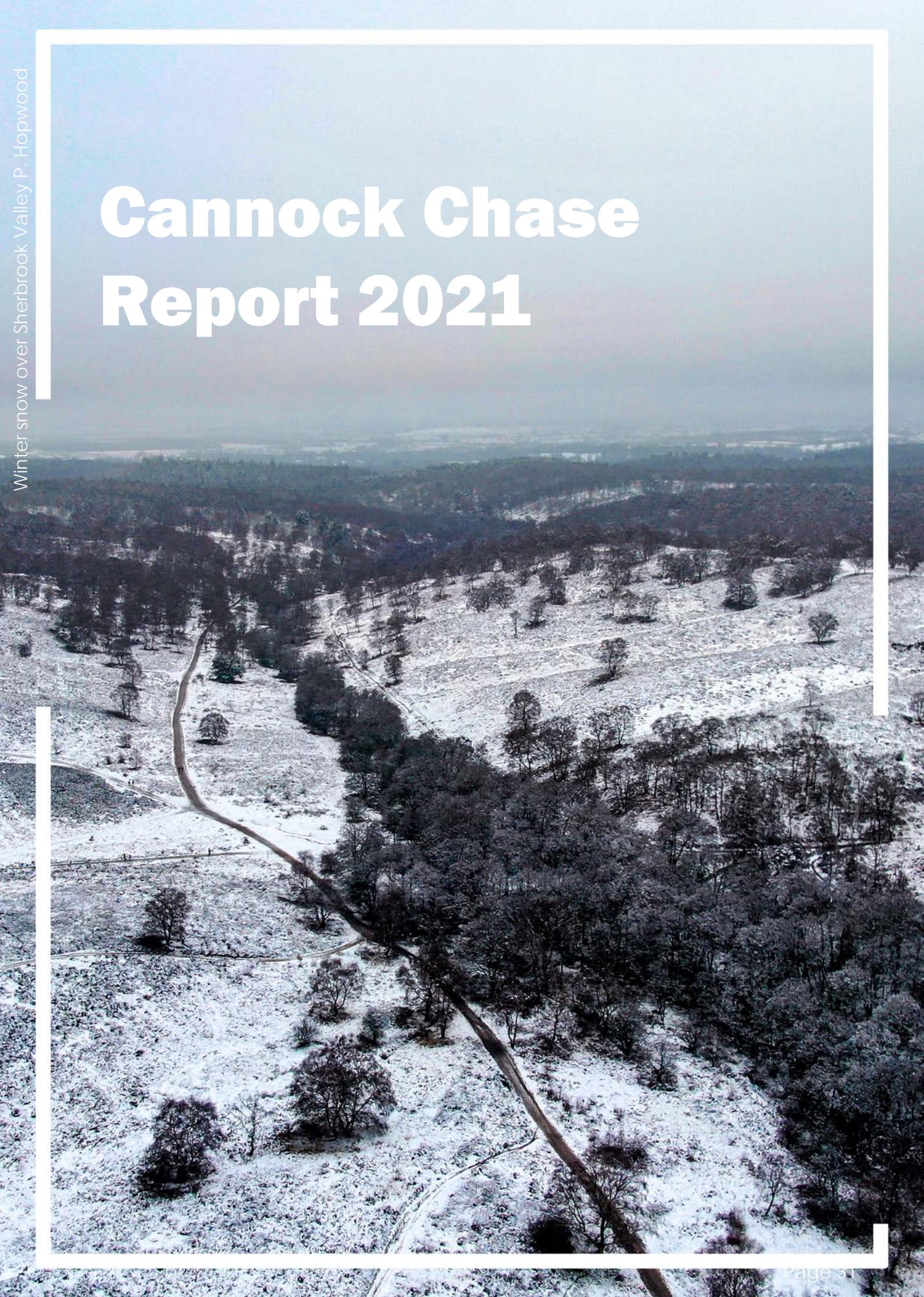
This year the birds returned almost two weeks earlier than last year, and settled on the same territories. Thanks to the expertise of the West Midland Ringing Group, we now know that at least one territorial male captured in 2021 was ringed the previous year at Cannock Chase. This amazing recapture leads us to speculate about where else they might be in the area. We know they have been found near Loggerheads, but perhaps they are even closer to Bishops Wood, perhaps at the nearby Burnt Wood reserve? What about the Maer Hills? Where do the juveniles from Bishops Wood disperse to? And what about the Cannock Chase population – does this serve as a source population for a wider, regional nightjar meta-population?

Forestry England have been extremely supportive for our work at Bishops Wood, and are both passionate and committed about doing more for nightjar (and biodiversity) conservation in the region. Looking at any map of the West Midlands reveals similar areas of habitat all within easy movement distances for nightjars. Bird watchers, #nocmig enthusiasts, and citizen scientists from all over the West Midlands can now help in solving some of these mysteries.



Analysing passive audio recording sonograms of Cuckoo!

# Cannock Chase Report 2021



# Cannock Chase report 2021

**Cannock Chase is a key site for the group. We have access to the Forestry England estate and Staffordshire County Council land, which provides a range of habitats, and a variety of species.**

Cannock Chase was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1958 because of its beautiful landscape, its wildlife and its history.

Our main work on the Chase typically starts in late April, early May when the Nightjar and Cuckoo arrive, although members of the team are also out trying to locate potential breeding territories of birds of prey.

In recent years our work has also involved surveying specific areas of the chase for Forestry England. This is vitally important within an active working forest and we are often called upon to provide data in respect of sensitive and Schedule 1 species where forest



Woodlark

operations are planned.

The data we provide ensures that there is no impact on Schedule 1 nesting birds. There are several Schedule 1 species that nest on the Chase, so this is critical work.

Spring saw the arrival of migrants, with Nightjar, Cuckoo and warblers being noted across the area.

Woodlark, another Chase staple species are often at their most visible in the spring as they display and call across the open areas, their song is often the herald of spring. The Woodlark is an unassuming bird, fairly secretive outside of the breeding season, and often difficult to see, as more often than not, they walk around rather than fly!

Spring is a brilliant time to visit

the Chase, it is alive with birds and you don't have to walk too far to be immersed in a very special landscape, brimming with wildlife.

2021 was a great year for Cuckoo with numerous birds being seen. However these are very clever and our catches don't reflect the number of birds present. It is not unusual to have more than one Cuckoo sitting on our mist net poles.



Stonechat nest

Stonechat were also present across the heathland with Sherbrook Valley and Brindley Heath being strongholds for these species. Please keep your eyes peeled for our colour ringed birds.

Nightjar are an iconic Cannock Chase bird and can be seen at dusk and dawn from May until September. They are an inquisitive bird and can be found in the more open



An early Tree Pipit from Cannock Chase in 2021

areas.

Nightjar are ground nesting and may nest close to paths, so during the breeding season (May to September) it is worth keeping dogs on leads on paths to protect their nests. Our summers are filled with the distinctive Churr or Cu-ick of the Nightjar and members of WMRG put considerable effort to survey these birds.

We do know that Nightjar are a popular species for people to watch, but we would ask that people refrain from playing calls or waving handkerchiefs to attract the birds as this may draw birds away from their territories.



Nightjar nest!

were ringed.

2021 was a better year for warblers with nearly twice as many birds ringed, but Redpoll and Siskin numbers were significantly lower, with

over 200 less than were ringed in 2020. However ringing effort was reduced considerably.

Garden Warbler numbers were particularly impressive this season.

We only conducted three Redwing sessions this season and we found that there weren't as many birds as had been noted in 2020. Sadly the catch was only around 13% of the 2021.

We would like to thank Staffordshire County Council and Forestry England for their continued support and for allowing us access to the Chase.



Male Nightjar

Details of this years Nightjar survey is found later in this report.

As the Nightjar season comes to an end, and after the Cuckoos have left we turn our attention to warbler species.

2020 was a good year for warblers on the chase, with over 200 ringed. Added to this 266 Redpoll and Siskin

Blackbird	3
Blackcap	87
Blue Tit	1
Chiffchaff	169
Cuckoo	1
Dunnock	1
Garden Warbler	18
Goldcrest	11
Goshawk	3
Great Tit	1
Lesser Redpoll	37
Linnet	2
Long-tailed Tit	4
Nightjar	40
Redwing	41
Reed Bunting	2
Reed Warbler	2
Robin	5
Siskin	4
Song Thrush	1
Stonechat	10
Tree Pipit	2
Whitethroat	20
Willow Warbler	68
Woodcock	2
Woodlark	2
Wren	5
Total	542



SEVERN  
TRENT

# Our Work with Severn Trent

**Our work continues with Severn Trent. This was a year of highs and lows. We were able to return to some of the sites, however across the UK it appeared that Hirundine (Swallows and martins) numbers were down.**

Following the easing of restrictions in 2021 we once again started our work across the Severn Trent estate.

Fortunately we were able to revisit Shifnal and Penkridge in 2021. These two sites have historically been two of our most productive locations with Shifnal holding a significant population of Reed Warblers and Reed Buntings.

Penkridge's open filter beds has attracts hirundines and three wagtail species across the year.

Being able to return to Shifnal was excellent news and we were keen to started.

Even before we started ringing, it was staggering to see the work Severn Trent



Refurbished reedbed at Shifnal STW

had conducted during our absence, especially to two of the phragmites reed beds which had previously had issues.

The beds had been totally refurbished and re planted with phragmites. By the end of the growing season the new growth was already 3ft tall, and in 2022 both refurbished beds should be back to normal.

Elsewhere across the sites we monitor we had a brilliant take up of our small passerine nest boxes, most of which were occupied.

Hirundines were present in good numbers at Burntwood and Roundhill once again was alive with warblers. A new site at Marchington was also visited twice during 2021 and the small reed bed there was found to be home to

several pairs of Reed Warblers.

Sadly across the sites, and across the country hirundine numbers were significantly reduced. It is believed this may be due to the birds encountering severe weather conditions in Europe during spring migration in both 2020 and 2021. This decline was clearly visible across the sites which had open percolating filter beds. An average count of Swallow and House Martin in cool conditions during the spring at Penkridge would see around 500 birds present. In 2021 in these same conditions saw around 50 birds present, representing a 90% decline. We can only hope that these far travelled birds have the ability to bounce back from the last few years and in the future we will once again be able to see good numbers at Severn Trent sites.



Yellow Wagtail



Barn Swallow

Tawny Owl at Shifnal Sewage works. P. Hopwood



# Year of the Owl

# Severn Trent - Year of the owl.

In this article Ben Dolan, Group Treasurer describes our owl based project across the sites we access on the Severn Trent Estate. Sadly this was impacted by COVID-19, but was extended into 2021.



Tawny Owl

Due to Covid last year we extended the Severn Trent 'Year of the Owl' project in to 2021, to enable us to cover as many Severn Trent sites as we could.

2020 saw some fantastic results with most sites recording Tawny and Barn Owl. The key elements of owl's success at and around Severn Trent sites is the limited amount of disturbance, excellent habitat and food supply.

Our 2021 results yet again provided positive results at all of the Severn Trent sites we surveyed.

We used several different techniques to survey the sites, all of which were dependent on access, site suitability and weather conditions.

## Thermal Technology

Enabling us to give an accurate picture and

reducing disturbance and time in the field.

## Audio Recording Equipment

At several sites we deployed 'Audio moth' passive acoustic recorders within sites to record calls. After a few days these were collected and the recordings were analysed on computers using 'Audacity' software.

## Mist netting

Where suitable we used traditional mist nets in an attempt to catch owls. These are a fine meshed net, fixed to poles. The nets contain pockets which catch the birds when they fly into the net. Birds are removed immediately and ringed with a uniquely coded metal BTO ring. The birds are then released. The ring details are entered onto the BTO 'Demon' system via a computer system.



Little Owl

If the ringed bird is encountered elsewhere; caught by us, other ringers or found injured or dead, the finder can report this ring number. The resulting data helps us understand the life history of the bird.

## Audio Lures

Audio lures; recordings of owls can also be used to illicit responses from other birds. The use of audio lures is



Barn Owl caught at Penkridge STW

carefully controlled and these are played for a very limited time.

As owls are very territorial, responses often take place immediately and any auditory response or subsequent sighting (with thermal) are recorded. This is often a very efficient method to record local birds and surveys can be carried

out very quickly.

### Nest Box monitoring

We have installed specific nest boxes for owls at Severn Trent sites. These are monitored during the breeding season.

At the end of 2020 and in preparation of the 2021 three boxes were installed at Roundhill. These were for Barn Owl, Tawny Owl and Little Owl. Sadly these were not used in 2021 by owls. A further box at Roundhill was found to be broken during the year and we will be repairing it in the months to come.

Barn wls are protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside

Act 1981 and we have specific licences to allow us to monitor this species.

During 2021 saw a further record of breeding Barn Owls in a nest box provided by STW, with 4 healthy chicks ringed from an original check of 6 eggs.

### Year of the Owl final thoughts

It is wonderful to see a large company such a Severn Trent that have many sites in the region taking positive action to support wildlife, including owls by improving habitat or erecting nest boxes.

Our hope is that other companies with who have

small or large estates or holdings consider making a space for wildlife wherever they can.

Small changes, that do not cost the earth can have a really positive impact on nature. Furthermore the wellbeing benefits of staff being close to nature can be really positive.

The table below shows the joint results of 2020/21 survey data. Most of the sites that we visited had owls present or in the near vicinity.



Site	Barn Owl	Tawny Owl	Little Owl	SE Owl
Walsall Wood	1	2	0	0
Peters Lane	1	4	1	0
Little Aston	2	2	0	1
Colton	1	0	0	0
Coalport	0	2	0	0
Barston	0	1	0	0
Minworth	2	2	0	0
Penkrige	2	2	0	1
Kinver	0	2	0	0
Roundhill	0	4	0	0
Shifnal	0	2	0	0
Checkley	0	0	1	0
Rugeley	1	2	1	0
Shenstone	2	1	0	0
Leek	0	2	0	0
Froghall	0	3	0	0
Waterhouses	0	1	0	0
Cheddleton	1	2	0	0
Ruyton X1 towns	0	2	0	0
Prees	0	1	0	0

# Roundhill, Nr Stourbridge

**Paul Hopwood & John Overfield provide an overview of a year at Roundhill in 2021. Activities were reduced at the site, due to Covid and John's move to Cornwall.**

We managed to trim the paths we created last year, and hopefully this will make sessions in the future easier.

The trees planted in late 2020 were doing well and the majority of them have survived.

After being away from the site due to Covid it was great to see the staff on site had undertaken some brilliant work installing reptile and amphibian mats. Work also included the innovative use of recycling to create a small pond.

Several bee hives had also been sited at the works, which will be a great addition.

The nest boxes that were installed last year were all checked and most of them were had signs of use, this was great news.



Nest boxes across Roundhill with chicks present.



The boxes across the site were numbered and the following provides details of the nest recording.

Box 5 was found to have 5 well grown Great Tit chicks with parents actively feeding them.

Box 6 had 11 Blue Tit chicks in it. Whilst the number of chicks is high, in some nests 15 have been found.

Box 9 - an open fronted box had 4 Robin chicks present. The birds were on the verge of fledging and were not disturbed.

Box 10 - had 4 Great Tit eggs, but it appeared the female was still be laying

Box 13 - sadly had a dead Wren in the entry hole and 3 cold eggs inside. The poor weather during the breeding season is likely to have been the reason.

The old Barn Owl Box was found to be broken and we will look to repair the base in

in 2022.

The new Barn Owl, Tawny and Little Owl boxes were not occupied, but we know they are in the area and at some stage they will find them.

We suspect Tawny Owls have located their box and pellets were found close by. It may be that birds are using it to roost.

On the ringing front, efforts were reduced due to John moving to Cornwall. We had hoped that he would visit more frequently, but Covid yet again had an impact. We still caught Blackcap and Whitethroat, but this was limited to a single session. We hope that 2022 will be somewhat easier for us and that we can conduct more regular sessions.

Once again we need to thank the management team for allowing us access this year.



A series of paths were cut by members of WMRG which can be seen in this aerial shot

# Shifnal STW

**After a year away from the site, it was great to get back in during the summer. This is a lovely site with a special reedbed which Severn Trent have recently refurbished.**

Shifnal is one of our favoured Severn Trent sites and over the years we have processed over 1000 birds from there.

The mix of habitat, with a substantial phragmites reedbed, woodland and scrub is home to many species throughout the year.

Regular species include Pied and Grey Wagtail, Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting. However there have also been sightings of Hobby, Yellow-browed Warbler, Marsh and Willow Tit, and Kingfisher.

Due to Covid restrictions we missed the opportunity to target hirundines in the spring and come the summer, they were hawking too high over the trees to be caught.

The refurbished reed beds will be incredible and will no doubt increase the amount of breeding habitat for Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler and



Recently refurbished Phragmites reed bed.

Reed Buntings.

We were also impressed with the installation of a new bug hotel at the site, this was an extremely impressive residence, probably akin to The Ritz for humans. A photo of this fancy new residence can be seen below.

We also found orchids on the grass banks this year which are the first we have recorded on site.



Warbler ringing sessions produced 14 Reed Warbler and 3 Sedge Warbler. The reduction in numbers partly due to the growth of the phragmites in the reed bed which prevented nets being erected. This was rectified by Severn Trent after the breeding season had finished.

As winter approached we conducted our first roost session for Reed Buntings which produced 30 birds. Of note were several recaptured birds from previous sessions in 2016,



Reed Warbler

2018 and 2019.

The numbers of birds which visit the site to roost, remains well over 150 but this will increase throughout the winter months. The two refurbished beds should also increase numbers.

Three Water Rail were noted in late November, with one escaping our nets. Tawny Owl were also noted and a Barn Owl was seen on the adjacent farmland.

A further 3 Grey Wagtail and 1 Pied Wagtail were colour ringed.



Reed Bunting

# Penkridge STW

In this section Paul Hopwood reports on another season at Penkridge STW. This has been troubling year for Swallow and House Martin across Europe and sadly this was reflected at Penkridge



Historically Penkridge has been an important site for us, and over the years we have ringed well over 1500 birds, the majority being Swallow and House Martin, with both species usually being in really good numbers. Sand Martin have also been ringed here, but strangely the site never seems to attract Swifts! I can't explain why they don't favour this site, yet at Rugeley they are often the most numerous bird present.

I do believe that the spectacle of hirundines feeding over the filter beds in cool weather is breathtaking and often I have spent time just watching hundreds of birds swirling inches off the ground feeding. It was fairly common to see 500 birds present and on special days 1500-2000 would be present. Sadly 2021 never reached anywhere near these figures, and on a good day only 50 birds would be using Penkridge. Even when there were optimum conditions; overcast,

temperature and moisture in the air, the birds did not materialise at all.

There have been no significant changes to the works in recent years that can explain the decline, and it appears that the decline is due to conditions elsewhere. There is no shortage of fly life at the works, and there is plenty of nesting habitat locally, I just hope that this reduction is either cyclical or



a temporary blip, however I am concerned.

Pied and Grey Wagtails were present at the works, yet despite numerous checks none of our colour ringed birds were present, and it is felt that any young birds quickly disperse as we have had sightings of Grey Wagtails ringed at Penkridge across the UK.

2021 did see good numbers of Yellow Wagtails present, with 24 birds being the highest count.

These birds nest in the arable fields adjacent to the works and appear to be doing well. The appearance of these birds differ wildly and I often have to check through them to make sure that there isn't something more unusual present, like a Citrine Wagtail.

Only 115 birds were ringed at Penkridge in 2021, with the highlights being 51 Swallow, 41 House Martin and 6 Yellow Wagtails. To put this season into perspective, in previous years we would have ringed this many birds in a few hours on one day. When I put it like that it just shows how poor a year it has been.

I truly hope this is a blip and that in April 2022, the birds return in better numbers.

I do wonder if a House Martin tower would be worthwhile at Penkridge, but until we see an increase in birds present I don't think such a structure would be cost effective.



# Minworth

In this article John Hunt gives an overview of the year at Minworth sewage treatment works. This is the largest site in the Severn Trent estate and has a range of habitats.



Lesser Whitethroat

Early in March a visit to site was made to the site to discuss the re-profiling of the Sand Martin bank.

It was agreed that a new face would be generated.

Unfortunately this proved difficult as the sand bank was unstable and kept collapsing.

On the first visit after this work Sand Martins numbered about a dozen with five active nests.

Additional collapses at the face reduced this down to just two and no youngsters were seen at the bank.

The old side of the site held all of the expected migrants with Common Whitethroat, Willow Warblers, Blackcap and Chiffchaff.

A meeting with Severn Trent ecologists was set up to discuss the habitat and potential for improvements.

Suggestions included a wetland scrape, an enhanced reed bed, an additional Barn Owl box at site of the buildings and finally grassland management and mowing.

While on site the large Barn Owl box was checked and after a poor year last year this year there was a bonus of six eggs attended by the two adults.

Later in the season four Barn Owl chicks were ringed. Three were well fed but one looked underweight. It looked hopeful that two or three would fledge. It is quite normal for one of a brood to be considerably



Minworth Barn Owl chick

smaller than its siblings, due to hatching later.

Populations of Field Vole can fluctuate widely over three to four year cycles, with numbers rising and falling dramatically.

2020 was a poor year for voles and we saw the effects of this with poor levels of breeding around the local area. This year there are reports of a significant increase in voles that looks to have given the owls a good breeding year

With the poor experience of the Sand Martin bank a survey was undertaken to identify a suitable position for an artificial structure. A site has been chosen and a detailed design accepted. Costings and funding discussions are in progress.



The failed Sand Martin bank

# Leek

**In this article Keith Clowes an overview of the year at Leek sewage treatment works. This site, situated in the Churnet valley has a range of habitats and looks really promising.**



The location of Leek sewage works within the Staffordshire Moorlands and close to the Roaches will no doubt attract some interesting species in years to come.

Once the Covid restrictions were lifted we made a start of creating areas for

ringing and we installed ten nest boxes around the edge of the works.

Dipper were noted on the river Churnet close to the works and hirundines were present over the lagoons.

A Cetti's Warbler was heard calling in some scrub at the north end of the site.

An area of wet scrub looked to have great potential and snipe were noted early in the year.

Redstart passed through the site on their way north and passage warblers were encountered across the site.

Blackcap and Chiffchaff were most numerous, but the highlight for me was a Green Woodpecker that was caught in my warbler net.

Green Woodpecker numbers appear to have suffered in recent years, so this was a welcome addition to my totals.

It is hoped that our new nest boxes will be occupied in 2022, hopefully the Redstart will use them. We will be conducting more regular sessions in 2021 as this really is an interesting site and has a lot of potential.

We are already looking forward to 2022.

# Marchinton

**In this article Paul Smith gives an overview of a new site for us in East Staffordshire. Whilst the site is small, what it lacks in size is made up by the quality of the reed bed present.**

Phragmites reed beds provide important breeding habitat for both Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting, and whilst this is only a small area within the site, both



species were noted, with at least 4 pairs of reed Warbler present.

The site also has Pied and Grey Wagtails, with the latter noted in double figures.

As winter arrived, Water rail were heard with the reed bed, and we imagine that they use the area to over winter.

Whilst we do not envisage many ringing sessions at the site we will concentrate on the Reed warbler present



and also look to conduct a Reed Bunting roost session in early 2022.

Tawny and Barn Owl were noted nearby.



# Thermal Imaging Surveys

# Thermal Imaging Surveys 2021

**Following the huge achievement of the group winning the Marsh Charitable Trust's award for innovative ornithology, we look at how our findings have identified a key issue for some species of wintering birds.**

In 2021 we had some significant captures, including some new species, including Dotterel and Common Quail were ringed as a result of thermal imaging. This goes to show what is out there at night and what is missed in the day.

These captures and our experiences over the last five years have highlighted that land is just as important during the hours of darkness.

As a large part of our work concentrates at night we constantly observe the nocturnal landscape. Whilst ecologists may visit these areas during the daytime for winter bird surveys, these surveys only tell part of a picture and miss the night time environment.

We often visit farmland during the daytime and it can appear void of some bird species especially in ] winter months. But at night the picture is significantly different.



Thermal footage: Jack Snipe

As well as needing food and breeding areas, species also need areas to roost and this can be critical, especially for those who do not roost arboreally. Other birds also feed at night, including wading birds such as Woodcock, Snipe and Golden Plover.

Skylarks need large fields to roost, and the size of a field is critical. Smaller fields surrounded by hedges and trees are not favoured, there maybe several reasons but to us it appears that this is due to an increased risk of predation. It is the large fields that offer these birds protection.

Crop type and stubbles are also vital and tall cover crops are not used, and it is believed this is due to 1) the risk of predation and 2) the damp conditions found under the crops. We find that over wintered stubbles are favoured by Skylark, and lets not forget that this species remains red listed.

We are aware that some land has been given the green light for development without consideration of a nocturnal survey. These areas may appear devoid of birds during the day however at night they are home to large numbers of birds, with Skylark, waders and other farm-land birds being present. Are these been ignored or missed?

In November 2021 I visited a field in Worcestershire to conduct an experiment. I took binoculars and counted birds around the field. I noted 2 Skylark, 2 Meadow Pipits, 3 Red Kite, 4 Buzzards a Kestrel and a Sparrowhawk plus passing Redwing and Fieldfare. The larks were not displaying or singing. Shortly before dusk, as light faded more Skylark were noted, with a visible count of 14 birds.

After dark I utilised thermal camera, and counted over 80 Skylark, 23 Woodcock, 30+ Golden Plover and 10 Common Snipe. Two Short eared Owls were also noted. These birds were not visible during the day and without thermal technology would have been missed. Only through thermal surveys has this been identified and we now feel it time for nocturnal surveys to become part of ecological surveys in the future.



# WMRG Stonechat colour ringing project update

The project concentrates in Staffordshire in and around Cannock Chase and Gentleshaw Common. Other sites including Sutton Park NNR and Bredon Hill are also part of this project. Details of the project and how you can get involved can be found in the next pages.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- To help inform habitat management for landowners, AONB, Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and Forestry England
- Identify breeding territories
- Identify wintering areas and numbers present
- Monitor species longevity
- Monitor species movement
- Monitor site fidelity
- Understand dispersal of young birds marked
- Allow us to understand the reasons why birds may not return to the same breeding territory. This will consider numerous aspects including, disturbance, competition, habitat management and habitat changes.
- To understand the population of the species in the area.

## Project Summary

The project got off to a great start and we quickly ringed our first birds on their winter territories. On some of the more public sites we struggled with disturbance in public when we tried to catch the birds, but despite this we still managed to catch in quieter areas.

In 2021 we ringed 61 individual birds across the region and recorded 5 nests during the breeding season.

The project totals currently stand at

<b>Male</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Pullus (Chicks in the nest)</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Unsexed juvenile</b>	<b>3</b>

Several sightings of colour ringed birds were received from the public.

A juvenile female that was ringed on the 28th August 2021 on Bredon Hill was recaptured in Hayling, Hampshire on the 22nd September 2021. The bird had travelled 100 miles in 25 days and represents our first controlled bird of the project



Stonechat on Bredon Hill, Image courtesy of Nicholas Berry

# WMRG Stonechat Project update

The following section describes some of our findings from the year across our main project sites.

## Cannock Chase

Our work on the chase got off to a great start, with sightings being made across the Sherbrook Valley area.

We have been greatly assisted by local birder who have provided us with detailed locations of birds throughout the year.

Winter territory monitoring started in January and we managed to ring 10 birds, although this was not a true reflection of birds present.

We were assisted by Jonathan Groom who kindly helped with nest finding.



Several sightings have already been submitted, with Mike Roberts capturing BN in October, close to its original ringing location. Interestingly this bird was not sighted from March to October and it is possible that the area where it remains only represents its breeding territory.

### Cannock Chase totals

**Male 5**

**Female 2**

**Juvenile 3**

In December several birds were spotted in Sherbrook valley and we hope to catch up with them in the new year.

The sheer numbers of birds on Cannock Chase makes it impossible to cover every pair, so at present our focus remains at the Southern end of Sherbrook Valley and Brindley heath.

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## Gentleshaw Common

The Common is one of the largest areas of lowland heath in Staffordshire, covering 86 hectares. Gentleshaw Common's status as one of the UK's best wildlife sites was reflected in its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1981



Gentleshaw is managed by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and is a jewel in their crown.

Whilst disturbance has an impact on the site, especially from dogs off leads there is a surprising amount of flora and fauna on the site.

We were greatly assisted by Jonathan Groom, the monitoring officer for SWT who is also a part of the BTO Nest Record Scheme and a nest finder extraordinaire!

Jonathan located several nests for us and we managed to ring several Stonechat chicks in the nests. (Left).

Adult birds were also ringed across the reserve.

Further winter visits are planned in the months ahead

### Gentleshaw totals

**Male 1**

**Female 1**

**Juvenile 10**





## Sutton Park NNR

Sutton Park is a 2,400 acre National Nature Reserve located 6 miles north of Birmingham city centre. It's one of the largest urban parks in Europe and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The park has open heathland, woodlands, seven lakes, wetlands, and marshes - each with its own rich variety of plants and wildlife, some rarely seen in the region.

Cattle and wild ponies graze on the land.

Local birders had reported seeing a number of Stonechat pairs across the park, so we felt that this was a perfect site to include within our project and was similar to Cannock Chase in habitat.

We quickly established a positive relationship with several bird watchers on site to report sightings to us, this was particularly effective.

The inclusion of Sutton Park within the project started positively with several male and female birds being ringed on their winter territories. These birds were regularly sighted which provided a good level of confidence that the rings could be read relatively easily in the field.

Later in the season local birder Carl Hiles notified us that adult Stonechat had been observed feeding chicks in two locations.

Finding the nest proved to be a challenge, so a camera was utilised to locate the nest. This allowed us to remotely view the location, review the footage and pin point the exact location of the nest with little disturbance.

We ringed 3 healthy chicks from nest 1 and 4 from nest 2, allowing us to identify the parent/s through their colour rings. This data will hopefully provide us with some really interesting family trees in the future.

We suspect that chicks from nest 1 were predated shortly before the birds fledged, as several large primary feathers were located in situ.

Nest 1 fledged at least 2 of the young.

As the season moved on, more reports came in from Carl of un-ringed birds within the park. We made several trips and ringed a further five birds.

We look forward to monitoring winter territories during 2021/22.

## STONECHAT TOTALS

### Sutton Park NNR

**Male 6**

**Female 2**

**Juvenile 7**

The below map provides an indication of the location of Stonechat territories identified. We would like to thank Carl & the Sutton Park team for their help in 2021.



## Marsh Lane NR

We were keen to include Marsh Lane NR in this project as it is well watched by birders and sightings would hopefully be of benefit to our project.

John Hunt searched for Stonechat on and around the reserve.

Four pairs had set up winter territories across the site as well as several wondering males.

We were able to ring two pairs and one male, the others proved more difficult to catch.

The pairs were monitored until they all moved off and dispersed to their breeding grounds

A number of pairs held winter territories, of which the following were ringed:

**(AC)** Female - seen west of Patrick's bridge,

**(AD)** male and **(AF)** female - noted East of the A452

**(AA)** male and **(AH)** female noted Alongside the HS2 works north of Marsh Farm,

**(AB)** male with unringed female noted south of the farm towards 16 Acre wood,

**(AI)** male noted near Dragonfly pond,

In autumn an additional bird **(TA)** was ringed having been located south east of Patrick bridge

During winter **(AC)** female was sighted back at Patrick's

bridge. **(AC)** had not been seen during the breeding season but has returned to her winter territory already.

The ongoing HS2 works seem to have provided a suitable overwintering habitat for early 2021 as this number is far in excess of what has been recorded in previous years



### Marsh Lane NR Totals

Male 4

Female 3

## Bredon Hill (Overbury Enterprises)

Located in the Vale of Evesham, Bredon Hill is not only beautiful but is steeped in thousands of years of history. At the summit of the hill is an Iron Age hillfort that dates back to well before the 1st century.

The area covered by our survey is owned by Overbury enterprises and is a mosaic of grassland, pasture and arable farmland.

The drystone walls that criss cross the landscape are favoured by several chat species including Stonechat.

What makes this areas of

particular interest is its height in the surrounding area. The hill is a favoured stop off for migratory species, and throughout spring and autumn there is good passage of Stonechat.

Furthermore, Stonechat also breed on the hill, however our initial observations indicate that the local breeding population do not over winter in this area as no sightings have been made outside of the breeding season. However there is an influx of wintering birds in autumn and there are numerous birds across the hill

Several birds were easily caught and ringed this year, but at least two of the pairs

proved impossible to catch!

The estates team provided us with updates as to the locations of birds throughout the year and we managed to ring good numbers.

During recent visits several un-ringed birds were noted and these will be targeted in the near future.

### Bredon Hill Totals

Male 8

Female 4

Juvenile 3

# WMRG Stonechat sightings

## If you see a colour-marked Stonechat in the West Midlands Region

The welfare of the birds is of paramount importance, and the priority will be to minimise disturbance of them, especially between April and July when they are breeding.

Sightings are of secondary importance and all efforts should be made to obtain details of the colour ring without unnecessarily encroaching on them. Cameras, binoculars, scopes and mobile phone (with zooms) are usually sufficient to read the ring.

Email/send via social media the details (species, date, time and location of sighting) to

wmrgstonechat@gmail.com

## or let us know via Social media

Twitter - @ringerswm

Facebook – West Midlands Ringing Group



## Once you have reported a sighting

We will provide you with some general background information regarding the bird in question, Please remember that we are volunteers and therefore may not be able to get back to you by return.

## Location recording

The project would benefit from any sightings that are made. Where possible we would ask observers to consider using free mobile applications to provide more accurate data.

**Google Maps** – You could share a 'push pin' with us via email.



1. On your Android device, open the Google Maps app
2. Search for a place. Or, find a place on the map, then touch and hold to drop a pin.
3. At the bottom, tap the place's name or address.
4. Tap Share . . .
5. Choose the app where you want to share the link to the map.

## Ordnance Survey



- On your Android phone or tablet, open the OS maps app
- Search for a place. Or, find a place on the map, then touch and hold to drop a pin.
- Tap Share . . .
- Choose the app where you want to share the link to the map

What 3 words - have divided the world into 3m squares and given each square a unique combination of three words.



what3words addresses are easy to say and share, and as accurate as GPS coordinates.

You can find handy step-by-step instructions on how to use the what3words app here:

<http://what3words.com/how-to-use-the-what3words-app>



WMRG Urban Dipper colour  
ringing project.

# WMRG Urban Dipper Project

**In this article Kate Ashley, a birder and ringer from Birmingham provides details of a fantastic discovery in an urban landscape, where for the first time on record, Dippers chicks have fledged.**

Birmingham's not a place you'd typically expect to see Dippers. So, when a pair turned up on the River Rea in autumn 2020 there was plenty of local excitement, especially being so close to the city centre. Dippers have occasionally appeared here in previous winters, but these were only brief visits from individual birds. As the months went on, not only did these Dippers remain, but even more were seen. A pair were regularly sighted a few miles further up the Rea, and a regular bird or two seen up the Bourn Brook.

Occasionally three were seen together – including two birds fighting! One bird was even seen on the Merritts Brook.

This left us asking – how many Dippers are there? How far does each of them travel? And where have they come from?



This presented an opportunity to study these new arrivals and find out more about urban Dippers.

Working with Birmingham City Council and the West Midlands Canal & River Trust, the West Midlands Ringing Group embarked on an exciting Dipper colour-ringing project to try and find out more.

By March it became clear that these Dippers had set up territories and looked set to stay. Over the next few weeks, 3 adult Dippers (1 male & 2 female) were caught in two locations, using mist nets placed across the river. The birds were fitted with engraved black and white darvic rings which could be read in the field, allowing us to monitor these individuals. It was interesting to observe that all three Dippers were young birds, hatched the previous year. This was indicated by

the presence of a white fringe to the greater coverts, but each bird had varying levels of wear in their wings.

Soon we watched as two nests were being built 3 miles apart along the River Rea. A quick check of one nest revealed 4 beautiful Dippers eggs. But it became clear from observing these birds just how many pressures they face in the urban environment. Not only was it a busy, noisy, and polluted environment, there seemed to be many potential predators, making nesting success seem unlikely. Crows, Magpies, rats and squirrels were frequent. Foxes or deer couldn't be ruled out. The discovery of a sleeping bag under one of the nest bridges indicated that human disturbance was likely. One nest was by a busy road, the other under a busy footbridge. Did Dippers really have any chance in Birmingham or was it all just wishful thinking?



(left, right - Dippers  
centre - nesting habitat)

Both nests were sadly predated. But one pair tried again, and it wasn't long before we realised they were feeding young in the nest. A check of the nest revealed four 8-day old chicks, and these were ringed in the nest, giving us the chance to monitor their dispersal after fledging.

Already, the colour-ringing project had started to reveal something fascinating. We noticed that both birds feeding the chicks were colour-ringed. This seemed odd because we knew that only the female from this pair had been ringed.

A photo of the other ringed bird revealed that it was in fact the male who had been caught near the other nest site 3 miles away! This suggests that it could have been the same male at both sites all along, having two simultaneous nests with different females!

After an anxious wait, we were thrilled when, eventually, the chicks fledged from the nest.

Dipper mortality in the immediate days after fledging is high, and the young Dipper chicks were regularly left alone for long periods, under the watchful eyes of hungry corvids. But it wasn't just predators to worry about. Sadly, one chick was found to have drowned after being attacked by a Moorhen guarding a nest. This was heart-breaking to see, and we soon realised that only one chick was left.



A predated Dipper nest

Thankfully this fledgling managed to survive, and continued to be seen close to the nest site with the adult male. We also managed to catch this bird in a mist net and fit it with a colour ring so that we might be able to monitor its dispersal. Just a week later, it was sighted a couple of miles away, clearly on its way to find its own territory.

As far as we know, this is the first ever record of Dippers breeding within Birmingham.

This appears to be a positive indication of the condition of Birmingham's waterways. Back in the 1950s, studies showed that the majority of rivers here were so polluted, they were toxic to most living things. And now a bird which is reliant on clean water is breeding successfully for the first time on record, suggesting that things have cleaned up.

To explore what food sources were available to the Dippers, Phillip Playford carried out freshwater invertebrate surveys at 3 sites in the Bourn Brook and River Rea. The first site, closest to the bridge where

Right: Phil Playford invertebrate surveying on the Bourn Brook

the Dippers were nesting, had a dominance of beetle larvae, blackfly larvae and freshwater shrimp.

There were also good numbers of Baetidae mayfly nymphs and caddisflies in the other two sampling sites further upstream.

The second site along the River Rea had a dominance of Baetidae mayfly nymphs throughout the three sample locations.

The third site off the Bourn Brook had a dominance of blackfly larvae, water slaters and freshwater shrimp. Sample site 3 was near the bridge where a Dipper was seen foraging and here there was less leaf litter and more Baetidae mayfly nymphs, crane fly larvae, freshwater shrimp and bloodworms than at the other two sampling locations.

Mist netting across a river is always likely to result in a by-catch of other riverine species, and it was great to catch 3 Kingfishers while targeting Dippers. These were also fitted with metal rings with a hope to help monitor these breeding birds.



A photograph of a bird, possibly a species of gull or tern, sitting in a nest made of dry straw. The bird has a distinctive patterned head with dark and light stripes, a dark eye, and a dark beak. Its body is primarily grey with dark, mottled patterns on its wings and back. The nest is composed of numerous dry, light-brown straw stalks. The background is a blurred field of similar straw, creating a natural, textured environment. The entire image is framed by a white border.

**New Encounters  
in 2021**

# New species encounters for 2021

We never go out to target rare or unusual species but now and again we encounter some special species in the region. In 2021 we ringed some new species for the group, including three which have never been ringed in the West Midlands previously

## The Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*

Up until 2021 I had never seen a Dotterel, and not being a hardcore birder or twitcher I never thought I would have the opportunity to see one of these birds, let alone ring them.

A search of the internet will identify several references to these birds being easy to catch, its name 'Dotterel' dates back to the 1400s when it was also an insult for someone stupid or a 'dotard'. In Scottish Gaelic its name is *madan-mointich* which means 'fool of the moors'. However perhaps the only fool here is me, as the capture of these birds was unexpected and was made even more difficult when I realised what it was, when I became somewhat of a quivering wreck!.

The Dotterel is a member of the Plover family. In summer they are only found in the UK at altitude in Scotland. They are most common in northern Europe, from Norway to eastern Siberia. They breed in Arctic tundra and are only seen outside of these areas during periods of migration, often in groups or 'trips' In winter they winter in North Africa where they favour semi-desert areas.



During passage they can be found in the East of England, but also in high areas. Locally they have been recorded on the Malverns and across the Cotswolds but these records are not annual. In some areas of the UK they are known as 'Stone Runners' perhaps due to their favoured habitat.

Ringling totals show that between 1901 and 2020 2380 birds have been ringed. However mostly chicks. Between 2002 and 2020 only 22 juvenile or adult birds were ringed in the UK! Until 2021 no Dotterel had been ringed in the West Midlands.

The Dotterel is a red listed species and is of conservation concern because of recent breeding population declines, winter population decline.

The first Dotterel I encountered was in late August whilst targeting Skylarks in an elevated region of Worcestershire. I noted thermal signature of a bird around 100 yards away and initially thought it was Partridge or Golden Plover. The bird did not move until I had caught it and was calm throughout, however when I was within 10yards of the bird I was far from calm.

The Dotterel was a spectacular bird, whilst not in breeding plumage (this was a juvenile) it was special. Its feathers clearly designed for beginning life in challenging habitat.

A week later this bird was re-caught at a different area of the site.

A month later on my return to the site, I found another Dotterel, active on a harvested pea field, The bird was more active and was with several Golden Plover. Once caught it was established this bird was not ringed. One Dotterel in a ringling lifetime in the Midlands was special but two and a recapture is amazing and I doubt will be repeated. Although I will try again!

# The Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*



Little Buntings are a scarce migrant to the UK, with around 100 sightings per annum, ringing totals are even more limited, with 253 ringed in the UK since 1931, with most birds encountered at bird observatories.

This species has a large range and breeds from north-east Europe to far eastern Russia, wintering in India and Southern China, so a bird in Worcestershire is somewhat special and a first for the UK.

This bird was taking advantage of supplementary winter feed and was with a large flock of farmland birds. We had no idea that the bird was present. There had been no sightings of the bird, nor had it been heard to call. So imagine our surprise when the bird was found in the bottom shelf of one of our mist nets!

This shows the benefit of feeding farmland birds, not only does it sustain regular occurring farmland species during the hungry gap, which is key aim but it also attracts unusual visitors.

It would be fascinating to know where the bird originated from, but we can only guess.

However with lots of our farms undertaking supplementary winter feeding schemes I don't think this will be the last unusual bunting. What next Rustic or Pine?

# Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

I find it ironic that some species are afforded the title of 'Common' because more often than not they aren't, the Quail is one of those birds that simply aren't common in the slightest. Some areas have more than others and they are a regular bird in the UK in summer, with some taking up residence in the West Midlands during the breeding season.



Exquisite plumage of the Common Quail

The BTO reports that 155 of these birds have been ringed in the UK since 1931.

Furthermore the BTO suggest that around 355 males are present in the UK in the summer.

We know that across several of our farms Quail are present and they have been both heard and seen previously, but never caught.

This bird was located with a thermal camera in South Staffordshire in a stubble field whilst surveying Skylark. The bird's heat signature was similar to that of a snipe and whilst early in the season for snipe, initial thoughts were exactly that!

The bird was caught quickly and only once it was in the



hand, could you appreciate the beauty of its feathers and the strength of such a small bird. The plumage was spectacular.

This was a juvenile and it is hoped that it was from breeding pairs in the area. In the years ahead we will be actively looking to survey Quail (Under a S.1 licence)

# Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

I can remember a time when a sighting of a Red Kite was a rare event, and that you would have to travel to mid Wales for any chance of a sighting.

However with some brilliant work by ornithologists and conservationists their



numbers are now so high they are no longer considered to be of concern in the UK. In fact I imagine most of the readers of this report will have seen these birds in Oxfordshire, Mid Wales and closer to home in Shropshire.

So whilst this bird, isn't rare this record is significant as it may represent the first record of successful breeding and fledging in the UK.

We were notified about the nest by a member of one of our estate's team who had seen a pair of Kite in

the area.

Operating under a Schedule 1 Licence, we visited the nest, sat high in a chestnut tree and with the help of a climber and ringer in the group visited the nest under the nest record scheme.

At the nest we located a single healthy chick which was ringed, a first for Worcestershire? We are aware that the bird fledged as it had been monitored from a distance post ringing. A great record for the region, hopefully the first of many.

# Siberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus (collybita) tristis*

This was a rather unexpected capture in October at Lower Drayton Farm!

A small bird had been seen amongst the farmland bird flock which was feeding on Sunflower and fat hen, but at the time we thought nothing more of it.

However on a subsequent net round the bird was seen



in the net.

Once considered a sub-species of the Chiffchaff the Siberian Chiffchaff is now considered a separate species.

The bird is considered rare in the UK but it is believed that it is probably more common than is reported especially in the South West.

The Siberian is more dull than the typically occurring bird in the UK. It is more grey or brownish above and whitish below, with little yellow in the plumage. The supercilium is often longer than in the western subspecies.

Its call is significantly different to our 'standard' chiffchaff and when released this bird made a



short 'cheet' call which suggested 'tristis'.

They are now believed to be a regular vagrant to the UK and there have been numerous photos of 'tristis' type birds posted across social media from the UK this year.

DNA was not taken to confirm this as tristis, but plumage and call tends to indicate it is. Either way a nice bird for October!

# Covid, mental health and wildlife

In this article Martin George discusses the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and how connecting with wildlife can help.



To varying degrees the Covid pandemic has shortened our horizons and for periods of time forced most of us to stay closer to home. Many people have found the long-term stress caused by the public health emergency challenging, with additional concerns about the security and future viability of jobs or established markets and revenue streams as a consequence of Covid, Brexit and several other factors forming an extra layer of worry.

Working from home has been a challenge in itself for some of us, while for others the challenge has been the sudden addition of others having to work from home, particularly if that involved having to home school children on top of our other responsibilities. Despite this, one of the few positives of the pandemic has been the way it has made us appreciate our families and

friends, and the area close to our homes. Lots of people have reported discovering new walks nearby, even farmers who know the land intimately but simply never felt the need to walk it when there were other pressures and distractions to juggle.

With the increased focus on the places on our doorstep has come an increased focus on the things on our doorstep, and for millions this has meant paying more attention to the most



charismatic wildlife that share our spaces with us: birds. Perhaps it's just their obvious presence that sparks the interest, or perhaps their colours and songs offer a vibrant alternative to the often-depressing news. Could it be that part of the attraction is birds' independence from our worries, and the reassuring glimpses they provide of a familiar world that is still carrying on as

as normal?

In spring our winter visitors departed as normal, Fieldfares and Redwings turned their back on windfall apples and wormy pastures, heading north to breed at around the time that the dawn chorus of bird song became loud again and Swallows returned to outbuildings. Whatever was happening on the news, in March and April Blackbirds and Robins and Blue Tits started carrying nesting material and then food for their growing chicks, and by July family parties of tits and loud, raucous Starlings became hard to ignore. As harvest passed our resident birds started their annual moult and became less obvious. Robins briefly stopped singing but the Swallows were gathering on the wires and a vast tide of life started to head south again. By October the Swallows had gone and the Fieldfares



Fieldfares and Redwings returned, and vast flocks of Woodpigeons started to pass through, just as they have done in previous years.

No matter what the latest concerns were in the news, the birds provided a comforting reminder of normality. Even the globe-trotting national treasure Sir David Attenborough did interviews revealing he spent much of lockdown sitting in his garden and “listening to birds”, which seemed to confirm that it was a normal, healthy response to stress. In fact the beneficial effects of the natural world have been the subject of scientific papers and reports for more than forty years, starting in 1984 with “View through a window may influence recovery from surgery” in the journal *Science*, which found that people recovering from gall bladder removal who were assigned to rooms with windows looking out on a natural scene had shorter postoperative hospital stays than matched patients in similar rooms with windows facing a brick building wall.



More recently a University of Exeter study on 2017 made national news under the banner “Watching birds near your home is good for your mental health”. The lead researcher said “This study starts to unpick the role that some key components of nature play for our mental well-being”. The number of birds seen was more important than the individual species, which may suggest that people simply benefited from repeated reminders of the birds’ presence in the surroundings.

When we are looking at our surroundings and taking in as much detail as possible we can become absorbed in the moment and temporarily forget about life’s worries. This taking notice, ideally using as many of our senses as possible, is a form of mindfulness, a recognised technique for improving our wellbeing. In fact it’s one of the The Five Ways to Wellbeing that were identified by the New Economics Foundation in 2008 and are now used by the NHS and mental health

### The Five Ways to Wellbeing are

- Connect
- Be Active
- Keep learning
- Help others
- Taking notice

It’s quite easy to include all five in a gentle walk from home or workplace, particularly if you want to find out more about the birds you’re seeing. Simply learning to recognise the more common species is a great start, but once you know the name it’s possible to add layers of knowledge and satisfaction. It’s nice to be able to separate Swallows from House Martins and Swifts, but when you know that the birds that have reappeared in April would have been flying over herds of wildebeest on the far side of the Sahara just a few weeks before, it’s even more rewarding.

All you need to acquire that sort of knowledge is a little time and patience, concentrating on the obvious birds you see, backed up with help from a birder or a simple field guide – pick one that just deals with British birds to avoid confusion. Calls and songs can be a big help and used to be an additional challenge to learn, but the free BirdNET app has changed that. It uses the time of year and your location to match the sound you highlight to the most likely species and, so long as the bird is reasonably close, I’ve found it to be very accurate.

Taking an interest in the birds that you see and hear can be rewarding and add enjoyment to the simplest activity. Binoculars help but aren’t essential, and it’s officially good for mental health. Give it a try!

# So why bird ringing?

**In this article, WMRG trainee Bryan Rampton (pic below) provides an insight into his experiences of being a trainee ringer. So if you have a genuine love of our feathered friends from the big to the small and want the ability to get up close to them to study them and their habitat and at want to help to protect their future is ringing for you?**

I've always had an interest in nature and wildlife. The countryside plays a big part in my life through work and hobbies.

I had contacted Ben from West Midlands Ringing Group a little while prior to starting my training, but unfortunately as with a lot of things covid had put starting on hold for a time.

But boy was it worth the wait when I started.

Seven months in and I'm loving it. I've become part of a group of like minded people and its great being part of the team.

I've had so many amazing experiences and have got to ring lots of different species.



I have ringed Nightjar (yes you read that correctly), Skylark, Woodcock and Brambling, I could easily go on as there have been so many highlights.

Ringing is not for the faint hearted it takes a lot of commitment early starts and late finishes, plenty of travelling to different sites but you will see the best of the countryside and its inhabitants.

Be mindful it's not just putting rings on birds. There is a lot to learn, and at the fore of everything my trainers are extremely careful about the welfare of birds. There is a great deal to learn about the ageing and sexing of birds, bird identification and getting to grips with taking biometrics.

Aside from the ringing, I am also learning about habitat creation, taking part in work parties, getting involved in habitat maintenance and communicating with landowners.

Is it worth it?.....oh yes the rewards are incredible you will get to experience birds and the natural world in ways some just never will.

What does the future hold for my ringing? The aim is to gain my c permit which will allow me to ring my own sites. I have just gained my first ringing site; a lovely dairy/ arable farm, Ram Hall Farm, Berkswell. The farm has a variety of habitat, different types of cropping some lovely hedges and a wild bird plot.

I cant thank WMRG and Ben enough for their input and help, here's to lots more ringing!



Above: Nightjar, Left: Brambling

# Funding for 2021



Group treasurer Ben Dolan provides details of funding streams that have supported West Midlands Ringing Group over the last year. We could not have achieved what we have done this year without their support.

The Birmingham Airport Community Trust Fund makes grants of up to £3,000 to small community-based organisations. Core funded directly by the Airport Company and topped-up by any penalties levied on airlines breaching our noise limits, grants are awarded by a board of independent Trustees representing local authorities and the Airport Consultative Committee. Typically, the Trust Fund makes grants of around £100,000 each year and a total of nearly £1.8 million has been awarded to date

WMRG applied to the trust to support us with buying tools and equipment for Marsh Lane Nature Reserve.

Our application was to support habitat management at the reserve, to encourage volunteers to support us and for them to learn about habitat management and survey techniques.

The funding has enabled us to buy a chainsaw, hedge cutters and extendable electric loppers and has helped a great deal, which has reduced our time

on maintenance tasks, allowing us to spend more time on surveys and habitat improvement.

We have had good numbers of volunteers supporting us at the reserve.

If you're looking for a funding stream and meet their criteria please consider Birmingham Airport Community Trust, it was a relatively simple process and were very supportive throughout.



Projects that Explore Biodiversity Benefits in the Local Environment

Since 2016 WMRG have ringed nearly 2000 Skylarks across a number of farms in the West Midlands Region, taking a variety of biometrics from our local and winter populations.

In 2021 we approached South Staffs Water's Pebble Fund with an application for us to take DNA from the Skylarks that we catch so that we can learn more about them,

encourage people who are looking for funding streams to consider the Pebble Fund.

We look forward to sharing the outcome of our work with you once it is complete

Skylarks are a Red listed species of conservation concern in the UK that are ground nesting and predominantly breed on Farmland, with an influx of continental birds moving on to our farms during the winter.

In September we found out we were successful and with BTO's permission our project began.

We extend our huge thanks to South Staffs Water for the support they have given through this process and we



# Farmland bird drawing competition

## Sponsored by Focus Environmental Consultants

In January we faced a further lockdown as a result of the Covid pandemic. This was a challenging time for us all.

To bring some positivity to the new year we decided to run a drawing competition focussing on farmland birds.

Entries were open to all ages, with the winners being chosen by the public via social media.

Focus Environmental Consultants very kindly sponsored the competition, which allowed us to offer

prizes to the winners.

The first prize was a bird watching scope, with runners up receiving the Wild Guides Britain's Bird: An identification guide to the birds of Great Britain and Ireland.

The level of entries were fantastic and we were amazed at the quality of the drawings that were entered.

Fortunately we didn't have to select a winner as this would have been a difficult decision.

We hoped that this little bit

of light relief during lockdown gave some pleasure to the artists and the public who saw these images.

We received some fantastic feedback from the competition and it is hoped that we brought nature a little closer to others. If you would like to sponsor a future event please do not hesitate to contact us.

One of the nicest comments from a parent of one of the entrants, was that we had '*inspired a future generation*' for us this is what really matters



WINNER Lewis Frost (8)  
Woodcock



Madison (9) - Goldfinch



Jorja (9) - Common Snipe



Grey Partridge  
Matilda (12)



Barn Owl  
Cameron (9)



Redwing  
Eleanor (7)



Yellowhammer  
Jensen (4)



Fieldfare  
Elizabeth (10)



Little Bird - Nadine Carruthers



Fieldfare Rohan Fellowes-Day (9)



Kestrel - James Beaumont (23)



Starling - Ernest Chapman (9)



Lapwing Katie Buckley



Yellowhammer Ivy Fellowes-Day (4)



**Our sincere thanks go to Focus for kindly sponsoring our drawing competition and for funding the prizes.**

**Focus Environmental Consultants are a multi-disciplinary consultancy, providing Ecology and Arboricultural surveys, reports and services to support planning applications across England and Wales.**

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# Marsh Lane Nature Reserve



# MARSH LANE NATURE RESERVE



Marsh Lane Nature Reserve is situated at Berkswell (between Solihull and Coventry) and covers 75 acres adjacent to and in the River Blythe Flood Plain, an SSSI.

The site was quarried for sand and gravel from 1995 to 1999 and was reinstated jointly by RMC and the owners, Packington Estates, opening as a reserve in 2001.

It comprises three main pools (one a reedbed), woodland, grassland, smaller ponds and some agricultural land.

Two of the main pools have been shaped and include a number of islands which, since formation, have attracted a wide range of breeding and passage waders.

Eight hides have been constructed which, between them, give excellent views of all the pools and islands.

The majority of the hides are linked by hard paths and there is a car park within the site's locked gates.

Disabled visitors should find the site suitable for them although the paths are unbound. The paths are made of planings and are reasonably compact but wheelchair visitors may need some aid.

Within the hides, seats can be unhinged or moved to allow wheelchair access to the blinds.

The reserve attracts a wide variety of resident species and regular migratory visitors, both breeding and on passage, as well as occasional migrants.

The site list currently stands at 206 and includes a number of regional rarities.

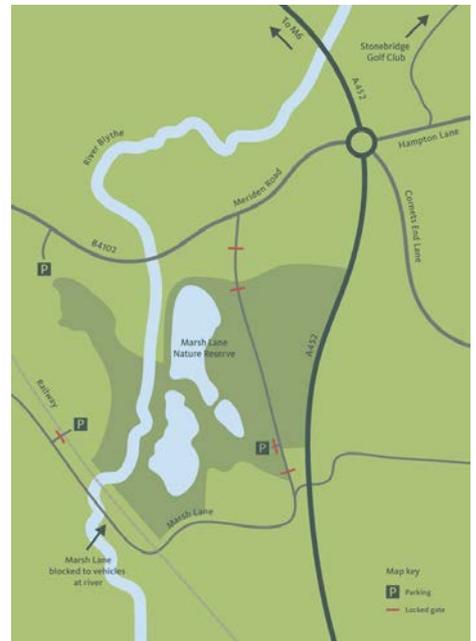
Details of latest sightings can be found on the website.

Birds of particular note include Bonaparte's Gull, Hoopoe, Spotted Sandpiper, Grey Phalarope, Black Kite, Rough-legged Buzzard, Spoonbill, Stone Curlew, Lesser Yellowlegs, Red-backed Shrike, Dusky Warbler and Bee-eater.



Little Egrets occur regularly, and Osprey is recorded in most years.

Hobby is a regular in the late summer and early autumn, Marsh Harriers are seen most years. Most passage waders have occurred including Avocet, Knot, Turnstone, Spotted Redshank and Temminck's Stint.



In winter, up to 400 Wigeon and 750 Lapwing are regularly present.

Packington Estate Enterprises Ltd runs and administers the site, with access (365 day/24 hour – key required) being by annual membership.

The adult rate is currently £43 with junior/senior/joint concessions available.

In addition to site access, members receive a quarterly newsletter and a copy of the annual report.

Full details together with a downloadable application form are available on the website:

[www.packingtonestate.co.uk/about/Marsh-lane-nature-reserve/](http://www.packingtonestate.co.uk/about/Marsh-lane-nature-reserve/)



# Marsh Lane Nature Reserve

## Ben Dolan provides an update the group's activities at Marsh Lane in 2021

Following Covid-19, we were really looking forward to starting 2021 with fresh eyes and making up for lost time.

Unfortunately Covid still held us back as our duck ringing session was cancelled until 2022, due to covid restrictions

You will see within this annual report we started a colour ringing project on Stonechat and John Hunt wasted no time tracking them down around Marsh Lane. He surprised us all with how many were found.

Unsurprisingly most were found on HS2 land, where active work was taking place.

We used a combination of mist nets and traps to catch the birds and were pleased to ring and process six of the eleven birds seen, with three male and three female birds.



Grey Wagtail



Kingsfisher from Marsh Lane

Around the causeway Nick Barlow had opened up a path adjacent to the stream and the reed bed providing us a fantastic new ride for mist nets. Cetti's Warblers had used this area in previous years and our first session resulted in four birds being caught and ringed in two sessions in April, 1 male and 3 females. The male bird had been originally ringed on the reserve as a juvenile in April.

A further male was also heard in the same area in April, but we did not catch again until July, however this again was captured in Nick's newly created ride. Again this was a new male.

We also started to pick up adult Blackcap, clearly showing breeding behaviour and this looked really promising for the season ahead.

However, a period of awful weather arrived and resulted in a cold and wet spring, with severe localised flooding.

Not only did this weather impact the breeding birds at Marsh Lane but large numbers of Sand Martin were reported at the local quarry, disappeared during the cold weather.

Across the country reports of large numbers of young sand martin being found dead in nest hole entrances. We couldn't access our colony due to the height and position the birds had chosen this year, however the numbers of birds had significantly reduced at this site, which is of concern.

Due to the weather we made a decision informed by bird welfare to suspend ringing for a period of time, to allow the birds to feed and build up their energy ready to try again as it was clear the 1st broods of especially Blackcap and Chiffchaff had been almost wiped out on the site. This was not limited to the West Midlands but was also replicated at other sites across the country, we could only hope that the weather improved and the birds were resilient enough to either delay breeding or try later on in the year when hopefully the weather would have been more settled.



Fortunately the weather did improve and large numbers of Black-headed Gulls returned to the site to breed, including good numbers of our colour ringed gulls, which were regularly reported by members.

The arrival of the adult birds, provided interesting information as we've been able to start sexing the birds through their behaviour, adding to our ever growing data.

2022 will likely be our final year of our Black-headed Gull colour ringing project, which will bring us sightings for many years to come.

For those who haven't experienced the spectacle of a gull breeding colony, then please consider becoming a member of Marsh Lane NR as it truly is a sight to behold.

We were able to colour ring another two Oystercatcher, which successfully fledged.

It was a slow arrival for our Common Terns, with many birds heading straight for their bungalows, which they

clearly love. Members also reported, Oystercatcher, Little ringed Plover, Gadwall, Tufted Duck and Dunlin using them for shelter and breeding

Due to HS2 being on our doorstep, they undertook some mitigation work, resulting in Barn Owl boxes being installed across Packington Estate and a further box at Marsh Lane, adding to the two already present.

We regularly observe Barn Owl around the site and have previously ringed several birds. It was no surprise when we checked the boxes to find Barn Owl chicks in one of them. A date was set to return when they would be ready to ring. On our return we found four healthy chicks and one unfortunately dead, this is not uncommon. The surviving birds were all ringed and safely returned to the box. A trail camera was installed to watch the activity at the nest.

From the footage reviewed we believe at least two of the chicks fledged. We were aware that some local broods had failed so we were pleased with this fledging success, considering that this was the first year these birds had bred on this site.



Sedge Warbler

Following the gull and tern ringing, we continued to ring the causeway streamline and reed bed. There were some positive signs with good numbers of adult Reed Warbler being ringed together with some Sedge Warbler showing a guest appearance as they passed through.

Although good numbers of Grasshopper Warbler were being caught across the country, we didn't hear or see any at the reserve in 2021.

As the season continued we operated in the same area with an occasional session at the back gate copse, which proved very slow.

We decided to remain on the causeway area, and were joined by our new trainee Bryan Rampton.

Ringing started to pick up with one young Cetti's being caught, giving us hope that second broods were

successful, however this was the only young Cetti's to be ringed during 2021.

As the breeding season continued we started to see good numbers of young Reed warbler and a surprising number of young Sedge warbler. However we noticed that around 90% of these birds were carrying fault bars in their tails. Fault bars appear when the birds go without nutrition for a period of time, and tends to show a very difficult year for these hardy little birds.

We continued to see this in both Garden Warbler and Blackcap. (Photo).

On one of the morning sessions we were joined by Nick Barlow. As we walked to conduct a net round we heard the distinct call of a Kingfisher, I turned to him and said, "its odd that we've been ringing here since 2015 and have never caught a Kingfisher!" As we walked to the net, you guessed it, there was a young Kingfisher in the net. The next chat I have with Nick will be about something more unusual, like a Pallas's Warbler, just in case one turns up and luck strikes again!



Nightjar at Marsh Lane

Whilst opening nets during a morning session in late summer I thought I heard the 'cu-ick' flight call of a Nightjar. I dismissed it, as we had ringed a lot of Nightjar in 2021 and thought it was in my head, however the following week as I was sat at first light by Oak Hide, I was amazed to see a Nightjar hawk over the bank by Oak Hide and disappear, not knowing this was a first for the site! The following week I set a net for Meadow Pipits along the bank, also hoping I would be lucky enough to see the Nightjar, however not only was I lucky enough to see it but I actually caught it and ringed it!

Due to our current Cannock Chase project I was able to process it, take DNA (under licence) and release it, confirming it was a very healthy juvenile Nightjar. This is an interesting record as potentially over a three week period I heard or saw 3 birds. Previously the only record locally was by Dave Clifton at WMBC Ladywalk NR in 2020.

As we approached autumn we moved to the back gate area for the end of our warbler season, hoping that our two new rides through the copse would

pay off.

The weather earlier in the year had resulted in an excellent growing season and foliage and scrub was higher than expected. This negatively affected our ringing totals, with birds using the high foliage to avoid the nets. We ringed fair numbers of Blackcap, but not the 60+ birds per session we had experienced since 2015. This was reflected across the country.

A late Willow Warbler was a surprise for the site. However on closer inspection the bird was found to have severe damage to its primary flight feathers across both wings. Images of the damage were shared on social media with a number of suggestions for the cause of this. We suspect from other examples obtained from ornithologists the damage was caused by a parasite called Mallophaga, commonly known as chewing, biting or bird lice. This results in extreme preening with the bird trying to remove the parasite, causing damage.



Above: Mallophaga damage to a Willow Warbler (also left)

We finished off with a big session on the 10th October, where all of the team attended and covered both the back gate area and causeway to maximise our final session there of the autumn.

All in all 2021 was a difficult year for some species where others faired a little better, and even though this was the case we ringed more of some species than we did it 2020.

## Marsh Lane NR warbler totals

Species	2021	2020
Blackcap	133	205
Cetti's Warbler	5	1
Chiffchaff	14	38
Common Whitethroat	3	3
Garden Warbler	7	7
Reed Warbler	81	23
Sedge Warbler	54	4
Total	297	281

## Marsh Lane NR Recoveries 2021

- Reed Warbler, originally ringed 12/05/2018 at Blythe Valley, West Midlands. Caught at Marsh Lane 27/07/2021, which is a movement of 22km over 1172 days.
- Reed Warbler, originally ringed 04/08/2020 at Brandon Marsh NR, Warwickshire. Caught at Marsh Lane 27/07/2021, which is a movement of 17km in 357 days.
- Reed Warbler, originally ringed at Marsh Lane 28/09/2018, identified by colour rings feeding in garden at Little Witcombe, Gloucestershire on 07/03/2021, which is a distance of 72km in 891 days.
- Reed Warbler, originally ringed at Marsh Lane 05/08/2016, re-trapped at Marsh Lane 09/07/2021.
- Reed Warbler, originally ringed at Marsh Lane 12/08/2017, re-trapped at Marsh Lane 29/04/2021
- Reed Warbler, originally ringed at Marsh Lane 12/08/2017, re-trapped at Marsh Lane 07/05/2021



# Marsh Lane Common Terns

Group member John Hunt provides an insight into our Common project, which was our most successful year to date!



A Common Tern on one of our trail cams!

The nesting site at the reserve was cleared in late March 2021. Excess matting was cut out and larger uncovered edges were turned back under and gravelled over in an attempt to prevent weed growth

All of the areas of gravel were raked and the tufted grass removed.

A one metre area around each bungalow site was burned to suppress the weed seeds and bungalows were deployed, including several new ones.

Weed control remains problematic but it is evident that the best course of action is to control the perennial weeds by a combination of hand weeding, burning and spraying. It has been noted that the annual Mayweed

is ideal for providing cover for the young terns.

Stakes of varying height were put in along the front of the Tern and right hand islands.

These proved popular with the adults and allowed an easier platform for clear sightings of darvics.

Two trail cameras were deployed to monitor activity including the Vosker camera, that sends images back to a phone . It was hoped that this would be able to pick out colour ringed birds thus reducing the time required to spend in the field,

Unfortunately the level of detail recovered was insufficient to read any colour rings and we will need to consider further options in the future to improve sightings of Terns throughout the breeding season.



An occupied tern box at Marsh Lane NR



Mallard chilling outside a tern bungalow at Marsh Lane

This year was successful in terms of fledged youngsters.

Of the 35 that hatched, 27 had fledged by the end of the ringing season, 25 of which were fitted with darvic colour rings. All of the Marsh Lane birds are fitted with a black ring with alpha numeric white coloured writing.



Common Tern chick

# Marsh Lane Tern monitoring 2021

<b>31st March</b>	Arrival of first tern
<b>16th April</b>	4 un-ringed and a tern with a metal ring on its left leg
<b>20th April</b>	11 un-ringed, 2 with metal ring on right leg and 1 metal on left
<b>6th May</b>	The first count of sitting birds indicated a possible 8 pairs established
<b>9th May</b>	Tern numbers have increased to 20 un-ringed, 2 metal right, 1 metal left
<b>19th May</b>	An evening visit revealed 19 terns of which 13 were sitting Two terns ringed back in 2018 were seen, C13 and C25 C13 is female and was seen copulating. C25 is also thought to be female
<b>4th June</b>	There were 13 nests on Tern Island and a further 3 on the left hand island. Between them they had 5 broods (3,3,3,3,2) a total of 14 chicks The adult female C13 was sitting but the nesting area was obscured
<b>16th June</b>	The first ringing session saw 21 ringed of which 19 were also fitted with a darvic

Common Terns usually start visiting the breeding colonies after spending their first two years off the African coast.

At this age, they are usually prospecting and most terns do not start breeding before the age of three.

Six 2018 ringed terns returned in 2020 C17, C25, C26 and C35 to Marsh Lane. In addition C33 was seen at Draycote Water, and C13 at Grimley.

This year both C25 and C13 were seen at Marsh Lane breeding. Due to the nests being well hidden it was not possible to identify any successful fledged offspring.

C13 was spotted on a couple of occasions feeding twelve miles away at Bittell Reservoir, so it seems that this is an acceptable distance commute for food.

At the end of the season the adults and juveniles move north to the Lancashire coast being a regular place for Terns to congregate.

After feeding for a few weeks they begin their southerly journey out in the Atlantic flying down the west coast of Ireland.

Hopefully in late March 2022 our birds will return to Marsh Lane NR for another successful breeding season.



Yop **C69** Common Tern at Seaforth

Bottom: mating tern at Marsh Lane

# Marsh Lane NR Tern sightings 2021

Darvic	Date	Location	Distance (miles)	Finder	Year ringed
C25	19/05/2021	Marsh Lane NR	0	J. Hunt	2018
C13	19/05/2021	Marsh Lane NR	0	J. Hunt	2018
C17	27/05/2021	Marsh Lane NR	0	J. Hunt	2018
C13	29/05/2021	Upper Bittell Reservoir, Bromsgrove	12	S. Hares	2018
C13	04/07/2021	Upper Bittell Reservoir, Bromsgrove	12	S. Hares	2018
C25	05/07/2021	Marsh Lane NR	0	J. Hunt	2018
C17	05/07/2021	Marsh Lane NR	0	J. Hunt	2018
C66	08/07/2021	Earlwood Lake, Solihull	11	J. Owen and J. Oates	2021
C33	12/07/2021	Draycote Water, Rugby	17	B. Hazell	2018
C46	13/07/2021	Marsh Lane NR	0	J. Hunt	2019
C13	13/07/2021	Marsh Lane NR	0	J. Hunt	2018
C79	14/07/2021	Draycote Water, Rugby	17	B. Hazell	2021
C76	26/07/2021	NT Formby Point, Merseyside	98	T. Vaughan	2021
C69	26/07/2021	NT Formby Point, Merseyside	98	T. Vaughan	2021
C69	27/07/2021	Seaforth, Merseyside	91	J. Greeps	2021
C76	28/07/2021	Seaforth, Merseyside	91	M. Roach & D. Kelly	2021
C63	30/07/2021	NT Formby Point, Merseyside	98	T. Vaughan	2021
C83	31/07/2021	Upper Bittell Reservoir, Bromsgrove	98	S. Hares	2021
C33	01/08/2021	Draycote Water, Rugby	17	N. Jarvis	2018
C63	05/08/2021	Seaforth, Merseyside	91	M. Roach	2021
C67	05/08/2021	Seaforth, Merseyside	91	M. Roach	2021
C81	07/08/2021	Seaforth, Merseyside	91	J. Greeps	2021
C33	09/08/2021	Draycote Water, Rugby	17	J. Galletly	2018
C63	30/07/2021	NT Formby Point, Merseyside	98	T. Vaughan	2021
C66	10/08/2021	NT Formby Point, Merseyside	98	T. Vaughan	2021
C81	10/08/2021	NT Formby Point, Merseyside	98	T. Vaughan	2021

Please continue to provide sightings to us at [wmrg.contact@gmail.com](mailto:wmrg.contact@gmail.com)

# Marsh Lane - Oystercatcher Project

John Hunt provides an update on the Oystercatchers at Marsh Lane NR, which has already resulted in some great sightings.

There were four established Oystercatcher pairs on the reserve in 2021, two on Railway and two on Car Park.

By early May they had three broods between them - Car Park: three chicks, Railway Pool: two chicks and a single chick).

By late May there was a nearly fledged youngster in front of Oak Pool. The other pair on Railway Pool were protecting their single youngster in front of Railway Hide whilst, on Car Park Pool, one pair and their young were still on the islands (with the young regularly sheltering in one of the tern boxes) and the other pair with three chicks on the shore in front of Oak Hide.

Oystercatcher ringing this year was held back while the Mediterranean Gulls attempted to breed on Railway and the terns continued their successful season on Car Park.

This led to just two chicks being ringed, darvics A21 and A29.

## Oystercatcher Sightings

A29 was ringed on 31st May and by the middle of August had already relocated to La Fresnaye Bay, Plevenon, Brittany, France. This is the second of the Marsh Lane birds, following A20, to move south to the French Atlantic coast.

A20 seen at Marsh Lane this year was also reported in 2020. There have not been



A20 - one of our Marsh Lane NR Oystercatchers

any reports of potential breeding.

In addition, the following sightings were reported (see table below)

Darvic	Date	Location	Distance (miles)	Finder	Year ringed
A20	01/04/2021	WMBC Ladywalk NR, Coleshill		M. Durkin	2018
A26	09/04/2021	Exe Estuary, Devon		J. Diamond	2020
A26	10/04/2021	Exe Estuary, Devon		J. Diamond	2020
A26	16/05/2021	RSPB Exminster Marshes, Devon		J. Diamond	2020
A20	20/05/2021	Marsh Lane NR, Meriden		G. Rowling	2018
A29	14/08/2021	La Fresnaye Bay, Plevenon, Brittany, France		R. Provost	2020
A26	08/10/2021	Dawlish Warren, Exe Estuary, Devon		Devon & Cornwall wader group	2020

Please continue to provide sightings to us at [wmrg.contact@gmail.com](mailto:wmrg.contact@gmail.com)

# Marsh Lane NR In other news...

John Hunt provides on some other interesting events from the reserve in 2021.

## Oystercatcher and duck interaction 2021

Early April some interesting behaviour was observed between an Oystercatcher and a duck.

Whilst on the Car Park island an Oystercatcher was seen to be sitting on 3 eggs, one of which looked out of place.

Later video footage showed a Mallard sharing the brooding of eggs. Eventually both birds deserted the nest.

## Trail Camera 2021

Extensive use of trail cameras has helped us monitor the terns on the islands.

In addition it was used to confirm Barn Owls using two of the nest boxes leading to the discovery of successful breeding.

They then allowed the monitoring of the



Otter at Rockcam!

of the youngsters as they progressed through branching and onto fledging.

When, what looked like, Otter spraint was spotted on a rock beside the central stream it was decided that the trail camera would be deployed to monitor the spot.

To our delight an Otter was filmed marking the rock within a few days of its deployment. This has now become a regular event.

What has been surprising is the number of animals and birds that use the rock.

Water Rail, Heron, Chaffinch, Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail (with metal ring), Robin, Pheasant, Song Thrush, Dunnock, Great Tit, Blackbird, Crow, Weasel, Muntjac, Squirrel, Mouse, Rat have all been recorded on what is now known as 'Rock Cam'!

## Mallophaga 2021

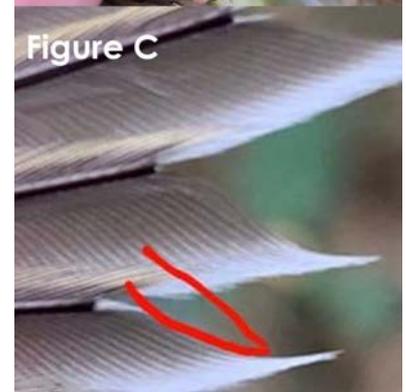
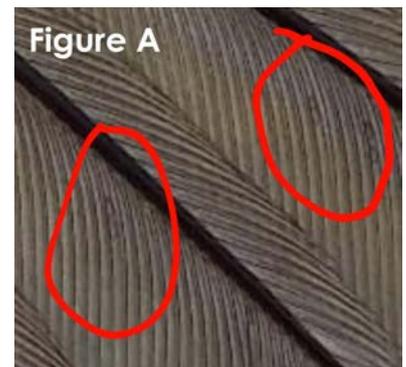
While ringing in September a Willow Warbler was trapped that exhibited significant damage to its flight feathers. A request was put out to the ringing community for discussion of this condition.

The culprit was Mallophaga a wingless chewing lice that feeds on birds. These lice are external parasites that feed

mainly on birds, although some species also feed on mammals. They infest both domestic and wild mammals and birds, and cause considerable irritation.

The eggs are glued to the feathers of the host. Figure (a) shows the wing feathers with the lice marked.

The bird was obviously attempting to rid itself of the lice by preening. The effect of this was to leave the shape of the bill in the feathers as it cut away material Figure (b & c)



# Marsh Lane Nature Reserve

## Black-headed Gull Project

**Ben Dolan discusses the continuation of the Black-headed Gull project at Marsh Lane Nature Reserve. The Project, now in its 6th year seeks to learn more about their post-breeding dispersal.**

2021 saw a continuation of our Marsh Lane NR project and it's been a great year.

The preference for Western/South Western dispersal, continues to be followed by the vast majority of the birds that we ring.

The colony at Marsh Lane continues to grow annually and this year was no different with 2000 pairs believed to be breeding.

Once again we visited the colony in mid June to colour ring as many chicks as we could.

A small team of experienced ringers and helpers attended the event to assist in catching, processing and ringing the birds.

Over the last six years we have continually improved our approach to the gull ringing sessions. Prior to visiting the colony with have a detailed briefing and allocate set roles to individuals. This is extremely important. Bird welfare is paramount to us and entering the colony can be daunting for those who have not experienced it before. The sheer numbers present, together with the noise and smell can be a little overwhelming.

We also set a strict time limit at the colony, and regardless of the number of birds present our presence is limited to no more than one hour. In 2020 we colour ringed a further 135 birds.

Mediterranean Gulls also attempted to breed on Railway pool, however it is believed that no birds fledged.

The data from the class of 2021 has provided some interesting results.

This year saw reported sightings double, all of which can be found on the following pages.

The furthest sighting was **2BAA** who was seen in San Vicente de la Barquera in Spain in January, 637 miles away from Marsh Lane. This sighting is twice as far away as any sightings recorded in 2020.

We could continue to receive sightings for the next 30 years!



2FTV at Redesmere, Cheshire

Please continue to report your colour ringed sightings we are keen to receive all sightings

[wmrg.contact@gmail.com](mailto:wmrjg.contact@gmail.com)

### Gull Facts and Stats

**779** Total birds ringed

**452** Total number of sightings

**96** Sightings in 2020

**637** Distance in miles of furthest sighting 2020

**34712** Total miles recorded from sightings

**32** Years old, longevity record for BH Gull

Ring No.	Sighting Date	Miles from Marsh Lane	Location of sighting	Person(s) reporting
2CTJ	01/01/2021	92	Channel View, River Taff, Wales	P. Howlett
2CTJ	01/01/2021	92	Channel View, River Taff, Wales	P. Howlett
2BAA	22/01/2021	637	San Vicente de la Barquera (Cantabria)	A. Garcia
2EXX	25/01/2021	233	Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, Ireland	F. Oconnell
2CFN	28/01/2021	6	Babbs Mill Lake NR, Kingshurst, Solihull	K. Duncan
2HFH	29/01/2021	230	Knocknagoney, Belfast, Ireland	S. Belshaw
2AXV	31/01/2021	254	The Peoples Park, Ballymena, Northern Ireland	G. Platt
2CFN	31/01/2021	6	Babbs Mill Lake NR, Kingshurst, Solihull	K. Duncan
2AXJ	04/02/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2BPX	05/02/2021	291	Andersons Quay, Cork City, Ireland	B.Power
2ACX	15/02/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2AAV	15/02/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2AXN	15/02/2021	5	Olton Mere, Solihull	A. Dean
2AVL	16/02/2021	135	Amroth Beach, Pembrokeshire	T. Phelps
2CKP	26/02/2021	293	River Shannon,Limerick City, Ireland	W. O'Connor
2CPN	01/03/2021	11	Earlswood Lakes, Solihull	J.Oates
2BFF	04/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2EXF	08/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2ECK	09/03/2021	23	Thornton Resvoir, Leicestershire	A. Smith
2CNP	09/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2BPA	09/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2CVV	09/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2APN	09/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2CFP	09/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2ATN	09/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2ACC	09/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2CPN	11/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2AJN	11/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2AVA	11/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2BFN	11/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2AHX	14/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2ENT	14/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2BFX	21/03/2021	20	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	M. Wakeman
2CTJ	21/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2BAX	21/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2ALF	21/03/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2CAT	27/03/2021	20	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	M. Wakeman
2APN	31/03/2021	20	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	M. Wakeman
2AKT	31/03/2021	20	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	M. Wakeman
2CAT	31/03/2021	20	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	M. Wakeman
2BXJ	04/04/2021	20	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	M. Wakeman
2CHN	05/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2APN	06/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2CCL	06/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2ANC	14/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2CFJ	14/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2BCK	16/04/2021	28	WMBC, Belvide NR, Staffordshire	S. Nuttall

2ATV	16/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2BXK	16/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G. Rowling
2ALV	21/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2ECN	21/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2EHT	27/04/2021	28	WMBC, Belvide NR, Staffordshire	S. Nuttal
2ANL	27/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2BFX	27/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2BVH	28/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2CXV	28/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2BPK	29/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2BXT	29/04/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	G.Rowling
2EKN	30/04/2021	28	WMBC, Belvide NR, Staffordshire	S. Nuttal
2ALC	13/05/2021	10	Kingsbury Water Park, Warwickshire	S. Puck
2BHJ	07/06/2021	28	WMBC, Belvide NR, Staffordshire	M. Foster
2BTJ	07/06/2021	11	Brandon Marsh, Warwickshire	J. Rushworth
2AFK	25/06/2021	116	WWT, Penclawdd, Wales	BTO
2APH	03/07/2021	67	Lake Waverley, Orgreave, Sheffield	M. Reeder
2ALA	03/07/2021	20	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	M. Wakeman
2CFN	07/07/2021	6	Babbs Mill Lake NR, Kingshurst, Solihull	K. Duncan
2CHN	09/07/2021	139	NeVERN Estuary, Newport, Wales	S. Baxter
2CVF	13/07/2021	11	RSPB Middleton Lakes, Tamworth	M. Smiles
2BFX	13/07/2021	20	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	M. Wakeman
2HVX	21/07/2021	6	Shard End Lake, Birmingham	K. Duncan
2ECF	21/07/2021	6	Babbs Mill Lake NR, Kingshurst, Solihull	K. Duncan
2ECX	03/08/2021	78	Shotton, Flintshire, Wales	BTO
2FXF	04/08/2021	205	Sean Walsh Park, Tallaght, Dublin 24, Ireland	D. H Edgar
2FXF	04/08/2021	201	Sandymount Strand, Dublin, Ireland	B. Burke
2HAX	04/08/2021	201	Sandymount Strand, Dublin, Ireland	B. Burke
2CTK	19/08/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2CTA	20/08/2021	126	Traeth Dulas, Anglesey	M. Jones
2AAV	20/08/2021	49	Westport Lake, Stoke on trent	D. Murray
2HFV	26/08/2021	20	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	M. Wakeman
2HVX	26/08/2021	20	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	M. Wakeman
2ACX	26/08/2021	108	Victoria Avenue, Porthcawl, Wales	S. Rosser
2FXF	29/08/2021	205	Sean Walsh Park, Tallaght, Dublin 24, Ireland	G. Prole
2HFH	02/09/2021	231	Kinnegar Shore, Belfast, Ireland	D. Sterling
2EAA	15/09/2021	49	Westport Lake, Stoke on trent	G. Richardson
2AFX	16/09/2021	0	Marsh Lane, Meriden	J. Hunt
2HHL	01/10/2021	233	Whitehead, Co. Antrim, NI	C. Armstrong
2HHP	02/10/2021	250	Seton Burn, East Lothian	S. Welch
2FTV	11/10/2021	60	Redesmere, Macclesfield, Cheshire	G & S. Barber
2BPH	21/10/2021	214	Newcastle, Co. Down, Ireland	S. Belshaw
2CAT	30/10/2021	213	Cruisetown Strand, CO. Louth, Ireland	J. Rod
2AJC	08/11/2021	200	Clongriffin, Dublin, Ireland	T. Carroll
2FTV	11/11/2021	60	Redesmere, Macclesfield, Cheshire	D. Tolliday
2CJV	14/11/2021	288	Blackrock Castle, Cork, Ireland	B. Power
2CHL	15/11/2021	604	Port de Capbreton, Landes, France	P. Grisser
2FTV	19/11/2021	60	Redesmere, Macclesfield, Cheshire	B. Rushton
2EAP	29/11/2021	71	Trentham Gardens, Staffordshire	G. Richardson
2APN	15/09/2021	173	Isle of Man	M.Fitzpatrick

# 'Terning' the corner for the regions Common tern

## Ben Dolan provides an update on our work at South Staffs Water's Blithfield Reservoir in conjunction with West Midlands Bird Club.

Following our successful project at Marsh Lane, we were keen to expand our work with this species across the West Midlands Region.

South Staffordshire Water's Blithfield Reservoir was identified and with their support and the support of West Midlands Bird Club planning started to survey the Common Tern in 2020. Sadly Covid, delayed this project until 2021.

The reservoir has two tern rafts and there have been regular reports from local birders of Terns actively using these rafts to breed.

In June we were joined by the team from South Staffs water and WMBC member Graham Mant to survey the Tern Rafts.

Tern rafts present different challenges to terrestrial colonies and must only be completed by experienced ringers that have previously ringed rafts, this is both for the safety of ringer and birds.

We were unsure of the impact of heavy rain earlier in the breeding season which had a

negative impact on the Marsh Lane colony.

Our approach to the rafts was greeted by good numbers of adults. Having arrived and assessed the rafts we were able to colour ring 7 juvenile birds.

Several chicks were too small to be fitted with colour rings and were left for welfare reasons. Our preference is to give the birds time to develop and grow stronger before adding the rings. At least 5 nests with eggs had been predated or perished.

Our first visit to Blithfield tern rafts had been a success but from our experiences at Marsh Lane we were confident that small improvements could be made to increase fledging success and deployment of Tern bungalows would be beneficial.

Tern rafts are exposed to the elements and predators and bungalows are a simple measure to mitigate these risks.

The very next day South Staffs water built a number of Bungalows, and these were



Above Blithfield Common Tern  
Bottom Left - Tern raft at Blithfield

deployed on the rafts.

On our second visit, a healthy number of chicks were located, and the birds had already moved into their new accommodation! A further 11 birds were fitted with colour rings.

During 2021 we colour ringed 18 Common Tern At Blithfield Reservoir.

We didn't have to wait long to have our reward with one of the Blithfield Terns being seen 71 Miles away at National Trust Formby Point Merseyside. This bird's ring was read amongst 1200 other Common Terns! Formby and Seaforth on Merseyside are key dispersal locations for West Midlands Common Terns. Following which they travel to the West coast of Ireland before continuing their migration to Spain and onto Africa.

We are looking forward to 2022 and are already looking at options to increase breeding productivity across the West Midlands Region.





**WMRG**

**Peregrine Falcon Project**

# Peregrine Falcon Project 2021

**Ben Dolan provides an update on the Peregrine Falcon project that WMRG have been working on for several years.**



A Staffordshire Peregrine

The Peregrine is an iconic raptor, reportedly the fastest bird on the planet reaching speeds of up to 200 mph. However, this speed is gravity-assisted and part of a stoop. In flat flight the Peregrine is not considered as the fastest, with Swifts reaching higher speeds.

The strongholds of the breeding birds in the UK are the uplands of the north and west and rocky sea coasts, however our birds favour the urban environment and the species has adapted well in towns and cities across the UK.

Monitoring Peregrine Falcons as ringers is a huge commitment and immensely time consuming, however with a great team of volunteers that are always willing to help, it makes life a little easier.

For those that don't know, Peregrines often fledge from high buildings within an urban setting, but their first flight is often unsuccessful and ends up with them drifting to the floor but are not strong enough to take off and rely on passers-by to report them to organisations or the building owners.

We are then contacted by either to return them to the building roof, often having to be carried up 100's of stairs.

Each bird can be recovered several times, sometimes having to be taken in to care before being returned or released.

2021 was no different with a number of collections and returns but eventually all birds fledged successfully.



Trainee Matilda on Peregrine rescue duty!

We also want to say a big thank you to the RSPCA and rescue centres who support us with keeping these birds fit so they can be returned to their nests.

Our visits to our 4 sites, started with one of our Staffordshire sites, which had hatched 3, however on our visit there were only two chicks present, one of these was ringed but the other was significantly smaller and wasn't ringed.

Our 2nd Staffordshire site, provided us with 3 very healthy chicks, which all fledged successfully

Our 3rd Staffordshire was a sad visit yet again with all 3 chicks missing, a police investigation is on-going with this nest site.

Our final visit was to our West Midlands site, which gave us some positive news with 3 healthy chicks ringed, all of which fledged.

Between us we made over 6 collection and returns this year, and climbed hundreds of steps!

We have also taken on several new sites across the West Midlands, which we are looking forward to adding to our project in 2022.

Specific site locations withheld due to persecution issues.

# Staffordshire Pied Flycatchers and Redstart

**Ringling Group member Keith Clowes has been ringing Pied Flycatchers in North Staffordshire for over 20 years. In this article he describes a season impacted by weather and human disturbance.**

2020 was a dreadful year for Pied Flycatchers in North Staffordshire, and will be remembered for all of the wrong reasons.

Our key issue in 2020 was damage to nest boxes and human interference.

However things took a positive turn in 2021 following us sharing the events of 2020.

We were contacted by landowners in the area offering private areas to install new boxes and also by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation who offered to replace all of the missing and damaged boxes for us. In fairness these were the only conservation group to offer us support, and without their help we would have either funded new boxes personally or would have not replaced them.



Female Pied Flycatcher

In truth the offers of support were the key reason for us continuing as we had discussed stopping the monitoring project altogether.



Redstart nest and chicks

So 2021 saw only 1 successful nest in one of the key areas that we monitor, however in other areas we located several active nests.

Eight nests were monitored which is way below our better years, but we were pleased to be able to monitor at least some of these birds.

Five Pied Flycatcher nests were recorded with broods of 4, 5, 6, 2 x 7 totalling 29 chicks, a further 3 adult females were also ringed in the area.



Pied flycatcher chick

We also monitored three Redstart nests which had broods of 7, 7 and six totalling 20 birds.

In total 52 birds were ringed as part of this project.

Pied Flycatchers are a red listed species and breeding habitat is vitally important for them, so we hope that by installing further boxes in 2022 increased breeding will occur in the region.

We also need to thank Terry Eyre for his continued assistance in supporting the group. Terry has located and monitored the nests in the area.

Terry does so much work for us, not only with flycatchers and Redstarts, but also with Barn Owls.

Staffordshire Police Wildlife Crime Team continue to monitor this area during the breeding season.

# Community Engagement

**Community engagement is central to our work. Our work with volunteers, community groups, partners and farmers and landowners is vitally important to us, even more so during a difficult year for all. Ben Dolan.**

2021 has been a difficult year in terms of our community engagement, we love nothing more than putting on bird ringing demonstrations so that we can share what we do with our local communities.

Due to Covid we had to change the way in which we engage, we increased social media posts, including competitions but we also joined forces with Transforming the Trent Valley Team to deliver online webinars around the work we conduct.

We conducted three online talks:

Our first was our Thermal Birding talk, which discussed all of our pioneering work with thermal technology, which was attended by a good number of people and has now been watched 1800 times from people from all over the world.

The further talks were around our farmland surveys, and were provided for Transforming the Trent Valley and for the South West region of FWAG. The talks were well attended and we had some excellent engagement and feedback.



Action for conservation summer camp held at NT Ilam Park



Both talks are now on YouTube and can all be found on our YouTube page.

During what felt like a brief rest bite from Covid restrictions we were able to conduct a ringing demonstration at one of our Wolverhampton Farms, which was attended by 25 members of the local community who were able to see Blackcap, Whitethroat and Kingfisher in the hand.

The feedback from the group was incredible and we look forward to being able to conduct more demonstrations in the future.

In August we were asked by the BTO to provide a ringing demonstration for Action for Conservation at the National Trust Estate in Ilam, North Staffordshire.

Action for Conservation works with secondary schools to inspire and empower students to become the next generation of conservationists.

The demonstration was part of a summer camp run

during which we were able to talk to 30 children about bird ringing and show them the birds up close, some were even were able to release the birds, their reactions were amazing. One of the attendees Ruth said *"The activities when we went to learn more about birds was brilliant because I was actually able to touch the bird which felt amazing."*

Unfortunately we had to cancel a further demonstration at Baggeridge Country Park in December due to an increase in Covid cases, but we hope to set a new date early in 2022.

As has become the norm, Dennis Leonard our nest box hero has continued to support ourselves and the regions birds by making loads more nest boxes which are ready to be deployed.

We can't thanks Dennis enough for all his hard work!



Paul Hopwood talking to Action for Conservation summer camp attendees

# WMRG Pin badges

**Ringling birds isn't cheep! (excuse the pun) and rings are only a small part of the cost involved in this vitally important piece of citizen science. In 2021 we decided to trial the sale of Pin badges to raise funds for our group, all of which is put back into ornithology.**

2021 saw the launch of our new series of Pin badges!

As a group we selected a variety of species which best represent the activities of our group.

We decided to have 100 badges of each bird, which enables us to raise some much needed funds for our group projects, whilst also giving something back to our fantastic followers. The badges are limited editions and no badge will be re-released so are very collectable.

Our first pin badge was the Skylark, which represented the 1500+ Skylarks we have ringed since 2016, which is nationally significant and goes a long way to support our scientific paper, which we have been working on this year.



Skylark Pin badge



Urban Dipper Pin badge available at on ourline shop

Our second badge was the urban Dipper, which represents our fantastic joint colour ringing partnership project with Birmingham City Council, which has been a great success. The money raised from this badge will be used to create more nest boxes in the area, which hopefully will encourage further breeding.

Badge 3, the Thermal Woodcock, was not part of our series but was to celebrate winning our National Christian Marsh award 2021 for innovative ornithology, which represents the work we have done with thermal imaging. This is a stunning badge and was desinged to give an idea of what a Woodcock looks like when viewed through a thermal camera at night.

This has been a successful badge and there are very

few left, so get in touch if you want to get your hands on one, and at the same time support our work.

Our aim is to continue to release a badge every 6-8 weeks, so please support our group's projects by purchasing the pin badges through our online shop:

<https://www.westmid-landsringinggroup.co.uk/shop>

The badges fit perfectly on binocular straps, scope covers, hats and clothing.

Thank you to everyone who has purchased our badges up to now, it goes a long way to support our ongoing project work.

We have several more species ready for 2022, can you guess what they will be?



Thermal Woodcock Pin badge

**VOSKER designs and manufactures the world first mobile security cameras. 2021 sees a collaboration between ourselves and Vosker Products, Canada looking at the wildlife capabilities of these devices.**



The V200 is a sleek black looking camera with a solar panel mounted to the top, with an aerial at the side. Charger, USB cables, strap and hard mount are also included.

When the unit was full charged, we downloaded the VOSKER app and activated the camera, this is an easy process.

The package that comes with the device provides 100 free images that are sent to a mobile device. We opted for an upgrade to the Elite package, which offers a number of HD images and unlimited lower resolution images, all of which are sent to a mobile device.

Using the app, we were able to set the times when the images would be taken, how often and how many. We found this as a real benefit as the days got longer during the summer months and enabled us to make these changes without disturbance.

The images were received daily. However it was quickly established that even with the HD images, the detail was insufficient for us to read colour rings on birds.



The unit is well made, well-presented. The battery and solar panel provided excellent capacity and remained full for the four months it was out on site.

The app is easy to use and enabled full control of the unit at any time of the day or night. VOSKER's after care was excellent.

Whilst the images were good enough to identify bird species and predators they could not provide the level of detail we required for this niche capability.

Improved optics which could consistently record colour rings would benefit 100s of schemes across the world, reducing time in the field and disturbance when combined with the mobile functionality.

We look forward to using the V200 again during the 2022 breeding season and thank VOSKER for their continued support.

During 2021 we were fortunate enough to work with VOSKER one of the premier providers of solar-powered and mobile-enabled monitoring tech on the planet.

Although predominantly used for security purposes, we had a number of aims for the breeding season that we wanted this unit to deliver.

- Monitor day and night remotely using the V200
- Receive HD images on our mobile phone to identify returning colour ringed Common Tern
- Reduce time in the field
- Reduce disturbance to sites
- Monitor predation/ predators



# Ringling Data 2021

# Ringling Recoveries

Details of birds subsequently encountered by the group and other ringers. Table also contains details of interesting longevity records

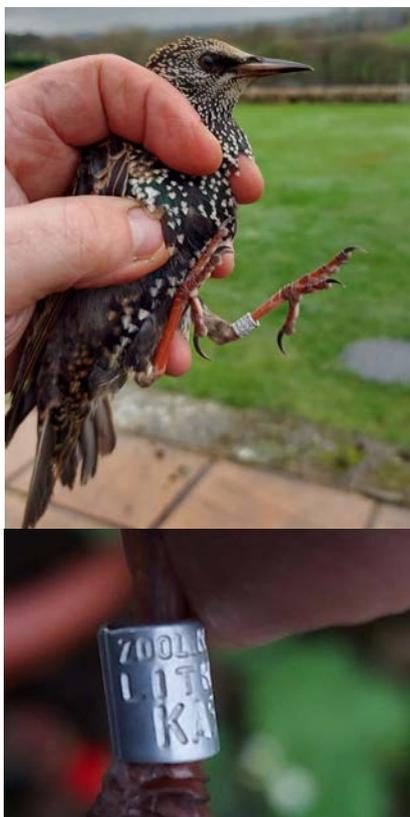
Species	Date Ringed	Original location ringed	Date found	Location found	Distance Travelled Km	Days	Finding condition
Barn Owl	13/08/2019	Gentleshaw Common, Staffs	26/07/21	Burntwood, Staffs	4km	713	Dead
Blackcap	06/08/2020	Marsh Lane NR, Meriden	26/05/21	Five Ways, Warwick	12km	293	Dead
Blackcap	08/04/2020	Portishead, North Somerset	18/04/2021	Overbury, Worcs	77km	375	Alive
Blackcap	28/09/2018	Marsh Lane NR, Meriden	07/03/2021	Witcombe, Glos	72km	891	Alive
Blackcap	22/08/2021	Overbury, Worcestershire	18/09/2021	STW, Swindon	54km	27	Alive
Chiffchaff	13/09/2020	Cannock Chase, Staffs	28/01/2021	Setubal, Portugal	1648km	137	Alive
Chiffchaff	11/07/2021	Strensham STW, Worcs	15/08/2021	Overbury, Worcs	7km	35	Alive
Goldfinch	31/01/2020	Leigh, Staffordshire	23/03/2021	Wirral, Merseyside	98km	417	Alive
House Martin	05/06/2017	STW Penkridge, Staffs	15/05/2021	Penkridge, Staffs	0km	1440	Alive
Linnet	25/02/2020	Lower Barn Farm, Pattingham	13/04/2021	Scotshouse, Monaghan	372km	413	Dead
Linnet	03/02/2019	Lower Barn Farm, Pattingham	16/04/2021	Patshull, Staffs	2km	803	Alive
Redpoll	10/10/2020	Cannock Chase, Staffs	17/04/2021	Cefn Coch, Shropshire	77km	189	Alive
Redpoll	05/04/2016	Cannock Chase, Staffs	16/04/2021	Dumfries Galloway	316km	1837	Alive
Reed Bunting	24/04/2017	Marsh Lane NR, Meriden	23/04/2021	Marsh Lane NR,	0km	1460	Alive
Reed Bunting	03/05/2018	Marsh Lane NR, Meriden	15/04/2021	Marsh Lane NR,	0km	1078	Alive
Reed Warbler	02/07/2017	Chelmarsh Reservoir, Shropshire	22/06/2021	STW Shifnal, Shropshire	21km	1451	Alive
Reed Warbler	23/08/2016	STW Shifnal, Shropshire	12/06/2021	STW Shifnal, Shropshire	0km	1754	Alive
Reed Warbler	12/08/2017	Marsh Lane NR, Meriden	07/05/2021	Marsh Lane NR,	0km	1364	Alive
Reed Warbler	12/08/2017	Marsh Lane NR, Meriden	29/04/2021	Marsh Lane NR,	0km	1356	Alive
Reed Warbler	04/08/2020	Brandon Marsh NR, Warwickshire	27/07/2021	Marsh Lane NR,	17km	357	Alive
Reed Warbler	12/05/2018	Blythe Valley, West Midlands	27/07/2021	Marsh Lane NR,	11km	1172	Alive
Reed Warbler	05/08/2016	Marsh Lane NR, Meriden	09/07/2021	Marsh Lane NR,	0km	1799	Alive

Species	Date Ringed	Original location ringed	Date found	Location found	Distance Travelled Km	Days	Finding Condition
Reed Warbler	12/08/2017	Marsh Lane NR, Meriden	08/07/2021	Marsh Lane NR, Meriden	0km	1426	Alive
Reed Warbler	04/06/2021	Marsh Lane NR, Meriden	11/07/2021	STW Redditch, Warks	23km	37	Alive
Reed Warbler	04/07/2021	Overbury, Worcs	17/07/2021	Priory Country Park, Beds	113km	13	Alive
Sedge Warbler	07/05/2021	Marsh Lane NR, Meriden	23/06/2021	WMBC Ladywalk,	12km	47	Alive
Siskin	05/09/2020	Cannock Chase, Staffs	01/07/2021	Dumfries and Galloway	316km	299	Alive
Siskin	12/09/2020	Cannock Chase, Staffs	14/04/2021	Nailsworth, Glos	120km	214	Alive
Siskin	05/09/2020	Cannock Chase, Staffs	18/03/2021	Morbihan, France	543km	194	Dead
Stonechat	28/08/2021	Overbury, Worcs	22/09/2021	Hayling Island, Hampshire	158km	25	Alive
Woodcock	12/01/2018	Rugeley Trent Meadows	21/04/2021	Bryansk o. Russia	2363km	1195	Dead
Yellowhammer	06/11/2020	Patshull, Staffs	12/04/2021	Lower Barns Farm, Staffs	2km	157	Alive
Reed Warbler	14/08/2021	Witches Oak, Derbys	22/08/2021	Kings Bromley, Staffs	35km	8	Alive
Reed Bunting	23/10/2016	STW Shifnal, Shropshire	20/11/2021	STW Shifnal, Shropshire	0	1854	Alive
Starling	25/06/2021	Ventes Ragas, Lithuania	03/12/2021	Kingsley, Staffs	1526	161	Alive
Jack Snipe	24/11/2020	Fair Lady, Fiveways, Staffs	24/11/2020	Cuckoo Bank, Staffs	2	362	Alive
Jack Snipe	28/12/2019	Fair Lady, Fiveways, Staffs	04/11/2021	Cuckoo Bank, Staffs	2	677	Alive



# A Lithuanian Starling!

**Following on from his catch of a Rose-coloured Starling in 2020, Keith Clowes strikes gold again, this time with a Lithuanian Starling!**



I regularly have lots of Starlings in my garden, which included last years Rose coloured bird.

This winter the flock that visits us started to increase in numbers in November and after a few days I noticed two ringed birds.

On the 3rd December several birds entered my trapping area and were caught. Little did I know that one of these birds was had travelled a long distance.

The bird was originally ringed on the 25th June 2021 at Ventes Ragas ringing station

in Lithuania.

The bird had travelled 1526km (miles) in less than six months, which is amazing. Its route is likely to have seen the bird pass through Poland and Scandinavia before it potentially crossed the North Sea from the Netherlands, ending up somewhere on the East coast of the UK.

There is a large roost quite close to my home in Kingsley, Staffordshire and I imagine that there are a few more ringed birds within the large roosting flock. I am hoping my luck continues and more foreign birds are caught!

# From Russia - but not with love!

**Another of the group's Woodcock found its way to its breeding grounds in Russia.**



We have had several recoveries of Woodcock within the group and this bird is another long distance traveller.

Whilst we have Woodcock breeding locally during the summer, the birds that we catch from November onwards are migrants and have travelled great distances to get to the UK to spend winter. This bird was no exception.

This Woodcock was ringed on the Trent Meadows near to Rugeley in Staffordshire

in January 2018. It was found dead in Bryansk Oblast in Russia, South West of Moscow, 1195 later on 21st April 2021, just over 3 years later. Whilst this recovery was 2363km (1468miles) from where it was ringed, in the 3 years it was alive it is likely to have completed this journey five times, between the UK and Russia.

When you add the distances up this bird is likely to have travelled around 12000km or 7456 miles. A great recovery, but a sad end for a long distance migrant.

# Ringling Totals for 2021

The following chart contains details of all birds caught, ringed and processed during 2021. Site specific data is not included in this report, but is provided to the relevant land owners. Should you wish to obtain site specific data please contact us at [wmg.contact@gmail.com](mailto:wmg.contact@gmail.com)

Year	2021	2020	% Change
Barn Owl	37	11	236
Blackbird	87	39	118
Blackcap	386	264	46
Black-headed Gull	135	112	21
Blue Tit	109	69	58
Brambling	24	4	500
Bullfinch	6	2	200
Buzzard	0	1	-100
Cetti's Warbler	16	2	700
Chaffinch	187	151	24
Chiffchaff	344	222	55
Chiffchaff (Siberian - tristis)	1	0	0
Coal Tit	6	1	500
Coal Tit (British - britannicus)	0	2	-100
Collared Dove	0	3	-100
Common Redpoll (Mealy - flammea)	0	1	-100
Common Tern	55	24	129
Coot	0	9	-100
Cuckoo	2	5	-60
Dipper	7	0	0
Dotterel	2	0	0
Dunnock	115	87	30
Fieldfare	13	37	-68
Garden Warbler	38	7	443
Goldcrest	34	70	-51
Golden Plover	3	1	200
Goldfinch	135	69	86
Goshawk	3	0	0
Grasshopper Warbler	2	1	100
Great Spotted Woodpecker	0	3	-100
Great Tit	83	30	177
Green Woodpecker	4	0	0
Greenfinch	274	47	483
Grey Partridge	7	6	17
Grey Wagtail	24	9	167
House Martin	54	8	575
House Sparrow	9	53	-83
Jack Snipe	53	8	563
Jay	11	0	0
Kestrel	9	6	50

Species	2021	2020	% Change
Kingfisher	10	0	0
Lapwing	5	2	150
Lesser Redpoll	72	179	-60
Lesser Whitethroat	7	1	600
Linnet	427	327	31
Little Bunting	1	0	0
Little Owl	1	0	0
Little Ringed Plover	1	2	-50
Long-tailed Tit	29	64	-56
Marsh Tit	3	1	300
Meadow Pipit	38	78	-51
Nightjar	34	34	0
Nuthatch	2	7	-71
Oystercatcher	2	3	-33
Peregrine	7	15	-53
Pied Flycatcher	32	10	220
Pied Wagtail (yarrellii)	1	2	-50
Pied/White Wagtail	11	1	1000
Quail	1	0	0
Red Kite	1	0	0
Redstart	22	7	214
Redwing	145	335	-57
Reed Bunting	203	83	145
Reed Warbler	163	23	609
Robin	104	62	68
Rose-coloured Starling	0	1	-100
Sand Martin	0	33	-100
Sedge Warbler	123	4	2975
Siskin	110	110	-3
Skylark	307	444	-36
Snipe	8	3	133
Song Thrush	23	10	130
Sparrowhawk	1	3	-67
Spotted Flycatcher	8	1	700
Starling	48	16	200
Stock Dove	5	5	0
Stonechat	60	12	400
Swallow	62	7	786
Tawny Owl	1	7	-86
Tree Pipit	2	16	-88
Tree Sparrow	4	18	-78
Treecreeper	3	2	50
Wheatear	16	2	700
Wheatear (Greenland - leucorhoa)	2	0	0
Whinchat	1	1	0
Whitethroat	70	20	250
Wigeon	0	9	-100
Willow Warbler	92	21	338

Species	2021	2020	% Change
Woodcock	33	47	-30
Woodlark	2	5	-60
Woodpigeon	1	1	0
Wren	62	25	148
Yellow Wagtail	6	0	0
Yellowhammer	115	68	69
<b>Species Total (94 species ringed)</b>	<b>4767</b>	<b>3491</b>	

## Subsequent Encounters 2021

Details of recaptured birds by WMRG and birds ringed by WMRG and recaptured by other ringers.

Barn Owl	1
Blackbird	2
Blackcap	11
Blue Tit	2
Cetti's Warbler	1
Chiffchaff	5
Dipper	1
Dotterel	1
Dunnock	10
Goldfinch	7
Grasshopper Warbler	1
Great Tit	2
Greenfinch	5
Grey Wagtail	1
House Martin	1
House Sparrow	1
Jack Snipe	6
Lesser Redpoll	1
Linnet	7
Long-tailed Tit	2
Nightjar	14
Nuthatch	1
Reed Bunting	21
Reed Warbler	21
Robin	2
Sedge Warbler	11
Skylark	12
Song Thrush	2
Starling	1
Whitethroat	2
Willow Warbler	1
Woodcock	2
Wren	1
Yellowhammer	7
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>196</b>



# Colour Ringing Projects

The following detail provides information on our Colour Ringing Projects across the Region and how to report sightings

**ABC**

**Peregrine Falcon**

Orange ring with black alpha-numeric code (letter/number) (on left tarsus) and metal ring (on right tarsus)  
contact  
wmrg.contact@gmail.com or  
jez.blackburn@bto.org

**2ABC**

**Black-headed Gull**

Black ring with a white four alpha-numeric code (starting number "2") and metal ring (on right tarsus)  
contact  
wmrg.contact@gmail.com

**AB**

**Pied Wagtail**

Black ring with a white 2 alpha-code (on left leg) and metal ring (on right leg)  
contact  
wmrg.contact@gmail.com or  
seatroutforum@gmail.com

**AB**

**Grey Wagtail**

Red ring with a white 2 alpha-code (on left leg) and metal ring (on right leg)  
contact  
wmrg.contact@gmail.com or  
seatroutforum@gmail.com

**C22**

**Common Tern**

Black ring with a white 3 alpha-numeric code (on left leg) and metal ring (on right leg)  
contact  
wmrg.contact@gmail.com

**BR01**

**Lapwing**

Black ring with white alpha-numeric code (letter/number) (on left tarsus) and metal ring (on right tarsus)  
contact  
wmrg.contact@gmail.com

**AB**

**Stonechat**

Black ring with a white 2 alpha-code (on left leg) and metal ring (on right leg)  
contact  
wmrg.contact@gmail.com or  
wmrgstonechat@gmail.com

Please visit  
<https://www.cr-birding.org/>  
for details of other  
colour-ringing projects

Please keep your eyes peeled for any of our colour-ringed birds. We would gratefully receive all sightings and will provide finders with details of each bird.

**WMRG.CONTACT@GMAIL.COM**

# Contact us

**For details of how to get in touch with us, or to find out what we are up to take a look below!**

**There are various ways that you can get in touch with us, and for our latest news we are on Twitter and Facebook**

For information on our farmland survey work or if you are a landowner and want to arrange a visit from us then please get in touch via email.

For details of demonstrations or for data enquiries please email us.

[wmrug.contact@gmail.com](mailto:wmrug.contact@gmail.com)

## Want to start ringing?

The ringing process involves much more than you might imagine, preparation and planning to catch and ring birds is essential.

Habitat management at ringing sites, maintenance of equipment and stocking winter feeding stations are all essential jobs.

We share chores with everyone getting involved. There is a lot to do and it will take up a lot of time.

As a group we are active all year. Most of our activity is often early in the morning, so sessions starting at, or before, 5am are commonplace.

Our ringing sites are rarely accessible by public transport so you would need to consider this.

During summer and winter we are often out on an evening or at night undertaking thermal surveys and nightjar sessions.

If you undertake bat surveys as part of your work or as a hobby then this may conflict with training.

If you are interested then please get in touch.



**To find us on Facebook, search for**  
West Midlands Ringing Group



**For Twitter please follow**  
[@ringerswm](https://twitter.com/ringerswm)



**To view our YouTube channel, subscribe to:**  
West Midlands ringing group.



**To contact us via email**  
[wmrug.contact@gmail.com](mailto:wmrug.contact@gmail.com)



[www.westmidlandsringinggroup.co.uk](http://www.westmidlandsringinggroup.co.uk)



Female Brambling



**The Society was formed in 1955 and aims to encourage the study and protection of birds in Shropshire and elsewhere.**

It organises a wide range of activities, including indoor meetings and field trips, undertakes survey work and produces an annual bird report and a quarterly bulletin.

SOS values the work of the WMRG for the contribution they make to our understanding of the County's birds.

**In December 2019, The Society published The Birds of Shropshire,**

This is the most comprehensive record of the County's avifauna ever published. It is based on the results of six years fieldwork by over 650 different observers who submitted over 333,400 records.

These records have been used to produce maps showing the current distribution of almost 200 different species.

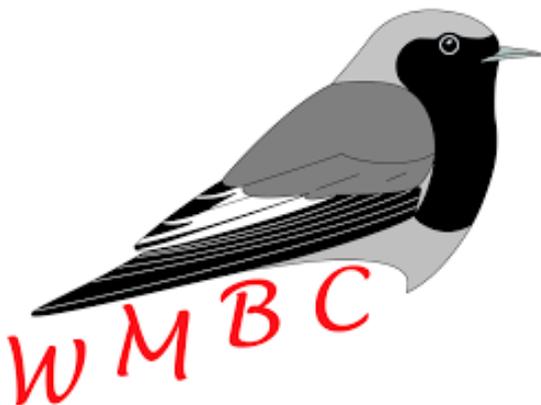
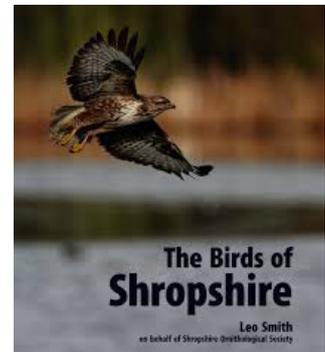
The Birds of Shropshire includes an account for each species, describing its distribution and relative abundance.

For many species it will show that massive changes have occurred in their population and distribution.

The Birds of Shropshire will shape conservation priorities in the County for the next 20 years

For more details visit the SOS website and for the Birds of Shropshire visit

<https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/books/id/41929/>



**West Midland Bird Club is a regional organisation that is dedicated to the study and conservation of wild birds in Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and the West Midlands.**

We have bird reserves at Belvide and Blithfield reservoirs in Staffordshire, Harborne near the city of Birmingham in the West Midlands and Ladywalk in Warwickshire.

WMBC also have access agreement to bird-watch at Gailey Reservoirs in Staffordshire (permission of the Canal & Rivers Trust) and at the Moors Pool at the Upton Warren reserve in Worcestershire (with permission of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust).

The Club also operates a network of local branches throughout the region and operates field trips for its members.

The Club publishes a comprehensive and highly acclaimed Annual Report of the birds of the region, which is the only authentic source of information on the avifauna of our four counties.

For further information about The West Midland Bird Club or if you would like to become a member please visit the website at

[www.westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk](http://www.westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk)



**Staffordshire  
Wildlife Trust**



*Protecting Staffordshire's Wildlife and places for over 50 years*

**Staffordshire Wildlife Trust is your local wildlife charity dedicated to looking after Staffordshire's wildlife and wild places. Our mission is to protect and enhance the wildlife and wild places of Staffordshire and to promote understanding, enjoyment and involvement in the natural world by putting wildlife at the heart of everything we do.**

**The UK has become one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. We actively work to protect all wildlife including birds, mammals, invertebrates, flowers, trees, fungi, fish, amphibians and reptiles. Our conservation projects help to create and restore habitats for wildlife, to ensure that the county's wild creatures have secure places where they can feed, shelter and breed.**



**For more information about our work visit:** [www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk](http://www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk)

**Or to become a member visit:** [www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/support-us/become-member](http://www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/support-us/become-member)



Registered charity number 259558 Limited company no 959609

Looking after **Staffordshire's wildlife**



## A world inspired by birds and informed by science.

**The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) is a UK charity that focuses on understanding birds and, in particular, how and why bird populations are changing. Our vision is of a world where people are inspired by birds and informed by science.**

There are lots of ways you can contribute. Many help by taking part in fieldwork surveys - but you can also support the BTO as a member, becoming a regional organiser, help at an event, or donate to an appeal.

BTO Surveys are great way of learning more about the birds and other wildlife in your local area.

The BTO organises a range of surveys every year.

Some surveys can be

done by beginners from the comfort of their own homes whilst others require more skill and endurance!

All BTO surveys make an important contribution to our understanding of the UK's birds.

For more information about taking part in a BTO survey or supporting their work, please visit

[www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)



Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group



The Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest (FWAG SouthWest) is a registered charity representing the region's farmers and landowners in the delivery of wildlife conservation.

FWAG was first established as a charity in the 1960s by a group of forward thinking farmers who saw that the environment was an important part of a successful farming business. FWAG SouthWest shares this

vision today and acts to: Promote and enhance the conservation of wildlife, the environment and the landscape in relation to modern agricultural needs.

FWAG SouthWest provides independent expert advice, tailored to your needs and aimed at bringing environmental and financial benefits to your business.

Our team of experienced advisers cover Cornwall, Devon, Dorset,

Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire.

FWAG SouthWest is also part of the FWAG Association, an umbrella organisation under which many of the independent FWAG organisations across the country can join together to help influence government policy relating to the delivery of farmland environmental conservation.

For more information visit <https://www.fwagsw.org.uk/>



## THE GREEN FARM COLLECTIVE



The Green Farm Collective are a group of farmers focused on regenerative farming practices which nurture the soil and nature.

We're passionate about making our farms a wholly positive legacy for the future of our countryside, our wildlife and our soils

The group will allow businesses and individuals to invest in our network of British farmers who are creating and managing nature and carbon-enhancing projects on their farms.

Our practices encourage nature, build soil health and increase carbon storage and protect our countryside's watercourses.

Our mission is to build a community that invests in and offsets personal and business environmental footprints in nature-enhancing projects that you can come and visit and be proud to share.

### Investing in Carbon

Carbon from our named farms will be sold by the tonne, annually.

### Investing in projects

The Green Farm Collective farms will create crowdfunded projects for the Green Farm Collective community to invest in. These could include specific wildlife and habitat creation or enhancement, public engagement/education facilities and education and Care Farming support activities.

For more information on the Green Farm Collective and how to invest visit

[www.greenfarmcollective.com](http://www.greenfarmcollective.com)

# Team4Nature

“Business, Community and Nature, Together for a better world”



## OUR MISSION

**“To strengthen local businesses and build pride of place so that local communities thrive, whilst enjoying the many benefits that arise from a deep connection with the rest of nature”.**

Team4Nature was created in response to the findings of The State of Nature 2013 Report.

We provide the stage for caring and visionary businesses, amazing community groups and passionate individuals to rise together and create thriving neighbourhoods with a bright future.

Our Team4Nature local guardians work on the ground to strengthen these exciting networks and find more heroes that possess the qualities necessary to make a difference in their local community:



Team4Nature local networks are designed to offer something for everyone, whilst building strength through teamwork. Businesses, community groups and individuals can all get involved and make a difference in their local area.

Each Team4Nature local network covers a parliamentary constituency.

Each Team4Nature local network will have its own community website area to promote local business and serve as a resource to help people connect with nature, projects and organisations in their local area.

Each Team4Nature local network will have one or more Team4Nature local guardians, working on the ground to help make things happen, organise network meetings and strengthen the local community.

By connecting people to the local businesses and other organisations that care, the level of local pride of place and sustainable economic strength will rise. Local supply chains and employment hubs will also be built, as each Team4Nature local network strengthens.

So! If YOU appreciate the power of nature, understand the challenge and feel inspired to get involved and make a difference in your local community,

Web:

[team4nature.co.uk](http://team4nature.co.uk)

Email:

[info@team4nature.co.uk](mailto:info@team4nature.co.uk)

# Thanks and Credits

**Our sincere thanks go to all of those people who have supported WMRG over the last year.**

## **Farmers & Landowners**

J&J Roberts and Sons, Richard and Ray Bower, Penelope Bossom, Jake Freestone & Paul Gillett at Overbury Enterprises, Graham Clay, John and Clive Bayley, John Bibbey and Richard Tomlinson.

## **We also wish to thank our partners for all of their continued support:**

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Jonathan Groom, Staffordshire County Council, Forestry England, Severn Trent, South Staffs Water PLC, Cannock Chase AONB, Packington Estate (Marsh Lane NR) Nick Barlow, John Hunt, Chris Millward, NFU, Thomas Jacks, Vosker, Ecotone, BTO, WMBC, FWAG South West, British Telecom and BASC

**We also extend our special thanks to nest box legend Dennis Leonard.**



## **Photo Credits**

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Tom McKibbin - Common tern

# WMRG Members

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Fergus Henderson

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Jim Stewart

## **C Permit holders**

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Anita Glover  
Claire Dovey  
Jessica Stuart-Smith  
Paul Smith  
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IMAGE COURTESY OF DEREK LEE'S



# WMRG

# STONECHAT

## COLOUR RINGING PROJECT

[WMRGSTONECHAT@GMAIL.COM](mailto:WMRGSTONECHAT@GMAIL.COM)

### PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- 1) To help inform habitat management for the Landowners, AONB, Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Forestry England and Staffordshire Wildlife Trust .
- 2) Identify breeding territories
- 3) Identify wintering areas and numbers present
- 4) Monitor longevity
- 5) Monitor species movements
- 6) Monitor site fidelity
- 7) Understand dispersal of young birds
- 8) Allow us to understand the reasons why birds may not return to the same breeding territory. This will consider numerous aspects including, disturbance, competition, habitat management and habitat changes.
- 9) To understand the population of the species in the areas surveyed.

### What to look for?

European Stonechats will be ringed with 2 rings

- 1) Metal ring left leg
- 2) Black Colour ring with 2 white letters on the Right leg.

**We will be concentrating on Cannock Chase, Gentleshaw Common and Bredon Hill.**

### How can you help?

Please send details of all sightings to our social media or [wmgstonechat@gmail.com](mailto:wmgstonechat@gmail.com)

Please include date, time, location, number of birds present, photographs and any other information you think would be useful. Details of unringed birds would also be important.

Consider Apps such as **What3words**, **Google maps**, **OS Maps**, **Viewranger**

A further information sheet is available on request via email.



**WMRG**

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