



# WMRG

ANNUAL REPORT 2020 ©

# WMRG

The West Midlands Ringing Group 2020  
Annual report would not be possible without  
the support of the following partners



J & J Roberts Farm  
Pattingham

R.Tomlinson  
Burleydam

The Bradshaws Estate  
Wolverhampton

R. Lay  
Wolverley

Lower Drayton Farm  
Penkridge

R W Leedham & Son  
Wiggington



Graham Clay  
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West Midlands Ringing Group

# Foreword



*Paul Hopwood*

**Paul Hopwood**

Secretary,  
West Midlands Ringing Group



**Welcome to the third annual report for the West Midlands Ringing Group.**

**Feedback for our 2020 was extremely positive and we hope that this years will be just as well received.**

We had hoped that 2020 would be a great year for us, we had high hopes and some exciting projects ahead of us, sadly as we entered February we started to see the impact of Covid 19, but at this point we had no idea of what the following months would bring.

First of all we would like to send our thoughts and best wishes to those who have been effected by the pandemic. Secondly we would like to thank all of the NHS staff and other Key workers who have worked tirelessly for the UK during an unprecedented event. As a show of the group's appreciation we held a fundraising event and donated over £200 to NHS Charities Together.

As I started to compile this report in the autumn, the second wave of the virus was increasing and the months ahead looked to be challenging. With that in mind we felt that our 2020 report may shine a light on some positives, in darker times.

Our ringing activities were restricted for

several months. Even when the restrictions were lifted members of the group, myself included, still had to consider partners and relatives who were in the high risk category, so we never got back to anything like normal. But, when we could get out, and when it was safe to do so, we did our best.

Our funding applications were curtailed due to charities concentrating on support for groups and organisations who are supporting those directly impacted by the virus, something that we totally understood.

For me 2020 has reminded me of two vitally important things; one to cherish your families and friends and secondly never to underestimate the importance of the natural world for mental health. In the darkest months of lock-down we were still lucky enough to have the countryside around us, and for me the daily one hour exercise period allowed me to immerse myself in the nature around my home in South Staffordshire. I truly believe that being outdoors in the natural world was hugely beneficial and helped me though the summer.

**I truly hope that you enjoy this report and it brings you some enjoyment!**

*Paul Hopwood*

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We would like extend our sincere thanks to all of the people who have contributed to the articles found in this report, from both within the group and our partners.

**WMRG**  
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NFU Online  
Vosker International  
West Midlands Police



# 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, and 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

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

# Focus on Farming

# Is it Really all Doom and Gloom?

**There can be no getting away from the fact that farmland birds are in decline, but do the recent figures indicate that positive changes may not be that far away. Is now the time for us to start working in a more positive way with farmers rather than continued criticism.**

Recent reports have shown that farmland birds have declined more severely than birds in any other habitat. Current estimations indicate a fall of 45% in the Farmland Bird Indicator since 1970.

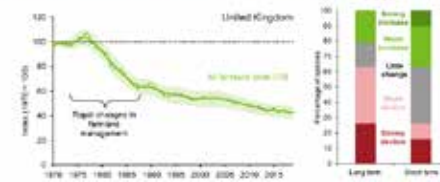
Farmland is vitally important and refers to the 75% of land in the UK which is devoted to agriculture. There is no getting away that this is land that we need to produce our food.

The data available shows that the majority of farmland bird decline occurred in the 1970s & the 1980s and it is suggested that this was due to the negative impact of changes in farmland management.

However, the decline has continued at a slower rate more recently. More encouragingly the decline has decreased significantly between 2013 and 2018 and we hope that this is the start of a positive change.

I am sure that we have all become experts in charts and graphs over the last year, with infection rates and R rates televised almost daily as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. We saw both significant declines and increases in the data over a relatively short time, and I am sure when we started to see infection rates slowing, we could see the light at the end

Figure 2: Breeding farmland birds in the UK, 1970 to 2019



of a dark tunnel.

I truly hope that this is where we are now, with farmland bird decline decreasing and a positive future and reversal of decline just around the corner.

We are not naive enough to think that it is all good news and there is still a lot to be done, and this needs to be done quickly. For some species we may just be too late.

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. For some this may not have gone far enough, but 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 they 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 now speak with farmers who have a passion for wildlife and the environment. These are farmers who are proud of their farms, proud of their soil, proud of their wildlife 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.

So perhaps it is now the right time, rather than dwelling on the past, to start working in partnership with farmers to encourage their actions, to support British farming and to ensure that the positive steps continue for the benefits of future generations.

The future may be bright and it may be green!

Paul Hopwood  
Secretary WMRG





# Overbury Enterprises

**West Midlands Ringing Group were kindly invited to Overbury in summer 2020. In this article owner Penelope Bossom and farm Manager Jake Freestone provide an overview of this magnificent estate.**



Sheep grazing the Iron Age Hill Fort on Bredon Hill

**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.**

The Martin family came to Overbury in 1723 and gradually bought up the farmland and village properties. Their descendants are still looking after it today.

The 1,600 Hectare in-hand farm is a mixed arable and sheep farm with some land let out for vegetable production with irrigation. The arable crops grown include milling wheat, malting barley, beans, linseed, oilseed rape and quinoa. We are a LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) demonstration farm as well as being annually LEAF Marque certified since 2007. The farm also has an extensive Entry and Higher Level Stewardship Agreement, which expires in December 2020.

Options across our farmland include; skylark plots, unharvested headlands, pollen and nectar mixes, wild bird seed areas, cultivated margins for rare arable flowers, fallow plots, beetle banks, reduced input grassland and water buffer zones. The Estate has other enterprises including a pheasant and partridge shoot, woodland, a nursery (Grasshoppers) and both residential and commercial property.



Planting barley into a cover crop

The farm has been managed using the principles of Regenerative Agriculture since 2015 which include

- 1. Move the soil as little as possible**
- 2. Maintain soil cover at all times**
- 3. Have a wide and diverse rotation**

The farm has been managed. The changes have made a huge improvement in our soil health, easily measured by increased earthworm numbers, which has subsequently increased the number and species of farmland birds. Coupled with the principles above, we have stopped using insecticides and seed dressings on our crops.

The farm still uses pesticides, such as herbicides (weed killers) and fungicides (crop health and protection) but we are reducing these slowly as we grow healthier crops in healthier soils.



Cover crop mix 2020



Oilseed with companion crops on Bredon Hill

Our sheep, who lamb outdoors in April, play a crucial role in the whole farm system, grazing grassland through the spring, summer and autumn but also forage and cover crops on the arable fields during the winter months. Lamb is fattened from grass and forage crops and sold through Sainsbury's and locally through a box scheme. The cover crops protect the soil from winter rainfall reducing erosion and capture significant levels of carbon dioxide (reducing climate change), feed the soil bacteria and fungi but also provide habitat, food and protection for our farmland birds.



Insects utilising the quinoa crop



One of West Midlands Ringing Groups ringed Skylark on Bredon Hill



Looking out over Bredon Hill

**It has been a real eye opener working with the West Midlands Ringing group this autumn to see for ourselves, in much more detail, the numbers of birds on the farm.**

We have been monitoring our populations since 2004 but the thermal imagery, catch and ringing brings our record keeping to a whole new level.

We are hopeful that these records will be able to promote a sustainable farming system, increasing our farm biodiversity at a time when it needs all the help it can get.

**Penelope Bossom & Jake Freestone**



Golden Plover ringed on Overbury Estate

From a West Midlands Ringing Group Perspective, Overbury Enterprises presents a fantastic opportunity for the group.

We were fortunate enough to be invited to engage with the Estate to conduct a program of ringing with the aim of assisting in the wildlife surveying of the estate.



A Northern Wheatear a passage migrant to Bredon Hill

Covid-19 delayed the start of our effort to the post breeding season and has restricted our activities this year as a result but good coverage has been achieved despite this, in particular nocturnal farmland bird surveys.

Our efforts to date have been concentrated on the higher elevations on the estate on the upper slopes of Bredon Hill (299m).

The worked area is comprised of a number of medium sized arable and a few pasture fields enclosed by limestone stone walls.

Plantation woodland borders the lower edge of the area.

Thermal Surveys have been conducted regularly and



systematically in 7 fields around Lalu Farm and Sundial Barn.

Skylark and Woodcock have dominated the catch in these fields with a small number of Snipe, Stock Dove and a single Golden Plover adding to the interest.

Roosting Fieldfare are frequently observed, often in good numbers and thirteen have been trapped and ringed.

Redwing are more occasional with only two trapped and ringed.

A small number of Skylarks have been re-trapped.

Several attempts to trap the Tawny Owls in the plantation woodland have so far only yielded one individual, but there is a healthy population and at least four territories are present and more work is required.



Above Stonechat from Bredon Hill

Above Right - Stock Dove from Bredon Hill



Observations indicate that there are very good populations of wintering Woodcock, evidenced by the highest count so far of 28.

Snipe have been encountered regularly, flocks of up to 12 in number have been seen on the arable fields.

Golden Plover have been observed regularly too with 22 the highest count.

Promisingly a single Grey Partridge has been noted on a thermal survey on the hill and as none are released here, this must be a wild bird.

Daytime activities have been limited to spring trapping chats and mist netting Meadow pipits during the autumn passage.

Wheatear, Stonechat and Whinchat have all been trapped and ringed as well as Meadow Pipits.

The Autumn Thrush and Pipit passage at the site was significant at the site with many thousands of the former involved while flocks of several hundred Meadow Pipit were present on at least one occasion.

It is clear that there are very healthy wintering bird populations present on the hill but also that there is much more potential for ringing activities at other times of year and at other locations on the estate.

Spring and autumn passage birds, chats and pipits especially can be expected in numbers on the hill.

Stonechat are ever present and the planned colour ringing of birds here should be productive in both numbers terms and ongoing observations.

The populations of Waders in the lower areas of the farm will be surveyed once Shooting activity subsides in the new year.

In addition two fields in vale area that have been managed sympathetically and developed into reedbed and rough flooded grassland will no doubt become a focus for future activity to conduct more passerine surveys.

Finch flocks have been noted here as well as a possible reed bunting roost. The area as whole will no doubt hold reedbed species and act as a focus for passage warblers in Spring and Summer through to early autumn.

**John Overfield**  
**WMRG**

# The Bradshaws Estate, Staffordshire

**In this article estate owner Sally Beard (pic) talks about her farm estate. We have been ringing at the Bradshaws for several years and have been hugely impressed by the work that has been undertaken to improve the farm for the benefits of the environment and for wildlife.**

The Bradshaws Estate is 1000 acres of land in a ring fence. The land is located on the edge of the West Midlands conurbation, only 5 miles from Wolverhampton City centre. There are many public rights of way within the estate.

The land is a good Grade 2 sandy loam.

The land has been farmed very intensively in the past. Fruit, vegetables and potatoes were the main crops. Artificial fertilisers and routine pesticides were applied to the crops for about 40 years.

Around the early 1990's, farming practice was changed and it became less intensive. The horticultural crops were replaced with combinable crops, namely wheat, oilseed rape, oats, and beans. However, there was increased use of nitrates and more annual cultivation of the land.



An extremely productive field system for farmland birds and in particular Skylark

The world has seen a peak in crop yields in the last 40 years enabled by artificial fertilisers and pesticides. These yields are no longer increasing while we continue to pour all these expensive inputs onto our land. Our valuable over-cultivated topsoil, which has taken millions of years to create, is disappearing down the rivers and our natural environment is suffering while we try to produce affordable food for an ever increasing population. The challenge to produce affordable, non-subsidised, environmentally friendly food for the world is the core of our thinking here.



With this in mind, 3 years ago we adopted a no-fill approach to our farming. We no longer cultivate the soil, everything is direct drilled into the soil. Our rotations have increased, cover crops are used so no bare soil is ever left to overwinter.



We no longer use any insecticides. By not cultivating, we no longer release any carbon into the atmosphere. Undisturbed soil creates ideal habitats for earthworms and micro rhizal fungi that enable our crops to take up nutrients and flourish.

As more earthworms are present we have more birds, more owls and field mice. The stubble and the trash left behind with no disturbance of the soil is transforming our wildlife populations.

We are able to monitor this amazing transformation with the use of night scopes and bird ringing carried out by The West Midland Ringing Group. A fantastic team of ringers who report their findings online and to us personally.

It is a complete revelation to us and a revolution in our soil and environmental management. A very, very big thank you to them.



# R. W. Leedham & Son

## Syerscote Manor, Tamworth

**In this feature farmer Allan Leedham talks about his farm in East Staffordshire and the work that they have undertaken to encourage wildlife.**

Having had only two visits from the West Midlands Ringers at the time of writing, we are perhaps the most recent recruit to the list of sites available to them so why did we offer to be involved?

Our family have farmed here at Syerscote near Tamworth for over 65 years. We have always had an interest in looking after and providing space for nature alongside productive farming and since the early 1980's have twice been successful in winning the Staffordshire Whitegrove Trophy for Farming and Wildlife Conservation.

It was over forty years ago that we began to trim the 42 km of hedges on a two-year cycle, originally at the suggestion of our landlords, so that there is fruit available through the untrimmed winter and a variety of sizes and shapes of hedge for shelter and nesting.



Bees in the margins at the farm



Wild bird seed cover

Of the 38 acres of woodland on the farm 10% has been planted by ourselves over the last 60 years and of the 30 or so field ponds, originally marl pits, 10 have been restored to hold water again. There are always jobs that can be done to maintain or improve habitat so we will never be short of something to do.

Since 2006 the farm has been in stewardship schemes, currently nearing the end of a Higher Tier agreement which sees us growing 26 acres of pollinator habitat and bird seed areas as well as grassy buffer zones for watercourses and other options. The bird seed plots in particular are really rewarding and besides looking great they provide tonnes of feed, supporting hundreds of birds through the winter and early spring.

In 2006 a friend offered to survey the birds on one of the farms and gave us a detailed report of his findings so when we recently heard about the work being done by WMRG we thought it would be great to make the land available and gain some up-to-date information about the species and numbers of birds present.

If this helps us to quantify any benefits that we have been able to bring through our work then that can only help in making decisions about any future plans and improving the outcomes from them.

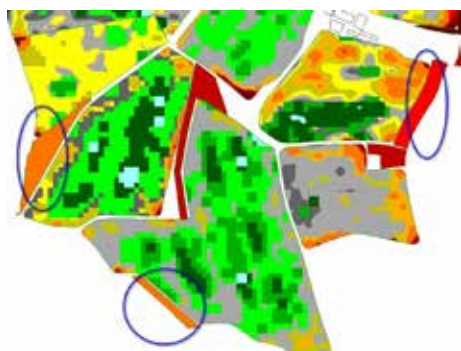
With the move away from the CAP following Brexit farming faces a very uncertain period.



Barn Owl caught & ringed at Syerscote Manor by WMRG

The payments we receive for our stewardship options are supposed to be based on 'income foregone' so that we are not worse off by providing these areas on the farm.

Data from field operations allows us to look at margin or profitability maps where red is bad, going through grey to green then blue showing better results. These areas of bird seed, nectar flowers and buffer zones ringed in blue don't come near to covering the income lost by not growing a food crop for harvesting. The subsidies that farms currently receive have provided a cushion which has helped us to fund these areas but this income is soon to be completely withdrawn.



Data from field operations at  
RW Leedhams

The proposed replacement, the Environmental Land Management Scheme, is also rumoured to be based on 'income foregone'.



Skylark caught at  
RW Leedham & Son Farm

Although the aim of payment for 'public goods' is worthy, if the same formula is used and continues to under-value this work then there could be difficult questions about how efforts to help the birds and bees will really be funded.

We can only hope that the decision makers and lobbyists feel that farms like this and the wildlife it supports merit proper support too. In the meantime, we look forward to working with the ringers and learning from their results.

**A. LEEDHAM**  
Farmer



Seed crop within a cover,  
providing food for birds

## **A WMRG perspective on this lovely farm,**

We met Alan and Ed during a farm walk earlier this year, and was clear that they had done lots of work on their farm to improve habitat for wildlife, so we were looking forward to visiting and starting our thermal surveys, however Covid hit and made us wait a bit longer.

We had a fantastic first visit where they showcased their farm to us, showing us large strips of wild bird mix



One of several Woodcock ringed  
at the farm

where you could hear a number of finches within them. On subsequent visit we noticed good numbers of Goldfinch and Greenfinch feeding in the area.

We have been able to conduct several visits and have had some nice results with several woodcock, a number of skylarks plus Barn and Tawny Owl.

Common Snipe were also noted on a small marshy area. We are looking forward to what 2021 brings



# Lay Farms Loppington

**Farmer Rory Lay offers a view of his farm nestled in the North Shropshire Countryside, to the north of Wem. This is a mixed farm with both livestock and arable land, extending to around 440 hectares**

My father was the first to farm the Loppington Estate that was handed down to him.

As tenant farmers have given up the farm then we have taken it back in hand.

We are in a very mixed farming area so concentrate on feed wheat and barley to be sold for livestock feed.



Rory Lay on a night out with WMRG targeting Woodcock

For many years, as was commonplace in farming we used a large cultivator, followed by a drill to establish our crops. In 2016 I changed to a strip till drill which is now used to establish most crops.

There have been many environmental benefits to this, not least we were able to sell a big tractor and reduce the hours and fuel it used!



A view over the fields at Wolverley

The strip till drill will cultivate a small area of ground and plant seeds in a single pass. This has resulted in about 60% of the soil being undisturbed. Our soils are improving, they are becoming easier to drill and we are finding more worms, which are vitally important for the soil and for birds!

I'm looking at growing a healthier crop, adding nutrients and amino acids with the long term aim of getting the soil into a better place.

Healthier crops will not be so susceptible to disease and pest attack and should result in the reduction of chemicals used.

In the last 5 years I have only used a low level of insecticides and in the last 2 years I haven't had used any!

Our 10 year stewardship agreement ended August 2020 This is being continued on a yearly basis until the

new ELM scheme has been launched.

At present we have a huge variety of options to work with.

Our current options include

- 14Ha of arable reversion on peat is now managed for overwintering and ground nesting birds with low stocking rates. Snipe love it.
- Most of our water courses have a 6 metre grass buffer strip to prevent erosion and run-off
- We have undisturbed field corners, which provide a variety of habitats for birds
- Low and nil input grassland.
- Wild bird seed covers.



Wild bird seen at Loppington



Several gull species on the fields during drilling

- Low input sp barley, this creates an open crop with a variety of 'weeds'
- Our hedges are cut in rotation every 2nd year and provide nesting habitat for a variety of bird species.

Over the years we have planted miles of new hedges and plant new trees yearly.

Our experience with companion cropping has had variable results. Although this year it is working well in the Oilseed Rape crops.

We have planted Berseem clover and Fenegreek which help with the establishment and to give the pigeons to eat who normally feast the oil seed rapes. The companion will not continue to harvest.

Cover crops are used to keep something growing on the soil between a summer harvest and spring

planting, they help with the structure of the soil, holding onto nutrients ahead of spring crops.

Some of the cover crops scavenge for nutrients, these are then released to the spring crop. The cover crops are grazed by sheep which help convert the biomass into a useful product for the next crop.

We are trying to widen the rotation with beans, planted in the spring after a cover crop.



Phacelia at Loppington an exceptional plant for pollinators

Woodland on the farm provides further beneficial habitats for birds and wildlife.

Our woodland is sensitively thinned on a phased basis and timed so not to disturb wildlife and is home to a variety of bird species.

**Organic manure.** We have just over 1000 tonnes of farmyard manure from our own cattle which is supplemented by a further few hundred ton from local farms.

We also receive approximately 900 ton of broiler litter (poultry waste) from a small local broiler unit.

The organic manure and broiler litter reduce the need for artificial input and improve soil health and feed worms, which in turn will feed the birds on the farm.

**WMRG member Martin George provides a view on Lay farms.**

The land that Rory and his family farm is proof that modern, efficient farming doesn't have to result in a sterile countryside. There are good, diverse hedges with lots of structure to provide food and shelter for a variety of wildlife; areas of woodland that are of wildlife and landscape value, and some nice patches of wetland, particularly on the peaty soils by the Roden.

Barn Owls have bred recently, and in winter we can almost guarantee to see Woodcock, Jack Snipe and Snipe when we go out with the thermal imager.



A Common Snipe caught at Rory's farm at Loppington



# Burleydam Farm

**Farmer Richard Tomlinson provides an insight into his farm on the Shropshire/Cheshire border, a farm brimming with nature!**

I am an arable farmer, farming about 400 acres on the Cheshire - Shropshire border. I first started working on this farm as a young lad in the early 1970's helping my father out and one of my favourite jobs was driving the tractors, cultivating the fields.

I soon developed a strong interest in the soil and have always strived to improve its condition. However, it became increasingly obvious to me that no matter how carefully I cultivated the soil, I was slowly degrading it over the years.

Around 12 years ago I spent considerable time looking into whether there were any solutions to this. I discovered a small group of people who were using No Till methods to encourage soil biology, it seemed to make so much sense to me.



A vibrant crop of Linseed at Burley Dam Farm



Good numbers of Yellowhammer are present on the farm.

I enthusiastically abandoned any form of tillage, started growing cover crops and leaving crop residue on the surface after every crop. The effect on the soil was a revelation, worm and beetle numbers increased, in particular surface feeding worms which were almost absent before.

Whilst I have always recognized the importance of wildlife on the farm, I have to admit I had very little knowledge or interest in it.

However, I couldn't help but notice all the Skylark that rapidly appeared in the crops after starting No Till. This tied in with what I was seeing happen to the soil and I started to get more interested in the whole farm ecosystem.

I already had good hedges and margins, but some more effort and research allowed me to improve them further. Yellow Hammers, amongst others became a common sight.

Keen to take things further, I set up a Mid Tier scheme, to help pollinators and provide hungry gap feed for birds. At this point I contacted Martin George of WMRG, it was a great move, I have learnt so much from getting involved with WMRG. Daytime farm walks with Martin and night time imaging sessions with WMRG have really opened my eyes to how much wildlife there is here now.



A Common Snipe in a cereal crop at Richard's farm

Some species like Skylark, Snipe and Woodcock benefit from the conditions provided by my No Till system, others like Thrushes thrive in the combination of good hedges and worm rich soil. Reed Bunting and Whitethroat nest in the Oilseed Rape and Barn Owls prowl the margins. I'm still learning, with the help of WMRG, the importance of and how to improve different habitats on the farm and how they all interact.

# Aston Hall Farm, Stone

## Paul Hopwood from WMRG provides an update on the farm and an exciting species discovery

Aston is one of my favourite locations that we have access to, the varied habitat is home to a range of bird species, predominantly Farmland passerines. However as the farm sits in the upper Trent Valley it is also home to a variety of wildfowl and wading birds.

The floodplains are lightly grazed and offer excellent breeding habitat for Lapwing.

I have seen a range of species on the farm, with a notable Marsh Harrier sighting in 2019.

As the weather improved in autumn the water levels of the pools in flood plain lowered and attracted a range of waders, Common Snipe, Common and Green Sandpipers were regulars, with Greenshank, Little Egret and Curlew also being seen.

On the 2nd August, 4 Black-tailed Godwits were present on one of the pools, together with 200+ Lapwings.



Black-tailed Godwit at Aston



One of several small pools and marsh at Aston

In late Autumn large numbers of Common Snipe and Jack Snipe visit the area. Ringing these is tricky not at least due to the openness of the site, making it prone to wind. The closure of a footpath has presented easy access, but this is due to be reopened soon, and in early 2021 we will be conducting a number of sessions here.

I was aware that Tree Sparrows had been seen in the area in 2019, and I had brief views of birds back then. But in Autumn I located a flock of Tree Sparrows using the hedgerows above the flood meadows. The initial count was of 20 birds, but they were very mobile. During following visits 70 Tree Sparrows were found.

These are a bird that has suffered a 94% decline since 1970 and a species that are in serious trouble. Finding such good numbers was exciting and we intend to install a number of nest boxes in the new year.

I had placed several large bird feeders at the farm during the winter of 2019, but these were stolen!

18 juvenile Tree Sparrows were ringed at Aston, and it is believed that these are locally bred, so additional nest boxes will hopefully increase breeding success.

I would like to secure funding to install 40 or 50 boxes at the site and monitor these, and we look at this option in the future. But it is a privilege to have these birds on site



Tree Sparrow ringed at Aston

Numerous Skylarks bred at Aston and two nests were located, one of which was later predated. However we did manage to ring one brood of 4 which successfully fledged.

Dippers, Mandarin Ducks, Kingfisher and Goosander are seen on the river at the sight, with Mandarin numbers increasing.

If the water levels drop we will target Snipe in the coming weeks.



# Article from NFU online talking about our work with farmers.



## CONSERVATION

# On farm with the bird recorders

The NFU regional team headed on a night-time field trip with species specialists

**U**nder the cover of darkness, members of the NFU regional team and a group of dedicated bird enthusiasts, headed out into the countryside.

Armed with torches, thermal imaging tech and a large net, the mission was to find farmland bird species and capture and record them.

The ringing process helps to improve people's understanding of species, bird populations, survival, productivity and movements of them on the land.

Sarah Faulkner, NFU West Midlands environment and rural affairs adviser, and Oliver Cartwright, NFU communications adviser, were at Richard Tomlinson's farm at Burleydam, near Whitchurch, with the West Midlands Ringing Group (WMRG) a few weeks ago.

The NFU was invited by Mr Tomlinson (pictured) and the WMRG, a dedicated group of licensed volunteers, to take part in the ringing evening that saw them collect data to help conserve, protect and enhance species.

Mr Tomlinson is a Wrenbury and South Cheshire NFU member, who grows wheat, oilseed rape and spring beans

across 400 acres over the Cheshire border with Shropshire.

"I have been involved with the ringers for around 18 months now and it has been a really interesting thing to do," he said.

"I initially made contact with them through Twitter and they didn't know what they would find here and I was actually rather surprised at how pleased they were!

"Consumers these days expect us, as farmers, to look after the environment as well as grow food and this is all part and parcel of farming as far as I'm concerned.

"I have learnt quite a lot about the wildlife that we have here at Burleydam Farm and there's a lot more here than I had realised to be honest.

"Doing the thermal imaging at night you have no idea what to expect and what is out in the field, until you get out there and have a look.

"To see snipe, woodcock and everything else has been really excellent and is really encouraging in terms of our biodiversity."

The process WMRG uses is 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



A woodcock on farm at Burleydam



efficiency, skill and care in what they do.

Different techniques are used, but at Burleydam the ringers moved slowly towards their target and then separated, one keeping the bird illuminated with the other using the net to capture it. During the evening, the four hours up to midnight, the ringers captured 19 birds and observed many more including a brood of around 30 sleeping skylark.

On the night they captured and ringed woodcock, skylark, redwing and fieldfare with only one capture that was a previously ringed bird.

## **IT'S A PRIVILEGE TO BE ABLE TO CAPTURE, RECORD AND RELEASE THESE FARMLAND BIRDS**

The group also heard other nocturnal animals, including different owl species.

Bird ringer Ben Dolan and the team said the work was essential to learn about how long birds lived and when and where they moved – questions that were vital for bird conservation.

He said they had surveyed across the region with excellent results on a number of farm businesses, with differing habitat type.

He said the results from fields with minimal till or no till had yielded the best results to date. Burleydam Farm

is currently in a mid-tier stewardship scheme and a no till system has been practised for the past 11 years. Mr Tomlinson said: "I had seen the soil quality deteriorating here so 11 years ago I looked around for a system that would combat it and decided to try no till.

"Of course there has been the odd hiccup along the way but it has worked.

"You have to have the right rotation though and I admit that it's not for everyone, you have to do your homework a bit and you can't just launch into it.

"You have to follow a certain set of rules and if it doesn't suit you or your farm then it is not for you, you're better off staying with a different system."

"For me though I improved the soil quality and I started to notice the birds appearing, you can't help but notice them. I then started wondering what else I could do on top of that, so looking after my hedges better and putting in supplementary feeding.

"I'm pleased to welcome the ringers here as it's been quite satisfying to see some of the wildlife we have and it's a privilege to be able to capture, record and release these farmland birds that you would never normally get close to."

WMRG has also released its annual report that looks at work across the past year including on NFU members' farms. Paul Hopwood, secretary for the group, said while the State of Nature report had

made depressing reading it was not all doom and gloom as there was some 'great work being carried out by the farmers that WMRG worked with'.

In the report he said: "Sadly in 2019 it was very easy to criticise farmers.

"This was often seen across both national and social media, views are polarised, and there was seldom desire to work together.

"However, it is vital that we illuminate and educate opinions and bring people together to look at how the situation can be improved.

"Farmers are custodians of the countryside, and many are passionate about the diverse nature of wildlife on their farms.

"Clearly there is still work to be done but with dialogue and trust we can all make improvements."

The annual report also covered work to look at Nightjar populations, work with the wildlife trusts, ringing reports and a comparison to 2018/2019.

**+** 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.

The WMRG report is also available from the NFU regional office by speaking with Mr Cartwright on 01952 400500.

**The ringers measure the long, backwards-facing, claw of one of the skylarks they captured and released**





# Lower Drayton Farm

**Paul Hopwood provides 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.

The farm offers a variety of ringing throughout the year



but our main focus tends to concentrate around thermal imaging surveys.

The farm buildings have always been home to numerous nesting Swallows, but development over the past year has seen a reduction in available habitat.

Father and son farmers Ray and Richard Bower have grasped farm diversification by the scruff of the neck and there are some really



interesting projects taking place. Part of the diversification has involved a fun farm, now called 'Play' which offered various activities throughout the year. 2018 the farm started to plant pumpkins for Halloween and in both 2019 and 2020 at the end of the pick your own pumpkin season large flocks of finches arrived to feed. Linnets made up the majority of species present, followed by Chaffinch, Reed bunting and the occasional Brambling.

In early November 2020 we located a large flock of finches which were using the pumpkin fields and a 4 acre area of wild bird seed covers. This area also contained a Pheasant pen, feeders and a duck pond.

As November continued the flock of finches using these areas increased, and at a peak in December between 800 and 1000 finches were

present, with Linnet, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Brambling, Goldfinch and Reed bunting being noted.

A handful of ringing sessions were conducted, with Paul my trainee.

During this period with had fair results with nearly 400 birds caught at the time of writing including:

Linnet 124  
Chaffinch 124  
Greenfinch 39  
Brambling 4  
Goldfinch 10  
Redpoll 11  
Reed bunting 4  
Yellowhammer 1

2 Sparrowhawks were present in the area, together with a young Merlin. In the adjacent field a Great White Egret was present for a few days. The ringing at the farm continues



Chaffinch (above)  
Brambling (top centre)

# 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.**

If I had to choose a favourite type of ringing it would be targeting farmland bird species. If I had to choose a location to ring at I would be hard pressed to look any further than Lower Barns Farm.

We have been ringing at the farm for six years now, and it can only be described as a flagship farm for farmland birds, it is one of our premier sites and all this is possible because of the work of the Roberts family. I am biased but there are not many locations in Staffordshire that are home to so many key farmland bird species,

Field margins, wild bird seed covers, nest boxes and sensitively balanced farming all provide superb habitats for a wide range of species.

In January we assisted with a ringing demonstration at the farm. This was on behalf of CFE (Championing the Farmed Environment) and was a well attended event.



Paul Hopwood showing a keen crowd farmland birds

Yet again it is so good to see so many farmers and landowners attend these events as they want to do more to encourage wildlife on their farms. As a result of the demo, we were asked to visit many more farms across the region!

So 2020, has been pretty awful, and dominated by pandemics and Brexit! It wasn't much better in January and February where the weather was the key issue affecting the nation.



I lost track of all the storm names, although Storm Dennis was notable. High winds, torrential rain and flooding all impacted on our opportunities to get out ringing.

Whilst mist netting is usually the staple method used by ringers to catch birds, their application is limited when it comes to adverse weather, and in particular wind. Bird welfare ALWAYS is the

priority and several sessions were cancelled due to the weather.

Where we could get out, we had to move away from mist nets and use a variety of other methods to catch.

Ground nets and traps were used and whilst our catches were often good, we simply didn't have the opportunity for large catches



Brambling were in very short supply early in the year and we only saw one female, but this was not caught. Corn Buntings were present and towards march their numbers had increased.

The key attraction for the birds at the farm during the winter is the supplementary feed that is provided by the farmer. This helps the birds through the hungry gap.

On the farm the feed starts on the first of January and continues until the spring. A mix of seed is used.



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.

We also supplement the feed, concentrating around catching areas, in bird feeders and on bird tables.

As the feeding flock increases many hundreds of birds visit daily. There is a large wild bird seed cover mix at the farm this year, and already (in mid December) there are over 1000 birds in the fields. Once this crop reduces, we envisage a large percentage will move to the winter feed.

So whilst the weather was against us in the early part of the year, we still had some good catches.

The chart on the right shows the numbers of birds ringed this year, and as you can see numbers are on the up. Whilst we caught 65 Yellowhammers there were in excess of 150 visiting in late February.

Our Linnet catch was slightly down on 2019, but this was not as a result of numbers present, but because the opportunity to catch was reduced. Linnet are quite a skittish species and are very mobile and at times they do

Species Name	2020	2019	2018
Blackbird		3	
Blue Tit	36	8	
Brambling		31	
Chaffinch	25	24	
Chiffchaff		1	
Corn Bunting			2
Duncock	33	16	18
Goldfinch		6	
Great Tit	6	11	3
Greenfinch	1	1	
House Sparrow	26	5	2
Linnet	228	257	52
Long-tailed Tit	6	6	2
Reed Bunting	75	46	32
Robin	14	5	4
Starling	2		
Stock Dove	1		
Treecreeper	1		
Woodpigeon		2	
Wren	3		
Yellowhammer	65	50	41
<b>Totals (not all species)</b>	<b>523</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>156</b>

disappear from the area. Corn Bunting are difficult to catch and appear very picky as to where they will feed. Our observations have shown that they favour feed on bare earth or farm tracks rather than on grass margins.

So as we approach the new year I am already looking forward to spending time at

Lower Barns Farm, in January. The sheer numbers present are spectacular and I enjoy the sight as much as I enjoy the ringing.

It wont be long until a Little Bunting, Rustic Bunting or Merlin graces our nets.

We can but hope!!!!



# Wild Bird Seed mixes

**In this article Farmer Andrew Roberts talks about the importance of Wild Bird Seed mix areas. These crops are sown specifically to provide a range of different seeds which support a range of different bird species. The following is Andy's experience of such areas, and provides an insight into the various crops that can be used. We know that Wildlife and birds love these crops!**

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 seeds and berries to sustain populations through winter. Countryside stewardship, which has been around for over twenty years in its various guises, aims to meet these three broad requirements through a suite of management options.



A varied wild bird seed mix at Andy's farm in Winter

As we head into the new year our attention has now turned to providing winter food for birds. In practice the preparation begins well in advance. Some measures we take involve slight management changes to what we do already,



from reducing herbicide use in cereal crops before a winter stubble to provide seeds from plants such as annual meadow grass and field pansy, to rotationally cutting hedgerows allowing them to flower and fruit.

These measures aim to restore some of the practices that provided abundant food for farmland birds in the past.

The loss of availability of crop seeds to farmland birds has come as a result of greater harvest efficiency and better storage. Long gone are the days when grain was stored temporarily as bundles of sheaves or 'stooks' in the field but instead is whisked off quickly to secure stores where it will be free from contamination by vermin.

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 mixes have evolved a lot from the standard two-year triticale, kale and quinoa mix we first grew to the vast array of species and mixes we have available today.

Here is a selection of the species I have used over the years and my experiences with them. Most are usually sown in the spring from April-June after the regular spring crops have been sown, although there are now autumn sown options too. Some species are also good for pollinators during the summer.







## Cereal

An important food source for granivorous buntings and sparrows. The rye/wheat cross 'triticale' is popular as it stays upright longer but any cereal can potentially be used from wheat to oats. I tend to use spring barley as I always have some available. It's not every bird's favourite but Corn Buntings do like it (they're not called the fat bird of barley for nothing).



## Sunflower

A real crowd pleaser, always like to have a few in the mix. Everything eats the seedlings at establishment from slugs to hares, rewarding though when it crops well. Clouds of Greenfinches used to be a common sight feeding on them but not so much these days with disease affecting their numbers. Always popular with the tit family and adds good structure.



## Kale

Major component of two-year mixes providing cover in the first winter and seed in the second year. Seed is expensive however and it can be difficult to establish when there are pigeons and flea beetles about.



## Linseed

Once upon a time when flax for linen was widely grown there would have been plenty of linseed available for birds. In fact it is where the Linnet partly gets its name from. A useful component of mixes holding onto seed for a good while. Can be tricky to establish with flax flea beetle around.



## Forage rape

Forage rape – A cheaper alternative to kale. The seed can be very persistent however and it turns up in following oilseed rape crops years later where it has lifted erucic acid levels of our rapeseed to undesirable levels.



## Quinoa

A prolific seed producer in a good year, however I have had years where it produces very little and is outperformed by its wild cousin fat-hen. Popular with Reed Buntings and Linnets. Although known as 'Keen-wah' in recipes these days, birds still pronounce it 'Kwin-noah'.



## Millet

Does well in a hot, dry summer when other species may struggle. Reed Buntings particularly fond of white millet. Mixtures of white, red and reed millet are available with reed millet providing structure.



## Mustard

Similar appeal to fodder radish but not quite so persistent. Cheap to grow and can be established relatively late if another crop fails. Great for pollinators.



## Buckwheat

Not entirely sure what eats it to be honest but this is the easiest to grow and is good for bees so I like to include some.



## Chicory

Used in two-year mixes as it flowers in its second year. Good for solitary bees and the seeds are enjoyed by Goldfinches. Provides good cover and comes back again if plots kept in the same place.



## Phacelia

Not included for seed provision but is amazing for bees and other insects and is easy to establish.



## Fodder Radish

One of my favourites. Good stands of this will hold massive flocks of linnet well into winter due to the strong pods. Establishment has become trickier in recent years with high flea beetle pressure at the time of sowing.

I don't have a set mix but tend to tinker with it each year. In general I like to have at least five species in the mix in case some fail and try to include a cereal, an oily seed like radish and other small seeds in the mix.

I have moved away from biennial mixes to annual mixes as this ensures good seed production and I tend to rotate them around the farm.

They used to be tucked away in one place but I feel they have a role in the rotation now improving soils in between arable crops. These plots can also provide nesting habitat and invertebrate rich areas for rearing chicks in the summer.

The most important thing I have learnt is to treat wild bird seed crops like you would any regular cash crop, giving them them

attention to detail they deserve to give maximum seed yield.



An example of Andy's wild bird seed cover



Wild bird seed crop at Lower Barns Farm

# Skylark

**WMRG are continuing to target Skylark in the region using Thermal technology, with well over 1300 birds ringed in the region in the last 4 years!**

Since 2016 we have been spending a lot of our time targeting Skylark. There were several reasons why we began to concentrate on this species;

1) very few are ringed. In fact, I was always told that they were too difficult to catch.

2) They are a red listed species, reported to have suffered a significant decline and we felt it important to concentrate on a species where an improved knowledge may identify measures that may reverse the decline.

3) As a group we had developed a catching technique that was extremely productive, utilising thermal image technology.

We have now ringed nearly 1300 and when compared against the national ringing statistics we have been ringing between 25% and 72% of the free-flying birds caught in the last 4 years (adult, juvenile and un-aged) in UK.



Ringling Juvenile Skylark in Staffordshire

Our interest in this species is focussed on wintering populations and their habitat preferences.

Our work is now being replicated across the UK, Europe and worldwide!

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 as to the age and sex of these birds.

To improve our knowledge, we have taken consistent biometric data from all Skylarks we have caught and hope that in the near future this data may provide some clarity.

Skylark are found across all the farms we have access to.

Most have breeding populations, but our observations suggest this population is increased in later autumn by an influx of migrant birds and this is an area that we are hoping to better understand using science.

Our findings to date have been interesting, and the observations that we have made have further increased our catch, helped inform some habitat improvements and allowed us to provide feedback to farmers.

On the farms we have access to, Skylark prefer large fields and favour over winter stubbles, young winter cereal crops and grass pasture or land left for haylage.



The Skylark *Alauda arvensis*





Our initial assessment was that farms who had adopted the zero till method of farming had larger wintering populations of Skylark than other tillage methods. However, we now do not believe it is as simple as this, as farms who employ other tillage methods have been found to have large wintering populations of these birds.

This is no way a criticism of zero till, in fact we are huge supporters of this methodology and the wider benefits it has to the environment.

In my personal opinion, this tillage method is vitally important and in the majority of cases is beneficial to larks, but it is not the sole factor when considering wintering skylark populations.

However, zero till should not be considered on a standalone basis as being a specific benefit to wintering populations of Skylark.



Skylark in primary moult



Thermal image of roosting Skylark in Staffordshire

There are significant benefits to other species, which can be directly attributed to zero/no till especially wading birds; Common Snipe, Jack Snipe and Woodcock, all of which benefit from the increased worm numbers associated with this the method.

Where cover crops are planted as part of the zero till methodology, there comes a time when Skylark move from these fields due to the height of crop. However the varied nature of fields found across farms usually results in Skylark moving short distances to fields where there are stubbles or crop with less height.

What we can say after working across several farms over the last 5 years is that a recently ploughed field that has inverted stubbles and previous growth, leaving bare earth is rarely ever used by larks at roost. We would suggest that this is a significant finding.

However, we have found these fields may still attract other avian species, Golden Plover being one such bird.

There are occasions where we have found larks in such fields, but we suggest that these birds have moved away from a favoured area by human or predatory disturbance and that their presence is temporary.

So, what do Skylark prefer?

Observationally there are 5 factors which we believe are key to Skylark roosting.

1. Field size
2. Field drainage
3. Crop/field usage
4. Crop height
5. Field applications

There is so much more we need to know about this species to inform our knowledge.

Our continued work in partnership with others and the increased numbers of Skylark being ringed by other ringing groups who have embraced thermal technology will increase our understanding of this iconic British bird.



Juvenile Nightjar - Photo courtesy of Ben Locke.



# Staffordshire Nightjar

# Nightjar in Staffordshire 2020

**Sadly our AONB funding was suspended in early 2020, however as the Lockdown period in early summer was relaxed we were still able to conduct our survey work.**

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.

2019 was a record year and the data obtained was encouraging.

There was a reduced effort in 2020 due to COVID-19 and whilst numbers of birds caught were down on the previous year, we still managed to ring over 30 birds and located a further 6 nests, but identified many more territories.

We have recorded human disturbance of breeding sites which resulted in birds abandoning a territory.



However this was an isolated case, in an area renowned for Nightjars, Sadly the same area was again subject of considerable human pressure in 2020.

Trail camera recorded a predator at one nest site, that was found to have failed.

One interesting finding in 2020 was the density of male birds in comparison to females, with only 3 female adults being ringed. This appears to have been seen across the UK, with more males being noted across sites.

The first bird of the season was found grounded on the chase on 2nd May and taken to the British Wildlife Rescue Centre. This bird was found to have been ringed in 2014 and was encountered in the same location.


A further success was the recapture of a Nightjar that had been ringed as a chick on Gentleshaw Common in 2019. This bird was found on Cannock Chase. Both of the Gentleshaw birds were found to have successfully fledged.

A bird originally ringed on the Chase in 2017 was recaptured in 2020.


A further male bird originally caught in 2016 on Cannock Chase, was recaptured in 2020. This bird had been further encountered on the chase in 2016, 2017 and 2019, showing the site fidelity of the species.




## 2020 NIGHTJAR RESULTS


 35 Nightjar caught

 6 nest sites located

 27 new birds caught

 8 recaptured birds

 23 males

 3 females

 9 juveniles





# Severn Trent Report

# Our Work with Severn Trent

**Our work continues with Severn Trent. In 2020 further access was granted to several new locations which present exciting new opportunities for the group.**

COVID-19 (again) has had a significant impact on our work this year, with two of our key sites having restricted access due to the pandemic. We fully understood the decisions to restrict access and hope that in 2021 we can recommence our work.

The two sites affected, Shifnal and Penkridge have been two of our most productive locations with Shifnal holding a significant population of Reed Warblers and Reed Buntings and Penkridge being known for large numbers of hirundines and Pied, Grey and Yellow Wagtails.

However, whilst we could not access these sites, we were provided access to some new sites in Staffordshire, more of that later.



Grasshopper Warbler from Roundhill



Common Whitethroat ringed at Roundhill

It is really important and encouraging for us as a group to see the enthusiasm by Severn Trent staff for the work that we undertake. The support that we get is overwhelming and this was more than apparent when we started our work at Roundhill. Not only are the managers and workers proud of the work that they do managing sewage and water courses, but they are also passionate about nature and learning more about the wildlife that uses sewage works throughout the year.

The managers have listened and acted upon advice and have helped us with our work to improve areas for wildlife.

Where work allows, they

have visited us at ringing sessions and seen birds being ringed.

We have been supported in improving some habitats at Roundhill and together with the installation of a wide variety of nest boxes, some of which were provided by Severn Trent, we have also planted over 100 trees in an unused area of the site. (pictured on the right of the aerial shot on previous page)

The trees selected were native to the UK and will provide food and nesting habitat in years to come. The majority of the trees planted were Rowan and fruit trees, but this was supplemented by cuttings from elder located on the site.

The initial results from Roundhill are promising with some good species noted.







# 2020 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 we have extended the project into 2021.**



Tawny Owl

We are privileged to have access to a number of Severn Trent sites across the West Midlands, which offer wildlife an oasis within their areas.

The sites have a wide range of habitats and are surrounded by either arable land or heavy industry, which makes surveying more interesting and at times very surprising.

During 2020 our aim was to visit every Severn Trent site we have access to survey these for owls, as we are convinced that a number of the sites hold valuable habitat which would support Tawny, Barn and Little Owls, if not the more unusual Short & Long-eared Owls.

Sadly Covid-19 restricted our ability to travel to these locations and survey, access was restricted at some of the sites too. Furthermore some of our members were within the high risk group and unable to assist with this project.

We are well known for pioneering thermal imaging technology to support our important survey work, which enables us to give an accurate picture for landowners with reduced disturbance and time in the field, and this project was no different.

Where possible we conducted ringing sessions at the available sites and ringed the owls we caught.

The unique ring number was recorded and this data was registered onto the BTO DEMON computer recording databases.

If this bird is then caught by us, another ringer or found injured or dead, the finder can report this ring number and find out its life history.

Where we could not access sites, the surveys were

conducted from publicly accessible land adjacent to the sewage treatment works.

We utilised our thermal cameras to view the areas and used playback calls from owl species for a limited time to ascertain if birds were present. Quite often the playback calls resulted in owls responding in a short space of time. The use of playback was tightly



Barn Owl caught at Penkridge  
STW



Little Owl

controlled and limited to short periods of time.

The table data on the next page shows the results of 2020 surveys, however due to Covid we will be extending the Year of the Owl project in to 2021. This will ensure we cover a full 12 months and give a true and accurate picture for Severn Trent.

During 2019 one of our members; John Hunt, found an active Barn Owl nest at Minworth sewage works and on checking the box, with the appropriate licences, we found a pair of adult Barn Owls with 4 healthy chicks.

However we conducted a check during 2020 and although the adults were present, they had not bred. This is something that we saw repeated across other Barn owl boxes across our other sites.

There have been two new Barn Owl boxes placed up across Minworth ST as part of HS2's mitigation, so we are hopeful for a more successful 2021.

We have been given access to a number of new sites during 2021, one of these being Roundhill ST in Stourbridge, and following several visits we have now erected two Tawny Owl boxes, a further Barn Owl box and a Little Owl box up at the site, which we hope will show signs of use during 2021.

Severn Trent fully supported this work and provided the funding for the boxes and their installation.

As seen in the table below, several owl species are present at Roundhill and these additional boxes will hopefully provide owl species with spaces to breed successfully.

As you can see by the results of our surveys, our initial assessment of habitats found on Severn Trent sites were well informed.

Severn Trent sites provide good habitat to a variety of owl Species, which now lend themselves to nest boxes being provided. This will ensure that owls not only have good feeding habitat, that have limited disturbance due to site security, but also a safe place to breed.

We are really grateful to all of the managers across the sites for their continued support.

## Year of the Owl Survey Results

The following are details of our survey results for Severn Trent, the sites listed were visited after 8pm. Other sites have been monitored during the daytime however due to restricted access and shielding there are a number, which have not been surveyed.

Site	Barn Owl	Tawny Owl	Little Owl	SE Owl
Walsall Wood	1	2	0	0
Peters Lane	1	4	1	0
Ray hall	0	0	0	0
Goscote	0	0	0	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
Penkridge	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

# The Importance of Sewage Works

**In this article Paul Hopwood talks about the importance of sewage works as bird habitats. To the general public these sites are usually controversial, to birds they offer excellent feeding opportunities throughout the year.**

Sewage works have been recognised as good bird habitats since at least the first decade of the 20th century. Coward (1927) and Parker (1928) provided two of the earliest ornithological accounts of sewage farms and a review of their bird communities was written by Boyd (1957).

A comprehensive review of Sewage Works as Bird Habitats in Britain published by Fuller and Glue (1980) for the BTO identified that modern works can be important bird habitats, particularly as feeding sites for several passerine species.

However the authors concluded that the ornithological potential of modern sewage works was restricted compared with the old farm systems.

Yellow wagtail from a sewage works



Phragmites reedbed at Shifnal, an ideal habitat for a range of species

It was noted that no other inland habitat held the number of wading birds that were found at sewage farms, sadly this is no longer the case.

In 2020 sewage works in the UK have modernised further and the Shallow lagoon systems once found across the UK's sewage works and sewage farms, which once attracted high numbers of waders in the autumn are no longer to be found.

The systems with percolating filters and tertiary treatment by surface irrigation appear to offer the best modern-day opportunity for a varied range of bird species.

Reedbeds found at several Severn Trent sites as a polishing medium provide exceptional habitat for a range of bird species.

The reedbeds are not only used as a breeding habitat but are also excellent roost sites for buntings and Starlings in the winter months.

Whilst modern methods may negate the requirement for reedbeds, the existing reedbeds found across the Severn Trent estate should be maintained and protected as a priority habitat for birds and other wildlife.



A sewage bed at Penkridge, these features sustain a wide range of species.



# Roundhill, Nr Stourbridge

**WMRG Member John Overfield provides an overview at our work across several new Severn Trent sites near to Severn Trent, including Roundhill which promises to be an exciting location.**

At the request of the area management, seven Severn Trent Water Sewage Treatment Works (STW) sites were surveyed by the West Midlands Ringing Group (WMRG) to assess the potential for ringing survey activities and for conservation actions that could positively impact bird species diversity and numbers at sites in the Stourbridge region.

During our surveys we identified that Kinver and Roundhill had the most potential from a conservation and ringing survey perspective, whilst other sites were found to have at least some potential.

We identified that modest nest box schemes for hole and open box nesting species would be benefit to most sites as would boxes for owl species.



A series of paths were cut by members of WMRG, improving access around the area.



Reduced mowing regimes in areas where appropriate at some sites were suggested to increase flora and invertebrate populations and diversity.

We further recommended significant effort to maintain and enhance the existing scrub area and to establish a discrete conservation area at Roundhill.

Our intention is to conduct Intensive ringing surveys at Roundhill and Kinver, with additional sites warranting only occasional and seasonal visits to fulfil their potential.

The recommendations and work undertaken by WMRG in partnership with STW have the potential to showcase the positive conservation activities of Severn Trent Water.

Roundhill makes a good flagship for the activities and positive conservation action that can be made at other sites in the surrounding area.

We would hope that this could become a point of contact for the local community to learn about the actions and activities undertaken at the site and throughout the sites in the immediate area.

Where possible WMRG will support STW with ringing demonstrations at this location. Additionally, there are recreational and wellbeing benefits for staff working at Roundhill and other sites through the amenity of the conservation area at Roundhill and the increased interest generated by nest box schemes and conservation work generally.

Meaningful ringing survey work at these sites will quantitatively and qualitatively demonstrate the value of the sites to birdlife and will serve to monitor this value for as long as they are conducted.



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



Net ride creation amongst scrub

Since the completion of the requested survey much has been achieved already at Roundhill despite the constraints imposed by Covid19, in no small part, thanks to the committed engagement of STW to take on board and fund the key recommendations of the report and the enthusiasm and commitment of the team at Roundhill to support conservation and surveying activities and facilitate the work required.

The amenity value of the project at Roundhill for employees there is already demonstrable. Each time we have worked at Roundhill members of staff have engaged during the sessions, some taking time to attend out of hours to engage in ringing sessions.

The area of rough grassland, tall herbs and scrub outside the fenced site area at Roundhill (formerly settling tanks) is an excellent area for wildlife and ringing and is being developed as a

discrete 'Conservation Area' that will have community educational and promotional applications for Severn Trent. In line with report recommendations WMRG members have commenced an ongoing program of scrub management, provided and installed 4 owl boxes (Tawny, Little and Barn) as well as 20 open and tit boxes.

We have also completed tree planting of 100 trees and have cut a network of rides and paths to increase edge and create glades in the scrub.

STW funded the tree whip purchases (Rowan, Crab Apple and Birch) as well as the 2 Tawny, 1 Little Owl and 1 Barn Owl Boxes and the local team have created a small pond in the conservation area. There is also an occupied Kestrel Box and an unoccupied box which were installed and are maintained by the local team.

Actions taken to date have enhanced the area for breeding and migrant birds and will increase plant and invertebrate diversity, future planned work will consolidate and deliver further improvement.



Care has been taken to conserve the existing habitat and breeding birds that include good number of Blackcap and Common Whitethroat as well as a pair of Yellowhammer.

The surrounding farmland appears to be in stewardship scheme and has wide field margins with wild flower mixes providing excellent habitat for invertebrates and farmland bird species.

There is a reasonable area of plantation woodland on the site and around its margins. There are some mature standing trees including a group of impressive oaks near the offices where Tawny Owl boxes have been sited.

Tit and some open boxes have been sited in plantation and more mature areas to increase opportunities for hole nesting species as there is little or no dead wood.

A mature broad-leaved woodland borders the site to the west and although rather disturbed is a reservoir for woodland species to populate the main site.



The 'cake beds' are attractive to insectivorous species and are seen to attract many wagtails, potentially many other species could occur. Future monitoring may reveal the value of this area for a wide range of species in other seasons that may warrant ringing survey activity here. Open nest boxes have been sited here to increase breeding wagtail numbers.



Members of WMRG, improving access around the area.

The Scrub Conservation area has been the focus for bird trapping for ringing surveys which have been severely limited by the Covid19 pandemic lockdowns and other restrictions.

As a new site the ground works necessary to prepare the site for ringing and the commitment to deliver on the reported conservation objectives have taken precedence over ringing activities in 2020.

Ringing activities could not be commenced until the autumn as a result, a more intensive year of ringing is envisaged for 2021, pandemic allowing.



An open fronted nestbox installed at Roundhill

Our plans for 2021 include the ongoing cyclical scrub clearance and other maintenance tasks.

We will conduct spring passage & breeding bird surveys and ringing sessions, together with nest box monitoring and Pulli ringing.

Autumn passage bird surveys and ringing sessions will also be conducted at the site.

As for this year, we were encouraged by the number of warblers, especially Common Whitethroat using the scrub area. Whilst we only conducted 2 half day ringing sessions in this area we ringed over 100 birds.

Of note were  
Blackcap 35  
Chiffchaff 19  
Common Whitethroat 9.

A surprise Grasshopper Warbler warbler was ringed in August and there is potential that this species may breed on site.

We also caught a colour ringed Dunnock and a ringed Blue Tit, that were identified as having been originally ringed in a nearby woodland.

As we moved into the Autumn we located 3 Green Sandpipers on site.

There are significant number of Black-headed Gulls at Roundhill and it is hoped that we can extend our current colour ringing project to include the birds using the site.

We sadly missed the opportunity to ring a brood of Kestrel that had bred on site, but we are told that they are regular breeders and this is something we will look to do in 2021.

The support from the team at Roundhill has been amazing and we would like to thank Paul, Sally and Stewart for all of their enthusiasm towards our work.

We are confident that the work that has been completed to date will have a positive impact and that this will make this a excellent site, for wildlife and ringing.





## WMRG Member John Overfield provides an overview on Kinver sewage works in South Staffordshire, a new site for 2020.

Kinver is a promising site from a ringing perspective and one with much existing conservation value.

The filter bed area and an extensive area of riparian scrub outside the fenced area of the site offer opportunities to capture and ring a good number of individuals and a wide variety of species throughout the year.

Net lanes need to be cut in the scrub/riparian area and to realise the full ringing potential of the site.

The site is well protected from wind and as a result is likely to be workable for ringing even in less than optimal weather conditions.

The settling beds have been the focus for bird trapping which have been severely limited by the Covid19 pandemic lockdowns and other restrictions.



Extensive scrub outside of the main ST works offers excellent ringing potential



Numerous warbler species were noted in this area at Kinver

With time and resources limited this year ground works, conservation work and ringing activities at Roundhill have taken precedence over ringing activities at Kinver in 2020.

Ringing activities could not be commenced until the late autumn as a result, a more intensive year of ringing is envisaged for 2021, pandemic allowing.

In 2021 we hope to establish net lanes in riparian scrub

Spring passage & breeding bird surveys and ringing sessions will be conducted.

We will also target the wagtails that are present at Kinver as part of our current colour ringing project. As our current project is focused on the importance of Severn Trent sites, this additional site will only serve to increase our data set.

We have conducted two short ringing sessions at Kinver, during which we have caught and ringed Grey Wagtails. The site holds good numbers of this species and the fact that the site is situated near to arable land may attract Yellow Wagtails also.

We are aware that in the past Siberian Chiffchaff and Yellow-browed Warblers have both been seen at Kinver.

This site offers a lot of promise for ringing and it is envisaged that it could be a productive site for us in the future.



The river Stour and the Staffs/Worcester canal border the works, further increasing the site's potential

# Bobbington, Himley & Gospel End

John Overfield gives a brief insight into three smaller sewage works which offer a range of ringing opportunities, including phragmites reed beds.

## BOBBINGTON

A small site with a small reedbed divided in two by a concrete bund.

The site is surrounded by mature hedgerows and contains some large trees.

Despite the size of the site, there is some limited targeted ringing potential at the site.

Reed Warbler were heard at the site during our visit and the breeding birds and their young could be captured and rung during spring/summer sessions.

A limited program of ringing is envisaged for 2021, pandemic allowing, where we will focus on Reed Warbler within the phragmites reed bed.

Grey Wagtail were found breeding on the site.



Reedbed at Bobbington



## HIMLEY

Himley is another small site, which contains a two phragmites reed beds.

The beds are separated by a grassy bund, which provides a natural net ride for ringing.

The reedbed is the key habitat of interest at this site.

There is potential for ringing surveys in spring and possibly winter. Sessions are likely to be limited in number and will focus on Reed Warbler. There is the potential that the reedbed at Himley may be used as a roosting site for Swallows during the summer and also for Reed Bunting.

With time and resources limited this year ground works, conservation work and ringing activities at Roundhill have taken precedence over ringing activities at Himley in 2020.

2021 will see a limited program of ringing targeting Reed Warbler.

## GOSPEL END

Gospel End is a set in a quiet rural area, close to the outskirts of the West Midlands.

There is a mix of habitat which will support a variety of bird species. Muntjac Deer are also regular visitors to the site.

The 4 filter beds and abandoned Back Beds provide ringing interest in specific weather conditions in spring and possibly autumn.

Ringing activity at the site is likely to be occasional and unintensified.

Sessions during periods of cool rainy weather between Spring and Autumn should provide opportunity to trap/ring Swallows, House Martins, Sand Martins (hirundines) and possibly Swifts feeding over the filter beds



Filter beds at Gospel End



# 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.**



falling dramatically. As there were no other prey items, maybe a reliance on Field Vole led to this position of failed breeding.

We have seen the same picture around most of our sites in West Midlands and Staffordshire, where they have failed to breed in 2020. It is further noted that Shropshire barn owl trust also reported a poor breeding season with potentially low vole numbers.

Lock-down has affected the recording of spring time migrants, but good numbers of Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff and whitethroats were evident, on a return to the site in June.

The Barn Owl box was checked on June 17 and unfortunately the indications were that these birds had not bred this year. A single adult flew out of the box, so this may suggest that the other bird has died, or on a more positive note was not present.

Another possible explanation for the failure to breed is a lack of prey. A study of 8 pellets recovered from the box revealed 23 Field Vole skulls. Populations of these can fluctuate widely over 3 to 4-year cycles, with numbers rising and

Our hope is that they breed next year and if we have lost one of the birds, a new pair is established that subsequently take over the territory.

Ecologists working on behalf of HS2 contractors have engaged with the Barn Owl Conservation Network



to ensure that Barn Owls are protected and not disturbed during the land clearance and construction phase of the railway.

The provision of alternate nest sites, in the form of nest boxes, installed on mature trees aims to mitigate for the loss of or disturbance to any sites within the HS2 land clearance and construction area. This not only includes nest sites used by Barn Owls in the past but also those that are not currently used but which may offer suitable nest cavities to this bird.

To this end a request made to Severn Trent by the Wildlife Conservation Partnership for the siting of two Barn Owl boxes on the Minworth site as part of this habitat mitigation strategy.



The ecologist determined the citing of the boxes which was adjusted during the visit in October to undertake the installation.

The large owl box is in need of some repair with a large area of the felt roof torn and the rest of the box would benefit from a suitable preservative.

Following a request from the ringing group, Stephen Griffin arranged for the Sand Martin Bank to be re-profiled after it had fallen into a state of disrepair. The first visit, in early June, following the end of lock-down, showed the bank had at least 8 active nests.

A visit to the Sand Martin colony, on June 17 saw approximately 70 birds free flying,

which suggested that the first brood had fledged.

A netting session resulted in 33 Sand Martin being ringed, with a good mix of juveniles and adults. As we moved into July the activity around the bank had subsided with only a few late broods being fed, this suggested that there wasn't a second brood.



Lock-down has affected the recording of spring time butterflies. Monitoring only began in June, all of these records have been logged with the Warwickshire county recorder.

Grassland species of butterfly were not as plentiful as 2019 as species such as Speckled Wood, Ringlet and Meadow Brown typically decline after wet winters. There was a marked decrease in the number of the migrant species Red Admirals and Painted Ladies after the large scale eruptions in 2019.

We hope that 2020 allows us more opportunity to access Minworth and continue our ringing surveys.

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## Barston

**In this article John Hunt gives an overview of the year at Barston sewage treatment works.**

Two visits were made early in the year prior to lock-down. The first visit of 2020 indicated that a substantial number of Pied Wagtails over-winter on the site with 40+ recorded.

With the installation of the new treatment processes the waste flow will be diverted from the new plant to the outfall with the existing plant being abandoned. Once this is completed the site is likely to be less attractive to migrants and overwintering birds such as wagtails. The rest of the bird life was much as expected with tit flocks dominated by Long-tailed Tits.

There was a large flock of Redwing in the surrounding fields using the hedgerows bordering the works.

The site contains an established rookery with ten nests in place.



### Recommendations

The mixed habitat of old settling pools, filtration beds and rough grassland provide ideal habitat for several species, in particular for Barn Owls that are known to frequent the area.

There are several mature oaks suitable for an owl box, the siting of which should be as far from the motorway as possible.



# Thermal Imaging Surveys

# Thermal Imaging Surveys 2020

**Thermal Imaging Surveys are integral to our group's work. As pioneers of this technique we look at the impact it has had across the UK, Europe and worldwide! Paul Hopwood looks at the reasons why this is so important!**

Who would have thought that a random conversation on a summer morning at Marsh Lane nature reserve would have resulted in what can only be described as revolutionising bird ringing and bird surveys!

The conversation between Paul Hopwood and Ben Dolan took place in 2016 and since then the technique has developed and we are now recognised as the pioneers of thermal ringing.

There are a number of reasons this technology is so special but it is perhaps best to go back to the start.

Firstly some birds are particularly difficult to locate, such as Lapwing and Little Ringed Plover chicks, their juvenile plumage is their only defence mechanism and nature has provided them with exceptional camouflage.



Lapwing chick camouflage

So whilst they are tricky to see with the naked eye



Thermal photograph of Nightjar

thermal cameras look at heat so birds are more easily located.

Secondly the traditional method of catching birds at night time with torches has relied upon seeing 'eye-shine'. There is no doubt this works, but in our view it is reliant on the bird being in the correct position for the reflection to be seen, and therefore not all birds are seen. The thermal again negates this requirement.

Finally and most importantly thermal technology opens and reveals a whole new world of nocturnal wildlife behaviour, that has been previously unknown. Whilst the technology does have capabilities during daylight hours; locating and catching Jack snipe, during the night it opens up a whole new world.

We have found that light pollution is not fatal in our ability to catch and as such, we have seen, caught and

ringed species in urban areas and close to cities.

Species that were previously unknown at sites have been found. Golden Plover, Common Snipe and Jack Snipe are now known to frequent arable fields and in areas where they have not been previously reported.

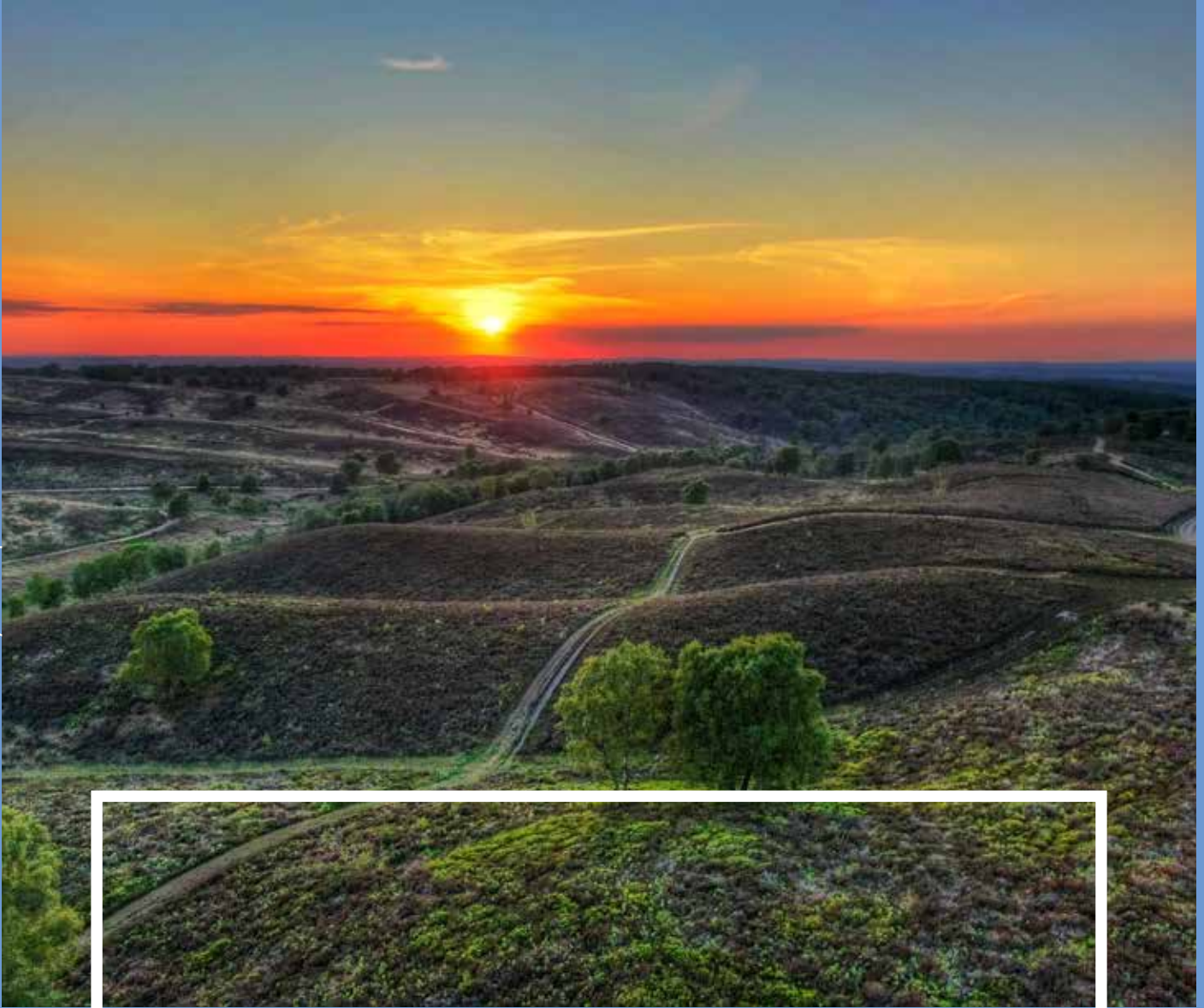
We have found more Nightjar in areas than was previously thought, and identified that the presence of a churring male is not an indication of only one bird or a pair, several more birds may also be in the same area.

We have also recorded the negative impact that fireworks have on birds!

Many other ringing groups across the UK and Ireland are now embracing this technology and developing it for their own needs and this is great news.

Further afield we have been contacted from ringers in Sweden, Luxembourg, Holland, Germany and France in respect of Skylarks. We have also had contact from Hungary, Poland, Canada, Madagascar, Japan, North America and Russia about our thermal work, and this is a legacy will are proud of!





# Cannock Chase Report

# Cannock Chase report

**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.

Cannock Chase is the largest surviving area of lowland heathland in the Midlands covering approximately 26 square miles. Lowland heath is an internationally scarce and threatened wildlife habitat. The AONB also has extensive areas of forest and woodland along with areas of designed parkland, sand and gravel quarrying and mixed agriculture.

Whilst the lowland heath is important the forest is equally as important



Willow warbler

for a range of bird species.

Several species are resident and breed on the chase, including the Woodlark, but there are concerns about increased human activity.

The Special Area of Conservation Team recently wrote

*"Let it be under no doubt, Cannock Chase is dying, we have ecological and biological evidence from 40 years, the biodiversity is decreasing, the habitat is fragmenting, the vegetation is in a poorer state, we have increasing problems with fungal pathogens, we have increasing erosion. Cannock Chase is on a constant downward spiral. The habitats, the wildlife which you see here today, if it carries on at this rate, will not be here in 30 to 40 years time."*

Whilst there is much talk about the heathland, we are also conscious that forest is vitally important and supports key species that require this type of habitat such as Redpoll, Siskin, Crossbill and raptors need this habitat, and are just as important for the area.

Clear-fell areas are home to Nightjar and Woodlark and we often see rare migrants, such as the Great Grey Shrike.



Siskin

and we believe this ringed bird returned to the same area in 2020. The bird favoured Forestry land and stayed for many months despite human disturbance.

Nightjar are an annual target species for the group and more detail can be found in the Nightjar section of report. However our ringing activities also see us target other species in the Forest and on the heath. We will be targeting



Spotted Flycatcher



Stonechat from 2021, again more detail is available in the following pages.

In the summer we target Common Cuckoo and several new birds were ringed.

As migration started in late July we held a number of ringing sessions in a section of heathland corridor and



Tree pipit nest

these sessions proved to be very successful, with over 100 birds being caught on one morning alone.

The totals included 166 Lesser Redpoll and 100 Siskin. A surprise Mealy (Common) Redpoll was caught during a session in September.



Common Cuckoo



Redwing

The Mealy Redpoll is larger than the Lesser Redpoll although they are all the same species, but biometric measurements do separate the birds.

This was a welcome addition to our totals and a



Mealy Redpoll

Spotted Flycatcher caught whilst targeting warblers was also a bonus.

The warbler numbers were good and our totals included:

154 Chiffchaff  
17 Blackcap  
15 Willow Warbler  
8 Common Whitethroat.

Other notable catches included 53 Goldcrest and

3 Sparrowhawks.

Several nests were recorded, with Woodlark nests being visited under Schedule 1 licence. We ringed 5 Woodlark and 13 Tree Pipit pulli.

Over 930 birds were ringed on the chase in 2020, but it is hoped that this will increase before the end of the year.



Sparrowhawk

As we got into Autumn we had four sessions targeting Redwing. This migrant to the UK are responsive to tape lures and as a result they are fairly easily caught. During the sessions we ringed 312 Redwing.

We would like to thank Forestry England and Staffordshire County Council for their support and for continued access. Special thanks are extended to the Head Forester and the Wildlife Rangers who have facilitated access.

We are looking forward to 2021 and commencing new projects. The chase will always have a special place in our hearts and we continue to strive to obtain data that will help inform improvements





# The WMRG Stonechat colour ringing project

# The WMRG Stonechat Project

**In 2020 we applied to the British Trust for Ornithology to colour ring Stonechats across Staffordshire and in Worcestershire. The details of the project and how you can help are found in the following pages.**

## Why colour mark birds?

When the Ringing Scheme began over 100 years ago, the primary aim was to find out more about birds' movements; attaching a uniquely coded metal ring to a bird's leg allows the individual to be identified if encountered at a later date, revealing the distance, direction and duration of travel. This technique also permits the calculation of 'vital' rates (survival and productivity), the key role of ringing in 21st Century conservation.

Originally, survival was calculated using dead recoveries reported by members of the public, which works well for large birds that tend to die in obvious places, such as Barn Owls, but less well for smaller birds and those living in remote areas. Fortunately, analytical developments have enabled a shift of focus, and survival rates are increasingly calculated using recaptures of live birds by ringers.



However, this method does have some limitations:

1. Catching (or recapturing) adults of some larger species, such as waders, wildfowl, gulls, herons and raptors, may require specialist techniques, although some (particularly herons and raptors) can more easily be ringed as chicks
2. Some species, such as House Sparrow and Starling, are extremely wary, so the chance of recapturing a bird once a ring has been fitted is quite low

## Enter Colour Marking

Both of these issues can be overcome by colour-marking. Using one of a variety of marks, such as lightweight plastic rings, leg flags, neck collars or wing tags, the identity of an

individual bird can be established remotely, without the need for recapture. Individual colour rings can be fitted in unique combinations but increasingly engraved rings are used, bearing a sequence of numbers and/or letters, as used on neck collars, wing tags and leg flags.

All BTO ringers must apply to the appropriate coordinator for permission to set up any colour-marking project, defining the species and location of the study and details of the resighting methodology, thus maximising the chance of sufficient data being obtained. Ringers undertaking a project are required to submit details of the number of birds ringed and any problems encountered



**The project will concentrate in Staffordshire and its primary focus will be Cannock Chase and Gentleshaw Common. However further birds will be ringed in other locations in Staffordshire together with Bredon Hill in Worcestershire. Cannock Chase is nationally important lowland heath and we believe a bespoke local project will be of benefit to all.**

## 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.

## How to get involved ?

The benefit of colour marks is that they enable non-ringers to engage with ringing projects by recording and reporting birds. But, as a non-ringer, if you see a colour marked bird (or find a colour mark on a dead bird) who do you report them to?

All colour-marking projects need to be approved and registered with the BTO or a species or group coordinator. This is very important to ensure that possible duplications between colour-marking projects on the same species are avoided.

Approved (European) colour-marking projects are listed on the European colour-ring website – [www.cr-birding.org](http://www.cr-birding.org) - organised by Dirk Raes.

It includes information on the colour-mark scheme (but not the individual codes for each bird) and the email address of the ringer in charge of the project so that they can be contacted directly by anyone who sees one of 'their' birds.



Stonechat on Bredon Hill, Image courtesy of Nicholas Berry



# 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>**

# Wildlife Crime



# Working with Wildlife Crime Units in the Region.

**The mystery of ghost-like figures silently swooping around Cosford has been solved...as colleagues discovered a family of owls nesting on the site.**

PC Glenn Flavell, a training officer based at the site and volunteer Wildlife Crime Officer (WCO), had suspected the site may have some new residents after spotting a duo of Barn Owls flying around the site and returning with food.

The species, their nests, eggs and young are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. As a WCO Glenn wanted to discover where the birds had made home to ensure it was safe.

With the help of fellow Wildlife Crime Officer and dog handler PC Carl Woodall, and by following the tell-tale sound of owlets calling out, their nest was located and four healthy young birds found.



One of the owlets

The duo contacted Sergeant Ben Dolan, who as well as working in Force Intelligence is also a licenced bird ringer, which allows him to place identifiable rings on wild birds.

After enlisting the help of cleaner Pam Smith and fellow trainer Asa Warren, and while both parents had flown off

hunting, the young birds were all fitted with rings so they can be monitored in the future & more learnt about their future movement and life span.

Disruption and handling was kept to a minimal, with the young birds given the names of Glenn, Carl, Pam and Asa. They were returned safely to the nest by the team before their oblivious parents returned with food.

Colleagues at Cosford will continue to keep an eye out for the owlets as they continue to develop and eventually fly the nest. WMRG have now supported these birds further by erecting an additional Barn Owl box on site and will help monitor these birds for the coming years.

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## Wildfowl Rescue

**Group member Paul Hopwood provides details of WMRG support to the RSPCA following a pollution incident in Smethwick.**



In August we responded to a request for support from the RSPCA in respect of a fuel spill at a park in Stony Lane, Smethwick.

Numerous birds including Canada Geese, Moorhen and Coot were affected by the spill and sadly several birds had died, together with many who had become covered in diesel

We attended the site within an hour, and utilising some of our nets, we managed to catch a number of the effected birds. These were taken to a RSPCA centre for cleaning.

An investigation into the spill continues and it is hoped those responsible will be brought to justice.



A landscape photograph of Marsh Lane Nature Reserve. The foreground is filled with dense, low-lying vegetation in shades of green and brown. In the middle ground, a winding body of water, possibly a pond or stream, reflects the overcast sky. The background shows a line of trees under a cloudy sky. The text "Marsh Lane Nature Reserve" is overlaid in white on the lower half of the image.

# 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 2020, a year which has had its ups and down in terms of weather, preventing us from conducting a number of ringing sessions on site.**

The end of 2019 and beginning of 2020 was a particularly quiet period for us due to the onslaught of constant rain and high winds, whilst remaining very mild.

From January to April we normally see an influx of finches at feeding stations or on the supplementary feed in the crop field, this usually gives us an opportunity to catch some of these farmland species

2020 did not see this influx, which we believe is down to the mild winter and is a picture that is repeating up and down the country.

In early February we were presented with an opportunity to target Wigeon and Teal by using a cannon net. A cannon net is a long net that is set across a specific area, which is then fired over the birds by the cannons, it is used for a variety of species and has to be carried out by highly trained individuals.



Cetti's Warbler

An area near car park hide was fed for approximately 12 days, which quickly saw good numbers of Wigeon, Coot and some Teal feeding, biggest count being approximately 150 birds feeding with just under 300 in the pool. The team met up the night before and set the cannon net and put down the last feed. During the night, the rain returned but stopped again by 5am so we sat in the hide and waited for the birds to start feeding at first light. The first birds to arrive were approximately 8 Coot, followed by around 15 Wigeon, which fed then flew back to the water then returned to feed and continued that pattern. Unfortunately the bird numbers did not improve so the decision was made to catch as many as we could, which ended with 9 Wigeon, 9 Coot and 1 Greylag Goose.

We took the opportunity during any dry days to get on to the reserve and conduct work parties, which included reducing height and willow scrub in the back gate area, ready for the warbler return, also concentrating on removing bramble along the bank along the back gate area and around the gorse bush.

On one of the work parties we were able to get a work party from Groundworks Ltd and had around 20 people who continued the work around the back gate area.

Work proposed to improve the reed bed area was suspended due the presence of a Bittern on the site, which was present for some time!

We would normally started ringing warblers around April time here however we were restricted from ringing for a few months due to Covid and didn't start until later.







Grasshopper Warbler one of many warbler species encountered at Marsh Lane NR

May saw a swift return following lock down to help us understand what birds were within the back gate area and we had an early smattering of Blackbirds, tits and a few Blackcap.

Thankfully we were able to continue our colour ringing projects on Black-headed Gulls, Oystercatcher and Common Tern, which saw a better year for Oystercatcher chicks with a total of 4 colour ringed, 95 Black-headed Gulls and a fantastic 20 Common Tern.

Ringing then continued in the back gate area but due to poor weather, this was reduced by about 50% compared to previous years but highlights were:

Blackcap 205, Chiffchaff 38, Garden Warbler 7, Reed Warbler 23, Whitethroat 3, Sedge Warbler 4, Willow Warbler 4.

The back gate area has always been an excellent location for Blackcap and this species makes up the majority of our catches in the autumn.

We do utilise tape lures, but these are only turned on once we are on site and no earlier than an hour before dawn.

Ringing sessions are conducted once a week as we like to show a true representation of the site.

We are really excited by the landscape work at Marsh Lane and we want to congratulate Nick Barlow, Pete Sofley and John Belsey for the work that they have designed, developed and delivered. This work is really exciting and could have a positive impact on the reserve and may attract a diverse range of species, we would love to see Avocet



One of Several Coots ringed during a cannon netting session

breeding at Marsh Lane in the future.

There is still uncertainty about 2021 and we do not know if we will be able to have further cannon netting sessions.

What we do know is Marsh Lane will remain a key site for us in the future.

### Marsh Lane Recoveries

**Blackcap** – Ringed 22/07/2020 Marsh Lane NR, Caught on 04/09/2020 at Chilling, Hampshire, 180km away.

**Blackcap** – Ringed 07/07/2020 Jubilee River, Slough, Caught on 05/09/2020 at Marsh Lane NR, 25km away.

**Sand Martin** – Ringed 11/08/2016 Marsh Lane NR, Caught 06/08/2020 at Bridgnorth, Shropshire, 52km away.

**Oystercatcher** A20, Ringed 11/06/2018 Marsh Lane NR, Seen on 24/04/2020 at Baie du Mont Saint-Michel, France by F. Cochard, 412km. Re-sighted 20/07/2020 at Marsh Lane NR by J.Hunt.

**Oystercatcher** A26, Ringed 31/05/2020 Marsh Lane NR, seen on 02/09/2020 at Dawlish Warren, Devon by L. Collins, 240km

# Marsh Lane NR improvement works

**Nick Barlow from Packington Estates explains his thoughts & hopes for Marsh Lane as work starts to improve the site for breeding wading birds.**

Some 77 acres of the River Blythe flood plain were extracted for sand and gravel in the late 1990s and formed into Marsh Lane Nature Reserve for opening on 1st July 2001. There are two main lakes, separated by Bailey's Brook which feeds into the Blythe. In addition to these two main pools there is a smaller pool, created into a Reedbed.

Gravel islands were formed in each of the two main pools with contoured channels and shallower areas and high points were left for breeding birds to avoid periodic inundation by the river in flood times.

In the early years of the Reserve these islands worked well for breeding waders - Oystercatchers, Lapwings, Little Ringed Plovers and Redshanks – but over time the battle to contain vegetation and a burgeoning Black-headed Gull colony has meant that these waders have been significantly less successful and more under pressure.



Marsh Lane in 2020 prior to landscape work commenced



Contouring work being conducted at Marsh Lane to improve habitat

A few years ago, the islands were stripped and re-gravelled which helped re-establish breeding Little Ringed Plovers but like Lapwings, they were successful to hatching but young were quickly predated by Gulls or Corvids.

Frustrated by this, I consulted with Pete Sofley and John Belsey of Ladywalk and Upton Warren respectively, and we decided to lower the water levels, bring in a digger and contour some of the shorelines of the islands and the mainland, and create pools on both which would (a) hold water longer and (b) would be planted up with Yellow Flag to provide cover for young waders.

As I said above, the hatching success is generally high but the fledging success is very poor and this partly because the open vistas of the islands, which work well for the waders to breed, does not work well for the young to hide away from the predators.

It is clear that Redshanks, in particular, like clumps of vegetation to nest in and also to hide their young in. Lapwings, Little Ringed Plovers and Oystercatchers seem to prefer sparse vegetation to nest in but young Lapwings in particular need protective vegetation as their parents are woeful in managing them.

Oystercatchers are highly protective of their young and easily have much more success at Marsh Lane.

The Little Ringed Plovers like open vistas to nest in and they are then much more tolerant of annual vegetation once the young have hatched.

To an extent, the work undertaken is experimental but hopefully a greater shore area, with some pockets of Yellow Flag and possibly Rush may provide the necessary variation to improve breeding success.



The use of a digger has been necessary to conduct such an ambitious project



# Marsh Lane Common Tern Project

**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!

Since 2016 the group have been ringing Common Terns.

As the years have progressed, the site has been developed so as to give them the best opportunity of raising chicks to a successful fledging.

During late 2017 we carried out extensive work on the car park islands, where we had re-gravelled a portion of one of the islands and installed twelve tern bungalows of two different designs, one with an apex roof and a flat roofed version with an open-door way.

This was in order to encourage terns to this area and enable them to seek a safe place of refuge until they were big enough to have a better chance of survival.

The islands are cleared each spring of vegetation which is an ongoing battle. Fresh gravel has been added and the nesting areas expanded to accommodate eighteen bungalows.

The tern bungalows have also been popular with other species especially Moorhens and on a single occasion a Gadwall.

Looking forward to 2021 we plan to revamp the nesting area. To tackle the vegetation we will be using a propane burner that we hope will be successful by sanitising the gravel and killing off seeds before they germinate.

A camera trap provided interesting footage during 2020 and we will look to use additional camera traps within the area to more closely monitor the breeding cycle.



An occupied tern box at Marsh Lane NR



Hopefully we will be able to identify mature adults with darvic rings thus giving us the opportunity to ring their chicks and create a documented dynasty. When used this year the support post for the camera trap proved to be a popular perch and so additional posts will be placed on the islands. These will have a small perching area so as to discourage larger gulls.



Common Tern chick



## TERN MONITORING 2020

The first two Common Terns of the year were reported on Car Park Pool on the 8th April, and by the 11th six terns were present

Numbers increased throughout the month, with 17 present on 17th, and 2 days later this had increased to 19 birds, the best count of the year.

By the 19th May 13 birds were sitting on nests. As we entered June, there was a change in weather with a noticeable drop in temperatures resulting in the adults brooding young and at least nine chicks were counted this morning.

At least 14 sitting terns were counted on Car Park Pool on the 5th June.

By the 9th July an estimated 30 tern chicks had hatched with a number ringed. By the 18th July 20 terns had been ringed, 18 of which had a darvic ring fitted.

Two days later on the 20th July juvenile tern C48 was seen at Earlswood Lakes

On the 24th July six birds and 5 juveniles were present and numbers continued to decline as the birds started to disperse.

On the 27th July two adults and 4 juvenile birds were present

On the 31st July there were no terns noted at Marsh Lane and this marked the end of the 2020 season.

Birds were still sighted locally but by the 2nd August the Marsh Lane birds that were present at Earlswood lakes had left.

There were sightings of our terns at Grimley in Worcestershire on the 7th August and at Draycote Water in Warwickshire on the 13th August. Full details of our sightings are found below.

We hope to continue this project and extend it to the WMBC Blithfield Reserve.

Darvic	Date	Location	Distance (miles)	Finder	Condition	Year ringed
C31	05/07/2018	Earlswood Lakes	11	M. Griffiths	Alive	2018
C13	12/07/2018	Earlswood Lakes	11	M. Griffiths	Alive	2018
C33	12/07/2018	Earlswood Lakes	11	M. Griffiths	Alive	2018
C37	12/07/2018	Earlswood Lakes	11	M. Griffiths	Alive	2018
C22	22/7/2018	Seaforth, Merseyside	91	J. Greeps	Alive	2018
C18	08/08/2018	Seaforth, Merseyside	91	J. Greeps	Alive	2018
C39	30/06/2018	Marsh Lane NR	0	B. Dolan	Injured	2019
C42	30/06/2018	Marsh Lane NR	0	B. Dolan	Dead	2019
C45	24/07/2019	RSPB Middleton Lakes	11	Mercian Birding	Alive	2019
C17	10/06/2020	Marsh Lane NR	0	J. Hunt	Alive	2018
C35	19/06/2020	Marsh Lane NR	0	J. Hunt	Alive	2018
C26	22/06/2020	Marsh Lane NR	0	J. Hunt	Alive	2018
C25	16/07/2020	Marsh Lane NR	0	J. Hunt J. Hunt	Alive	2018
C48	20/07/2020	Earlswood Lakes	11	J. Hunt	Alive	2020
C35	23/07/2020	Marsh Lane NR	0	J. Hunt	Alive	2018
C56	30/07/2020	Earlswood Lakes	11	J. Hunt	Alive	2020
C52	30/07/2020	Earlswood Lakes	11	J. Hunt	Alive	2020
C13	07/08/2020	Grimley, Worcs	27	D. Allott	Alive	2018
C33	13/08/2020	Draycote, Warks	17	J. Judge	Alive	2018

# Marsh Lane - Lapwing Project

**Member John Hunt describes a truly disappointing year for this species at Marsh Lane. Once a key site in the region, it has been impacted by HS2**



The majestic Lapwing

We are monitoring Lapwing numbers in and around Marsh Lane NR.

The requirement is to monitor Lapwing numbers from 2019

to 2021 to see the impact of HS2 on breeding and where birds may move to during the construction phase and subsequent operational phase.

The area east of the A452 was taken under notice by HS2 in 2018 and subsequently the farmer and Packington Estate held no control. Since the digging of inspection pits in 2019 and the subsequent work by HS2 contractors there have been no observed Lapwing activity in this area.

Pairs trying to breed on the crop field and the islands

were unsuccessful with continued predation principally by Jackdaws

Two pairs nested on the near shore of Car Park pool. Here more substantial early cover provided both pairs were able to raise a number of chicks.

Only 2 chicks made it to a size suitable for ringing, of these one was ringed (BR01), but sadly neither was seen to fledge.

Additional work has been undertaken to increase margins where additional reeds and irises will be planted.

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# Marsh Lane - Oystercatcher Project

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

Oystercatchers have been ringed at Marsh Lane since 2018. They are identified by a green darvic with white lettering.

Whilst only 5 chicks have been ringed, we have two sightings away from the reserve which is amazing.

The first sighting of a Marsh Lane ringed bird occurred on the 24th of April 2020. This bird, A20, ringed in 2018 was seen during a high tide roost at Saint-Jean-le-Thomas (France).

The second sighting was it

returning to Marsh Lane on 23rd July.

A 2020 bird A26, last observed at Marsh Lane on 10th June was seen at Dawlish Warren, Devon on 2nd September and on the = 22nd December.

Breeding pairs return to the same territories. In general females do not breed until at least three years of age, with males delaying until five or older.

If A20 is a female, then there is a chance of it breeding

next year and possibly at Marsh Lane.



One of our Marsh Lane NR Oystercatcher chicks.

# 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 5th year seeks to learn more about their post-breeding dispersal.**

Since 2016 we have had some interesting sightings, which have showed a preference for Western/ South Western dispersal, which is similar to other Black-headed Gull projects in the Midlands.

The reserve consists of three main pools. Two of the main pools include a number of islands which, since their formation, have attracted a wide range of breeding and passage waders.

During late 2018 the large islands at Marsh Lane were improved and covered with shingle, in the hope that this would improve nesting areas for wading birds such as Lapwing, Redshank and Little Ringed Plover

Large numbers of Black-headed Gulls breed every year at the reserve, with numbers apparently increasing.

Since 2016 we have continuously improved our approach to ringing a colony of Black-headed Gulls.

Following the disappointment of 2019 when our sessions had to be cancelled for a number of reasons, 2020 did present us with the opportunity to ring birds within the colony.



In 2019 our furthest sighting was 776 miles away in Pontevedra, Spain by O. Santome, our 5th Spanish sighting of four different birds.

The pattern continues to show a preference for the West/ South West which is seen across other similar projects past and present.

Interestingly since April 2017 we have seen a number of Black-headed Gulls return to Marsh Lane for different periods of time.

Our gull sightings are found on the following page.



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

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

### Gull Facts and Statistics

**650**

Total birds ringed in project

**347**

Total sightings to date

**48**

Sightings in 2020

**293**

Distance in miles of furthest sighting 2020

**27124**

Miles in total recorded from sightings

**32**

Years old, longevity record for BH Gull



Ring	Date sighted	Location	Distance (miles)	Finder
2AVL	17/01/2020	Gann Estuary, Dale, Pembrokeshire	157	D. Astins
2CHN	11/02/2020	NeVERN Estuary, Newport, Wales	139	S. Baxter
2ACX	29/02/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G.Rowling
2AJN	29/02/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G.Rowling
2AKX	29/02/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G.Rowling
2ANC	29/02/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G.Rowling
2AXN	29/02/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G.Rowling
2BFH	29/02/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G.Rowling
2BNF	29/02/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G.Rowling
2BPA	29/02/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G.Rowling
2BPK	29/02/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G.Rowling
2BTJ	29/02/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G.Rowling
2ALV	01/03/2020	Bull Island, Dublin, Ireland	198	P. Knight
2BJF	21/04/2020	Thrupp Lake, Nr Abingdon, Oxfordshire	55	Ben. C
2BKJ	28/05/2020	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	20	J. Belsey
2APN	28/05/2020	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	20	J. Belsey
2CFN	09/06/2020	Babbs Mill Lake NR, Kingshurst, Solihull	6	K. Duncan
2CJP	20/05/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	J. Hunt
2EXF	08/05/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	J. Hunt
2ATJ	29/06/2020	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	20	G. Williams
2AKT	03/07/2020	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	20	M. Wakeman
2BXJ	03/07/2020	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	20	M. Wakeman
2CHN	07/07/2020	River Teifi, Cardigan, Wales	129	R. Dobbins
2AAV	14/07/2020	Westport Lake, Stoke on trent	49	D. Kelsall
2EHL	15/07/2020	Brandon Marsh, Warwickshire	11	A.Boddington
2EFN	23/07/2020	Upton Warren, Worcestershire	20	M. Wakeman
2CCT	31/07/2020	River Clwyd, Rhyl, Denbighshire, Wales	98	A. Jones
2AJJ	04/08/2020	Cardiff Barrage, Cardiff Bay, Wales	92	P. Howlett
2BTP	06/08/2020	Draycote Water, Rugby	17	T. de Clemont
2CKP	10/08/2020	Clancy's Strand, Limerick City, Ireland	293	T.Tarpey
2EAA	21/08/2020	Rhos Point, Llandudno, Wales	106	R. Sandham
2ENT	21/08/2020	Tivoli, Cork City, Ireland	290	B.Power
2BTH	02/09/2020	Catsford Common, Bridgwater Bay, Somerset	103	R. Musgrove
2CXK	01/09/2020	Kinsale Marsh, Kinsale, Cork, Ireland	295	B.Power
2BTP	03/09/2020	Draycote Water, Rugby	17	T. de Clemont
2AKT	08/09/2020	Annagassan Beach, Co. Louth, Ireland	218	J. Rod
2BTN	19/02/2020	Barnstable, Devon	139	M. Thorne
2AHX	28/09/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	J. Coakley
2ANC	28/09/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	J. Coakley
2CKA	03/10/2020	Limerick City, Ireland	293	G. Browne
2CFV	10/10/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G. Rowling
2CHH	10/10/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G. Rowling
2AKK	06/11/2020	Devoran, Cornwall	212	J. St Ledger
2CFN	10/11/2020	Babbs Mill Lake NR, Kingshurst, Solihull	6	K. Duncan
2BAA	22/10/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G.Rowling
2BFX	15/10/2020	Marsh Lane, Meriden	0	G.Rowling
2BFH	14/11/2020	Gillan Creek, Cornwall	221	M. Grantham
2ALF	23/11/2020	Bull Island, Dublin, Ireland	198	B. Burke



# WMRG

## Peregrine Falcon Project

# Peregrine Falcon Project 2020

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



A brood of our Staffordshire Peregrines

Thankfully Covid restrictions were eased just in time for us to continue monitoring our Peregrine Falcon sites across West Midlands and Staffordshire, with a new Staffordshire site added to our ever growing colour ringing project.

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.

Peregrines were at very low levels in the 1960s and a number of factors had resulted in their decline.

Human persecution and farmland pesticides being present in their food sources in the food chain were the main issues.

Improved legislation and protection has helped the birds to recover, but they are still persecuted today. Some of our birds have been subjected to persecution.

Birds are illegally killed to prevent predation on game birds and racing pigeons. They also have eggs and chicks taken for collections and falconry. Peregrines are a Schedule 1 listed species of The Wildlife and Countryside Act.



Juvenile Peregrine Falcon

Our three Staffordshire sites provided us with 11 chicks, with two of the regular sites producing the regular 7 and our new site producing a healthy 4.

We were concerned around our West Midlands birds after producing 4 chicks yearly from 2015 and then reducing to 2 in 2019, however they returned to producing 4 healthy chicks for 2020, although we became aware of some serious threats against these birds by a local pigeon group.

Thankfully we work closely with the West Midlands Police and RSPCA, whose quick actions dealing with these threats undoubtedly saved their lives.

During 2020 we had two reported fatalities of chicks, one died on site after fledging, however another was found dead by a member of public on Wrekin, Wellington, Shropshire, which was 37km away.

Unfortunately the bird was decomposed and we were unable to ascertain cause of death.

Since we started monitoring Peregrine Falcon chicks in 2014, we have ringed a total of 80 chicks, and have had 12 reported deaths.



# 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.**

One of the biggest impacts that the Covid-19 pandemic has had is social isolation, especially for the older generations.

We had engaged with the Cannock Chase Shed group. The Shed are a self-help community group for men & women who build, make, mend, repair and restore things (including themselves!) whilst making friends and enjoying chat, banter, tea & coffee & cake.

The group had agreed to support us by making nest boxes for local birds and in support of our projects.

We had hoped to have visited the group to share our work and to offer the opportunity for the groups members to take part in our activities. Sadly this couldn't happen, but they have agreed to help where they can working from home. Obviously this is not the same and we hope, where possible to offer an online talk with them to provide them with an insight into our work. We hope 2021 improves and allows us to work closer with this group.



Nest Box Hero Dennis Leonard

Dennis Leonard continues to support our group and during 2020 has made a number of nest boxes for Little, Tawny & Barn Owls.

Dennis is now in his 93rd year and is still enthusiastic and keen to continue making boxes for us.

**We can't thank Dennis enough for the work he does for our group and the local wildlife.**

We did manage to conduct a demonstration for Championing the farmed Environment (CFE) in Staffordshire, helping farmers, landowners and those with a general interest in wildlife to identify birds.

A further outdoors, socially distanced walk was held at the Bradshaws Estate in September. This gave residents of Perton and the surrounding area the opportunity to see our work on the estate and on farmland. As numbers were limited the event was over subscribed very quickly and we scheduled a further event in November.

Unfortunately this too was cancelled, but we are looking to reschedule as soon as possible.

Due to the rules set by the Government, social isolation became more of a problem in Autumn, and a change was needed.

We held an online 'Trent Talk' for Transforming the Trent Valley and a talk for farmers and residents from the Bredon Hill area about farmland birds and ringing. Both of these resulted in some great feedback and we will continue to do more.

If you would like us to do a talk, please contact us.

To support the NHS we set up a fundraising event focussed on our Black Headed Gulls. People were able to sign up for a small donation and name one of our colour ringed gulls. This had a great response and we raised over £200 that was donated to NHS Charities Together!



# Transforming the Trent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme

**Nicola Lynes, Community Engagement Officer (Transforming the Trent Valley) introduces this fantastic landscape partnership scheme and her work with WMRG with online talks to address Social Isolation during a challenging year.**



## **“Trent Talks” with Transforming the Trent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme.**

Like many other organisations, Transforming the Trent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme has had a difficult year, having to cancel the majority of our face to face activities and furlough many of our team.

In the summer months we encouraged people to go out and explore their local wild spaces, but as the second lockdown loomed in November as the dark evenings drew in, we changed our approach.

Our online Trent Talks were launched with the intention of ‘bringing nature into your home’ while it was more difficult for people to spend time outside, and creating a space for like-minded people to come together in these times of isolation.

We were delighted to have WMRG deliver the first Trent Talk for us, speaking about thermal imaging surveys to an international audience!

We had people join our Zoom talk from across the UK, Hungary, Germany, Belgium, Czech Republic and as far away as Japan, so a truly international event!

Our Trent Talks will continue into 2021, with a range of speakers such as Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Staffordshire's County Moth Recorder, Bumblebee Conservation Trust and more to be announced. The full list can be viewed on our website <https://www.thetrentvalley.org.uk/events.php>. All talks are free to book onto and are open to everyone.

Transforming the Trent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme is focussed on the River Trent, its floodplain and tributaries in East Staffordshire and South Derbyshire.

It is led by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. To find out more about the scheme, please visit our website.

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



Cherry Holme - A natural river island restored for wildlife



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

# Staffordshire Pied flycatchers

**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.

Pied flycatchers arrived in the area as we would expect, but they were faced with many challenges

Early in the season when the birds went down on eggs we experienced a period of awful weather, resulting in four nests failing.

The situation did not improve and two further nests, where eggs had hatched failed following an extended period of wet weather.

But most disappointingly



Male Pied Flycatcher

the most significant impact was as a result of irresponsible human interference.

Nine of the occupied boxes in the area had been opened, and not closed properly, leaving the nests open to the elements and predation.

Pied Flycatchers are a red listed species and breeding habitat is vitally important for them, so 9 boxes being disturbed is just awful.

The boxes are located in a private area, but this has not stopped people going to the boxes. Birds have been displaced as a result of this, and some may never return.

We will not publish the location of the boxes, but if you know where they are and note any suspicious behaviour please notify us or the Police.

Staffordshire Police Wildlife Crime Team are aware and will be monitoring the situation in 2021

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## Everything is Rosy!

**In June group member Keith Clowes had a surprise visitor to his ringing site in Kingsley, Staffordshire, a visitor that had travelled some distance!**

In June I had large numbers of Starlings visiting my ringing site in Kingsley, and I decided that I would try and catch some, as they can travel some distance.

Having set up a small trap I noticed an unusual bird amongst the flock, and soon identified it as a Rose-coloured Starling.

These birds are usually found in Asia and Eastern Europe but in 2020 large numbers had been seen away from their normal

breeding range.

Only 42 of these birds have been caught in the UK since 1956, and only 1 or 2 are caught each year, although in many years they are not encountered. This was a real privilege for me and for the group.

These are a striking bird, with contrasting pink and black feathers. This bird was an adult. It certainly made up for a poor start to the year.



The Rose Coloured Starling



**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.**



VOSKER cameras require no Wi-Fi or power to operate. They are completely wire-free and fully mobile enabled.

Being weather and future proof, Vosker's cameras are a must use in today's world.

Vosker have kindly sponsored our group with a Vosker V200 trail camera, which will take photos and video in the field and send images directly to our mobile phones.

The main project we'd like to trial this technology for is our Common Tern Project where we will angle this camera on to a small perch, and as the Terns land on the perch, images will be taken and sent to us and allow us to see any of our colour ringed Terns that are returning to the site, therefore reducing time in the field.

The camera has an inbuilt solar panel which ensures continual power and meaning less disturbance to birds.

We look forward to working with Vosker during 2021 and beyond.

For more information visit <https://www.vosker.com/>



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## New Group Members

**We had two new members join us this year, and a further prospective member accompany us on several sessions. Due to the pandemic we made a decision not to take any further trainees on from the Summer.**

John Overfield a C permit holder joined us in the summer having moved from Gloucestershire. John has birded worldwide and is an international bird guide. John has been concentrating on new Severn Trent sites and Overbury Estate.

Paul Smith is a trainee and accompanied us in 2019, but commenced his training



Trainee Paul Smith with a Sparrowhawk

in January 2020. He hopes to get his C permit in 2021.

We have also been accompanied by Faye Minister, a trainee who has moved into Staffordshire. We hope Faye will move to the group in 2021.

We have many people waiting to start with us, but sadly this is being delayed due to Covid restrictions.



Ringling Data

2020

# Ringling Recoveries

**In 2020 the group encountered 19 birds that had previously been ringed, by the group or elsewhere in the country or abroad. The following page provides highlights of these encounters.**

Species	Location ringed	Date ringed	Location Found	Date Found	Distance km
Fieldfare	Bradshaws Staffordshire	22/12/2019	Belvide Reservoir	07/12/2020	10km
Skylark	TWB Farms, Staffordshire	24/09/2019	Bradshaws Staffordshire	26/08/2020	23km
Lesser Redpoll	Cannock Chase	04/10/2019	Heart of England Forest	18/10/2020	55km
Chiffchaff	Corbridge, Northumberland	01/08/2020	Cannock Chase	01/10/2020	243km
Chiffchaff	Patshull, Staffs	18/07/2020	Cannock Chase	13/09/2020	26km
Lesser Redpoll	Smallfield, South Yorkshire	10/09/2020	Cannock Chase	01/10/2020	81km
Blackcap	Marsh Lane NR	22/07/2020	Chilling, Hampshire	04/09/2020	180km
Siskin	Ramsley Res. Derbyshire	02/09/2020	Cannock Chase	05/09/2020	63km
Blackcap	Jubilee River, Slough	07/07/2020	Marsh Lane NR	05/09/2020	125km
Cetti's Warbler	Marsh Lane NR	08/07/2019	Chelmarsh Shropshire	14/06/2020	49km
Reed Bunting	Chelmarsh Shropshire	10/11/2019	Pattingham Staffs	14/03/2020	15km
Reed bunting	Shifnal STW	03/11/2016	Pattingham Staffs	14/02/2020	13km
Reed bunting	Attingham Shropshire	18/09/2017	Shifnal STW	29/12/2019	20km
Lesser Redpoll	Cannock Chase	13/10/2016	Wakefield Yorkshire	18/10/2020	102km
Pied Flycatcher	Alton, North Staffs	03/06/2017	Bearda, Staffordshire	21/05/2020	24km
Sand Martin	Marsh Lane NR	11/08/2016	Bridgnorth, Shropshire	06/08/2020	52km
Redwing	Cannock Chase	20/10/2016	Asha, Ashinsky Russia	15/07/2019	3896km
Oystercatcher	Marsh Lane NR	10/06/2018	Mont St-Michel, France	20/07/2020	412km
Oystercatcher	Marsh Lane NR	31/05/2020	Dawlish, Devon	02/09/2020	240km



# From Russia with Love!

**This year the BTO notified us of a recovery of one of our birds from Russia! This is one of the furthest recoveries recorded by the BTO!**

Whilst many Redwing are ringed annually in the UK (circa 15k per annum), the recovery rate for this species is very low.

We have had several recoveries of Redwing, with the furthest to date being in Portugal. However on the 10th January 2020 we were notified of the recovery of a bird from the BTO



A Redwing from Cannock Chase

The bird in question was ringed by a WMRG member on Cannock Chase on the 20th October 2016, during a session where these were targeted.

However on the 15th July 2019 the leg of an unknown bird species, together with a British ring was found in Asha, Ashinsky District, Chelyabinsk Oblast in the Russian Federation and reported to the BTO.

A search of the BTO database made the link to us and we were informed.

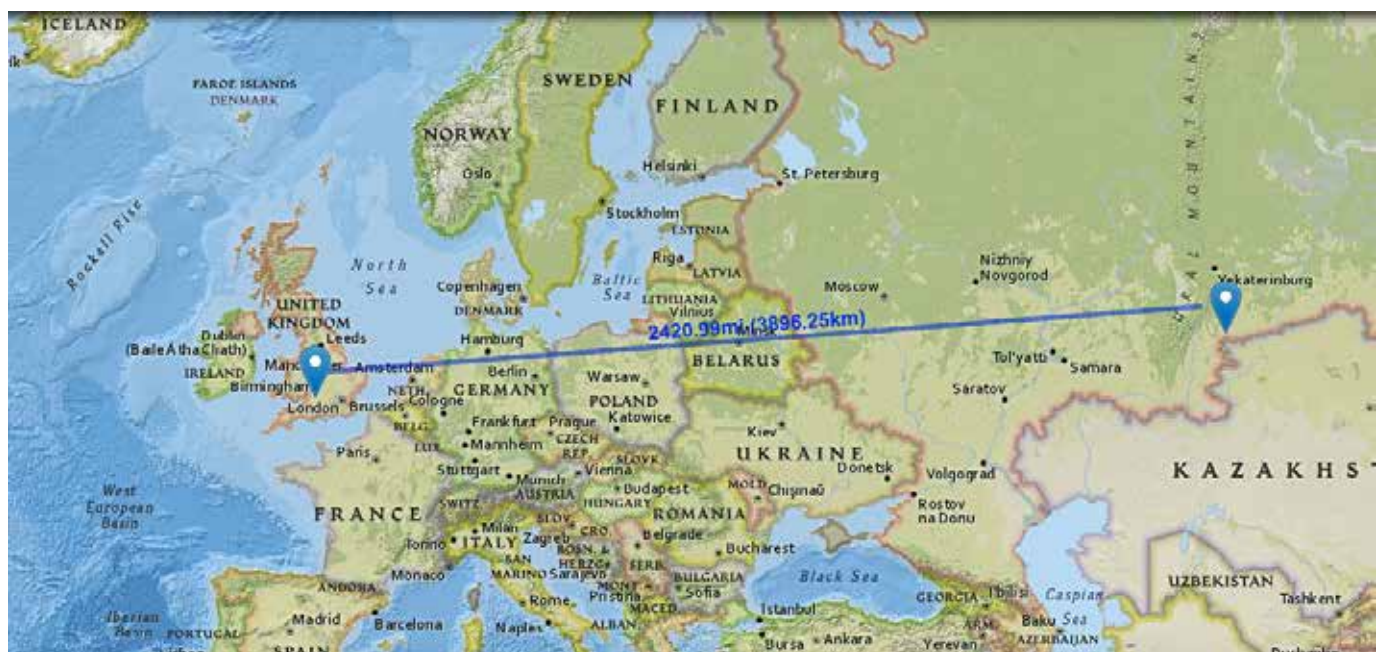
This recovery is amazing, and the distance between locations is 3896km or 2420 miles. However this bird is likely to have travelled significantly further!

juvenile and was aged as being born in 2016, however in the following three years this bird may have repeated the journey, or travelled further over 3 years, with repeated migration journeys, this could have totalled 23.400 km or 14500 miles!

We are trying to ascertain details of the circumstances in which the remains were located in Russia, as this could provide us with more useful information. Could it have been in a falcon nest, a bird of prey kill, a bird that was hunted? We hope to find out and will provide any information in our 2021 report.

Information of this nature is one of key reasons why bird ringing is so important!

The bird was ringed as a



Map depicting Redwing movement!

# Subsequent Recaptures & Sightings

The following table contains data of birds that have been recaptured by West Midlands Ringing Group in 2020. Gull and Common Tern sightings are also incorporated

This data includes birds that have been recaptured at the same location or controlled birds. Controlled birds are birds that have been previously ringed or encountered by other ringers or ringing groups in the UK. For this data we have only included controlled birds that have been recaptured over 10km away from our sites.



Species	Numbers Recaptured/ controlled
Jack Snipe	2
Oystercatcher	2
Black-headed Gull	33
Common Tern	10
Nightjar	8
Blue Tit	16
Great Tit	2
Skylark	29
Cetti's Warbler	1
Chiffchaff	3
Blackcap	6
Wren	2
Treecreeper	1
Blackbird	1
Fieldfare	1
Redwing	1
Robin	7
House Sparrow	2
Dunnock	8
Grey Wagtail	1
Chaffinch	4
Greenfinch	3
Linnet	54
Lesser Redpoll	1
Siskin	1
Yellowhammer	5
Reed Bunting	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>231</b>

# Ringling Totals for 2020

The following chart contains details of all birds caught, ringed and processed during 2020. 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 [wmrg.contact@gmail.com](mailto:wmrg.contact@gmail.com)

Species	Ringed 2020	Ringed 2019
Wigeon	9	0
Grey Partridge	6	15
Sparrowhawk	3	1
Buzzard	1	1
Coot	9	0
Oystercatcher	3	1
Lapwing	2	4
Golden Plover	1	1
Little Ringed Plover	2	0
Woodcock	47	72
Jack Snipe	9	21
Common Snipe	3	16
Black-headed Gull	118	19
Common Tern	30	12
Stock Dove	5	3
Woodpigeon	1	6
Collared Dove	3	2
Cuckoo	5	3
Barn Owl	11	13
Tawny Owl	7	8
Nightjar	35	69
Great Spotted Woodpecker	3	1
Kestrel	6	0
Peregrine	15	10
Coal Tit	3	20
Marsh Tit	1	1
Blue Tit	80	135
Great Tit	31	99
Woodlark	5	4
Skylark	457	214
Sand Martin	33	16
Swallow	7	73
House Martin	8	60
Cetti's Warbler	3	4
Long-tailed Tit	64	33
Willow Warbler	21	9
Chiffchaff	223	46



<b>Species</b>	<b>Ringed in 2020</b>	<b>Ringed in 2019</b>
Sedge Warbler	4	10
Reed Warbler	23	43
Grasshopper Warbler	1	0
Blackcap	269	315
Garden Warbler	7	17
Lesser Whitethroat	1	3
Whitethroat	20	9
Goldcrest	70	41
Wren	27	40
Nuthatch	7	16
Treecreeper	3	1
Rose-coloured Starling	1	0
Starling	16	16
Blackbird	40	24
Fieldfare	37	16
Redwing	335	167
Song Thrush	10	7
Spotted Flycatcher	1	0
Robin	68	64
Pied Flycatcher	10	43
Redstart	7	20
Whinchat	1	0
Stonechat	12	7
Wheatear	2	3
House Sparrow	55	7
Tree Sparrow	18	0
Dunnock	94	44
Grey Wagtail	9	32
Pied/White Wagtail	3	28
Meadow Pipit	78	44
Tree Pipit	16	9
Chaffinch	154	60
Brambling	4	85
Bullfinch	2	7
Greenfinch	50	21
Linnet	373	268
Common Redpoll (Mealy - Flammea)	1	0
Lesser Redpoll	179	4
Goldfinch	68	91
Siskin	110	23
Yellowhammer	70	60
Reed Bunting	99	205
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3625</b>	<b>2884 (some sp. omitted)</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**

# 2020 a Year in Review

## Martin George provides some final thoughts on our ringing year in 2020

Last year was a year like no other as the world faced up to the realities of the largest public health emergency in a century and the single gravest threat to our nation since the Second World War. Normal life was suspended to varying degrees, and many of the activities that we all enjoy and rely on were stopped or at least curtailed.

For many of us the birds were a welcome reminder of more certain times. As winter eased into spring the Fieldfares and Redwings were replaced by Chiffchaffs and Swallows and the group's attention moved from mist netting winter finch and bunting flocks to catching migrant warblers.

With the arrival of summer our nocturnal focus changed from dazzling Woodcocks and Skylarks to catching Nightjars, before autumn's peak numbers of young and migrant birds kept us busy again at the mist nets, and we also made an early return to Skylark catching to ensure that we could identify the local juveniles before the adults and young moulted into identical plumage for the winter. By November's "Woodcock Moon" we were back to walking farmland to look for Woodcock, Snipe, Jack Snipe and Skylark.

It was reassuring to see the birds continuing the seasonal patterns that their species have followed for thousands of years, but for us the world was now a very different place. When we look back on a year almost defined by the need to keep away from people what stands out is the number of people we have worked with: a diverse mix ranging from individual farmers to large corporations, but for even the largest organisation the point of contact has been individual people. Thank you to everyone who has partnered us in this year's work.



We're always keen to draw attention to the good work that often goes unnoticed in the countryside. In this Report we're delighted to highlight some of that work, in the words of many of the farmers and landowners who kindly host our activities throughout the year. Although the holdings are diverse there is a common thread, of wanting to support and encourage wildlife, that we feel many more people need to know about.

Looking forward to 2021 we will be continuing and expanding our work wherever possible, which will include writing up some of our work for publication in peer reviewed journals, an exciting and slightly daunting first for us. We are also looking forward to developing our Stonechat project, colour ringing these charismatic little birds at sites in Staffordshire and Worcestershire and encouraging birdwatchers to look out for them across the West Midlands region and beyond. Some British-ringed Stonechats have travelled as far away as North Africa!

If you worked with us in any way in 2020, thank you very much for your support. We couldn't do what we do with you. If you're reading this report as a potential partner for the future, we look forward to working with you, please just say if we can help with any more information.





# 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.

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



**To view our YouTube channel,  
subscribe to:**

**West Midlands ringing group.**



**To contact us via email  
[wmrg.contact@gmail.com](mailto:wmrg.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.

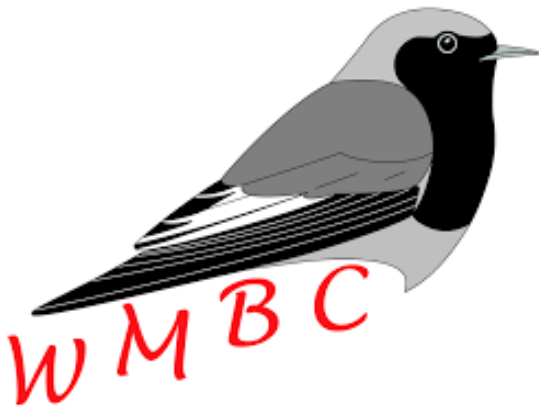
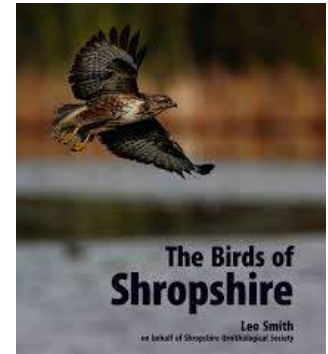
The Birds of Shropshire includes an account for each species, describing its distribution and relative abundance.

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*

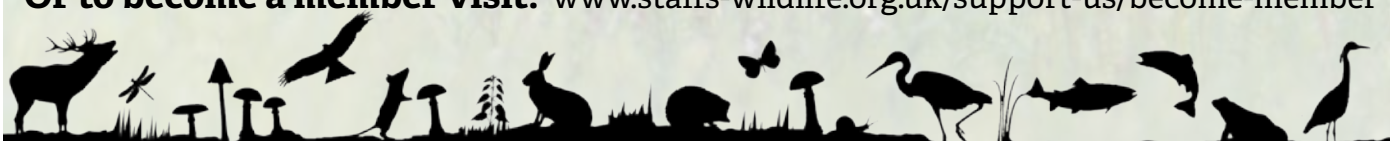
**Staffordshire Wildlife Trust is your local wildlife charity dedicated to looking after Staffordshire's wildlife and wild places. Our mission is to protect and enhance the wildlife and wild places of Staffordshire and to promote understanding, enjoyment and involvement in the natural world by putting 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



**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.**

## A world 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)





## 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)





# WMRG

# STONECHAT

## COLOUR RINGING PROJECT

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.

