

Bird Ringing at Ferry Meadows

Introduction

Wild birds have been trapped and ringed in Britain and Ireland for around 100 years and each year, approximately 800,000 are ringed by licensed ringers.

So, why do we ring birds? Handling birds for ringing provides an ideal opportunity to gather data on individual birds and although much has been discovered by watching and counting them, these methods rarely allow birds to be identified as individuals. This is essential if we are to learn about how long they live and when and where they move, questions that are vital for bird conservation.

What happens?

Birds are caught at Ferry Meadows using mist nets set vertically between poles to catch them in flight. A lightweight, uniquely numbered metal ring is then placed around the bird's leg and they are aged, sexed, weighed and measured before being released unharmed. Each ring also bears an address so that anyone finding a ringed bird can help to report its whereabouts and fate. This can be done on line at www.bto.org or by sending full details to: The British Trust for Ornithology, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP242PU.



A Willow Warbler in the net

Why is Ferry Meadows so special?

Ferry Meadows is one of around 130 sites across Great Britain and Ireland that is registered with the BTO as a Constant Effort Site (CES).

On CES sites, the data is extremely valuable because the mist nets are set in the same place for the same length of time year after year. This site has been a CES for over a decade and the data from here, added to that from other sites has proved to be extremely valuable to scientists studying specific aspects of bird behaviour but most importantly, CES monitors population changes, breeding success rates and survival rates of species living in scrub and wetland areas.

Here at Ferry Meadows, the most predominant migrant species monitored are Garden, Reed, Sedge and Willow Warblers, Blackcap, Whitethroat and Chiffchaff all of which are caught in significant numbers each year. Resident species monitored include members of the tit and finch families, Reed Bunting, Robin, Dunnock, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Treecreeper and Wren. Other species caught include Kingfisher, Tawny and Long eared Owl, Great Spotted, Lesser Spotted and Green Woodpecker, Jay, Woodcock, Cuckoo, Water Rail, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Grasshopper Warbler and Nightingale.

The mixture of woodland, scrub, sedge and reed here at Ferry Meadows provides a range of habitats so important for species richness which is why the area is so valuable for our birds.

How are Ferry Meadows' birds getting on?

Overall, most species are faring well. Fluctuations in populations between years are to be expected, given the vagaries of the weather both here and in the winter quarters of our migrant visitors. The reserve provides a superb range of breeding habitats for many species of warbler, with some individual birds returning to the same site year after year - and having covered many thousands of miles on migration! One adult male Willow Warbler, weighing in at around 8g, returned to this exact site for six consecutive years having overwintered in sub Saharan Africa - a remarkable example of survival and endurance.

Also, of particular significance here at Ferry Meadows is the strong presence of some of our more threatened resident species such as Bullfinch, Song Thrush and Dunnock.



Special pliers being used to place a ring onto a Willow Warblers leg

How do you know where 'our' birds go to?

Birds ringed here have been caught by other ringers or found by members of the public in Cambridgeshire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Rutland, Suffolk, Sussex and Yorkshire with others being caught in France and North Africa whilst on migration.

Can I watch ringing taking place?

You most certainly can. The ringing base is alongside the footpath by the river. Follow the signs from the Visitor Centre to the Nature Reserve. Just before Ham Bridge, follow the track onto the reserve and keep walking, passing the two hides and, when ringing is taking place, you should see a car parked just off the pathway approximately 200 metres after the second hide. The main CES ringing season is from May to September with occasional visits at other times of the year. Ringing often takes place at weekends and there are also ringing demonstrations held from time to time. Please see the notice boards for advance notice of these. Passers by are very welcome to come and have a look at the birds at close quarters if they see the car parked alongside the stand of willows. Look for the sign in the windscreen indicating that a bird ringing session is taking place.

Who pays for all the equipment and rings?

For more than a decade now the Nene Park Trust has grant aided the work here in addition to carrying out ongoing maintenance on the site. The Trust has been extremely supportive of this long term study and this help has enabled the work to continue. In terms of both the numbers of birds caught each year and the length of the study, Ferry Meadows has developed into a very important site nationally.

The Report

A copy of the latest ringing report is available as a PDF file on the Nene Park Trust Website
www.nene-park-trust.org.uk

Want to know more?

If you are interested in becoming involved in ringing for full details of what's involved please contact:

BTO Ringing Unit, The Nunnery, Thetford
Norfolk, IP24 2PU
Tel 01842 750050
Email: ringing@bto.org
Web: www.bto.org/ringing

Want to know more about Nene Park and Ferry Meadows?

Please contact:
The Visitor Services Officer
Nene Park Trust, Ham Farm House
Ham Lane, Peterborough, PE2 5UU
Tel 01733 234443
Email:
visitor.services@nene-park-trust.org.uk

Bird Ringing at Ferry Meadows

www.nene-park-trust.org.uk



A Kingfisher in the hand



By Chris Hughes