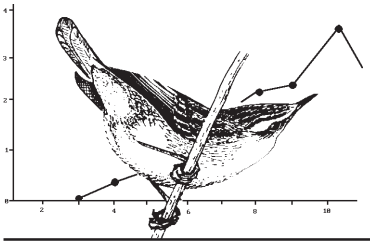
CES *News*



This is the sixteenth edition of the CES News, *the newsletter for the British Trust for Ornithology's Constant Effort Sites Scheme. If you require further copies, then please contact Dawn Balmer at The Nunnery.*

Number 16 April 2003

Similar long-term trends for Chiffchaff and Blackcap

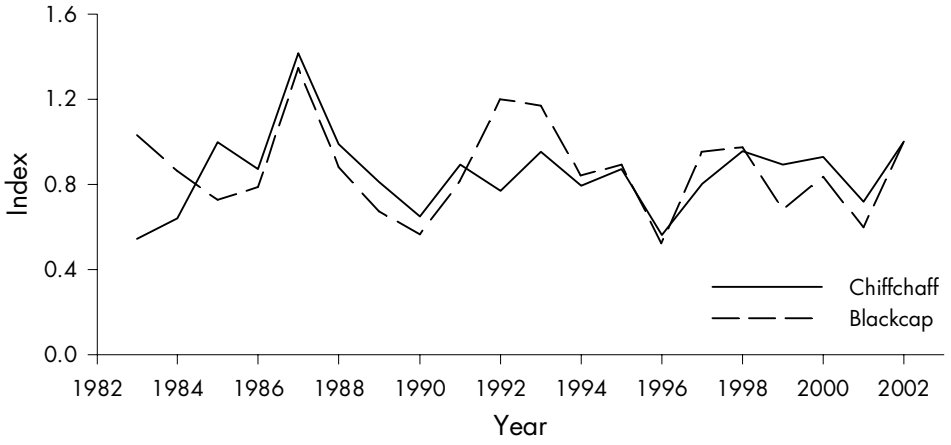


Figure 1. Productivity Index for Chiffchaff & Blackcap (1983-2002)

Chiffchaff and Blackcap have become familiar features in our winter birding calendar, both species are now present in Britain and Ireland during the winter months. The origins of these birds have led to much speculation by ornithologists! In the last issue of *CES News* we reported that John Webber ringed a juvenile Blackcap on his CES site in Somerset in June and retrapped the same bird in December of the same year; a remarkable retrap showing a locally hatched bird wintering in the same area.

Looking at the long-term trends of Chiffchaff and Blackcaps on CES sites has revealed some fascinating similarities in both adult abundance and productivity. Both species are short-distance migrants, chiefly wintering in southern Europe and North Africa, with some birds reaching as far as West Africa. The graph above shows the long-term trend in breeding success and suggests that similar environmental variables influence them. Productivity was high for both species in 1987 and low in 1990 and 1996; the latter year will be remembered by many CES ringers for being the worst breeding season since CES ringing began.

CES in 2002

Coverage in 2002

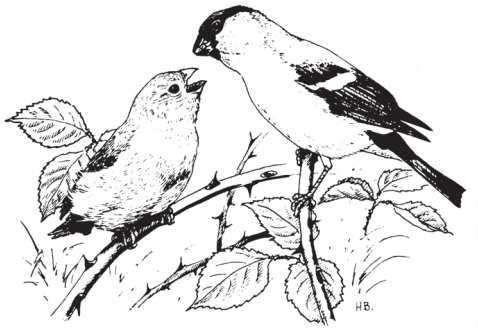
A total of 116 sites were covered in 2002 (Figure 2), which is down on the all-time high of 147 sites in 2000. Foot & Mouth Disease disrupted fieldwork for some ringers in 2001, when an impressive 114 sites were still covered, despite the restricted access in some areas. A few sites could not be covered in 2002 due to extensive flooding, but it seems likely that there has been a genuine reduction in the number of sites in the scheme. We hope ringers will re-start their sites in 2003 and that new sites will join this important scheme.

Figure 2. Location of CE sites in 2002

The results that are presented here come from the 105 CES sites that had submitted data by the time these analyses were carried out (early January): 83 from England, 13 from Scotland, four from Wales and five from Ireland. Seven sites were operated for the first time in 2002. The habitats covered are comparable to previous years, with the majority of sites located in reedbed, wet and dry scrub and a small number of sites in deciduous woodland. As usual, 90% of the CES data were received in electronic format and we would like to thank to all ringers and helpers who computerised their data so promptly.

Adults down after poor breeding in 2001

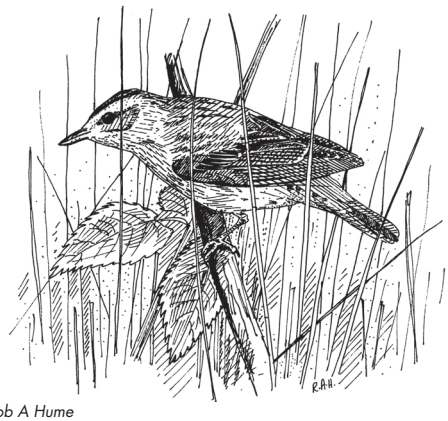
In the last issue of *CES News* (Number 15, 2002) we documented a poor breeding season in 2001 for a broad range of species including both resident and migrants. For resident species, weather over the winter 2000/2001 period was the usual mix of cold, frosty and snowy conditions together with some milder, yet wet and windy periods. Given such low productivity in 2001 and mixed winter (2001/2002) weather, it's not too surprising that the adult population measured in 2002 was low compared with the previous year. Table 1 shows the changes in captures on CES sites from 2001-2002. Nine species showed statistically significant changes in adult abundance. Bullfinch was the only species to show a statistically significant increase in adult numbers and is a welcome upturn for this species of high conservation concern in long-term decline. Eight species showed a significant decline in the numbers of adults caught between the two years, of these, four species were residents (Blackbird, Blue Tit, Great Tit and Chaffinch) and four were migrants (Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler,



Barry Stuart

Garden Warbler and Willow Warbler). Although between year changes are of interest, it is the trend over longer time periods that are of far greater conservation significance.

CES methods are well suited for ringing in reedbed and wet scrub habitats so results from the CES scheme probably provide the most comprehensive monitoring of Reed Warbler and Sedge Warbler populations. On CES sites the numbers of adult Reed Warbler and Sedge Warbler caught show large inter-annual fluctuations. The long-term trend for Sedge Warbler is fairly stable but for Reed Warbler there is a decline between 1983 and 2002 of 38% (Figure 3). Detailed analysis of BTO datasets has shown that much of the variation in population size for Sedge Warbler is related to changes in adult survival rates, which, in turn, are related to changes in rainfall on their wintering grounds in West Africa (Peach *et a*l 1991). The Migration Atlas has revealed that for Reed Warbler the extent of the wintering area is largely unknown so further ringing expeditions to Africa are required to help fill the gaps in our knowledge.



Rob A Hume

A further decline of 16% in the number of adult Willow Warblers trapped between 2001 and 2002 is deeply worrying. In the recent review of the population status of birds in the UK, Willow Warbler was admitted to the Amber list and is now officially considered to be a species of medium conservation concern on the basis of the moderate (25-49%) decline in the UK breeding population in the last 25 years.

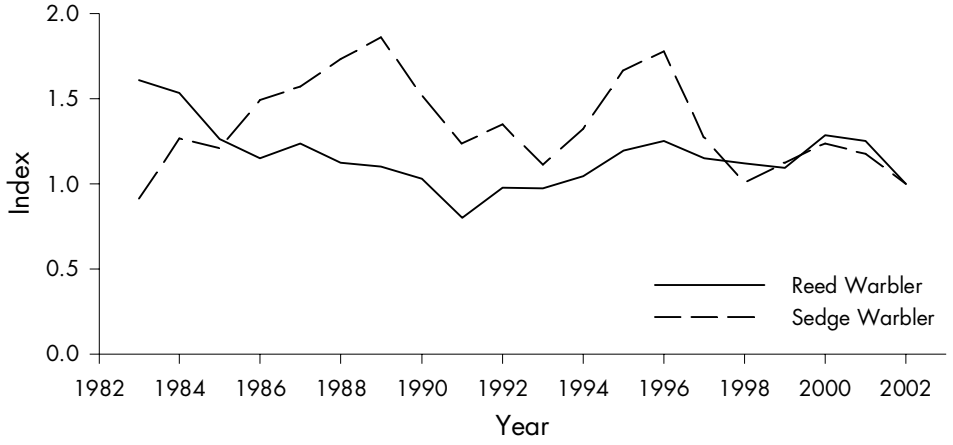
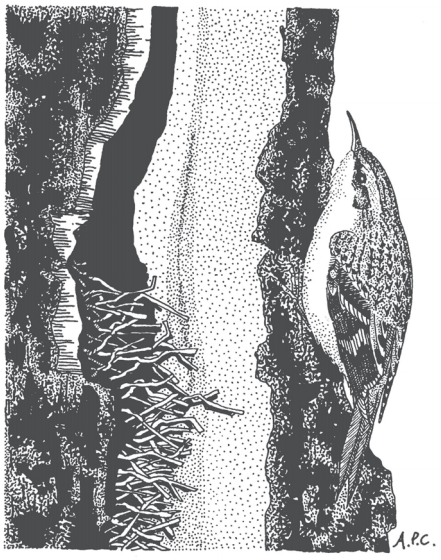


Figure 3. Adult abundance Index for Sedge Warbler and Reed Warbler

Better breeding season in 2002

Ringing on Constant Effort Sites has shown improved productivity for a range of common songbirds (Table 1), resulting in record catches of juveniles on some sites. This better breeding season follows several years of mixed or poor breeding success. Correspondence with ringers across the country, particularly those in Scotland, revealed that some areas had much better breeding success than others. Looking back at the weather in May, June and July in 2002 its easy to see why breeding success can be so localised; torrential deluges, flash flooding and electrical storms affected some parts of the country but not others (it was also hot and sunny at times!). These conditions can quickly wipe out nests of ground nesting species or soak open-nests as well as making foraging for insects much more difficult.

Eighteen of the 24 species monitored by CES showed statistically significant increases in productivity between 2001 and 2002 (Table 1). These significant changes included both residents (Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Treecreeper, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Bullfinch, Reed Bunting) and migrants (Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Whitethroat, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler). Warm and settled weather in the second half of March prompted nest building and laying for early nesting species such as Robin and Blackbird and some early broods were evident in April.



Andrew Chick

B E Slade

Blue Tit and Great Tit, up 127% and 59% respectively between 2001 and 2002, were much more successful than the previous season and large roving tit flocks could be found during the autumn months - much to the delight of ringers! These short-term ups and downs in breeding success are interesting but generally relate to short-term weather patterns; the long-term trends for these species are of far greater significance. The number of CES sites catching Willow Tit is now very low and it comes as no great surprise to find that Willow Tit has recently been added to the Red List in the Population Status of Birds and is a species of high conservation concern.

Linnet was the only species to show a statistically significant decline in productivity. The number of Linnets caught on CES sites is very small, so the decline of 93% between 2001 and 2002 should be treated with caution.

Reference

Peach, W., Baillie, S. & L. Underhill. 1991. Survival of British Sedge Warblers *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* in relation to west African rainfall. *Ibis* **133**: 300-305.

Table 1. Changes in captures on CES sites from 2001 to 2002

Species	Adults n 2002	Adults Total	Juveniles n 2002	Juveniles Total	Adult Abundance % Change	Adult Abundance Long-term trend	Productivity (juvs per adult) % Change	Productivity (juvs per adult) Long-term trend
Wren	104	640	102	1851	-5	→	+36*	→
Dunnock	96	668	100	1063	0	→	+26*	→
Robin	97	500	102	1796	-8	↑	+21*	↓
Blackbird	99	921	89	653	-10*	↓	+20*	→
Song Thrush	77	300	71	229	+6	↓	0	→
Sedge Warbler	65	996	66	1471	-15*	→	+34*	↓
Reed Warbler	57	1524	54	1722	-20*	↓	+31*	→
Lesser Whitethroat	40	89	40	172	+6	↓	+15	→
Whitethroat	70	396	73	821	+5	→	+38*	↓
Garden Warbler	67	278	67	314	-18*	→	+21	↓
Blackcap	94	879	98	2232	-6	↑	+67*	→
Chiffchaff	78	440	88	1671	+12	↑	+39*	↓
Willow Warbler	76	1015	91	2013	-16*	↓	+34*	↓
Long-tailed Tit	90	436	86	1148	-7	→	+78*	→
Willow Tit	10	18	20	66	-20	→	+140	→
Blue Tit	99	594	102	3132	-16*	→	+127*	↓
Great Tit	98	433	101	1706	-18*	→	+59*	↓
Treecreeper	38	74	77	273	-15	→	+55*	→
Chaffinch	83	511	70	554	-32*	→	+50*	↓
Greenfinch	47	241	29	152	-12	↑	+43*	↓
Goldfinch	31	99	20	53	-14	→	+42	↓
Linnet	10	22	5	9	-35	↓	-93*	↓
Bullfinch	77	480	67	436	+17*	↓	+50*	→
Reed Bunting	65	358	45	374	-12	↓	+72*	↓

n 2002 = number of sites operated in 2002 at which the species was captured
Total = total number of individuals captured on sites (for adults and juveniles separately)
% Change = percentage change between 2001 and 2002
* = significant change at the 5% level
Long-term trend = long-term trend during the period of CES ringing. See Wider Countryside Report on the BTO website for further details (www.bto.org/birdtrends).
↑ = long-term trend shows an increase
↓ = long-term trend shows a decline
→ = long-term trend shows stability

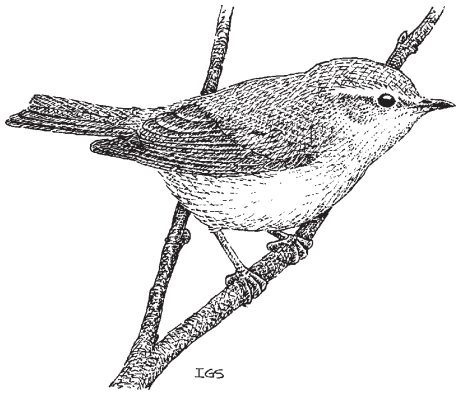
Willow Warbler migration
by Jim Cobb

After sixteen years of working with the Willow Warblers at my CES site near Kippo in East Fife, I feel I have a reasonable understanding of what they do. My control rate via the Ringing Unit is less than 0.1% and getting worse, however, I have generated approaching 1,000 retraps of nestlings alone. It is clear that the national CES data can answer some interesting questions about them and I am looking for help. I have noted previously in *CES News* (No12, 1999) that females just starting moult in late July/early August are likely to have reared second broods. There are still only four certain second broods during this study but are second broods more common farther south?

My studies and those by Steve Norman (in Cleveland) show Willow Warblers stay close to their natal site for about 45 days, though they may stay longer in the south (60 days) since Mike Lawn (in Surrey) showed they complete their post juvenile moult on the natal site. The average hatching date here in Fife is 6 June (clearly it varies each year by some days). This means in south Scotland that birds move, on average, after 21 July, but the timing will vary across the country. The percentage of juveniles ringed after this date can vary greatly between years: in 1992, 95% of Willow Warbler juveniles were ringed after this date, and may have been migrants, while in 1999 only 36% were (n = approx. 3,500 for all years). Discussions with Ken Bruce who runs Auchenfranco CES in Dumfries (at least he would but for Foot & Mouth and flooding) suggests there is little correlation between the east coast and west coast sites in the number of migrant birds.

It is conventional wisdom that Willow Warblers are night migrants. In Fife, they definitely move in the late afternoon and fly low across country and can clearly be seen crossing open fields in the hedge-less agribusiness land of East Fife. Nets almost anywhere will catch them from about 1530 to 1800 hrs. They are much scarcer at the coastal site of Fife Ness, but common on the Isle of May, which may be a convenient place to hop past on the afternoon flight across the Firth of Forth (the total for the last seven years at Fife Ness is 237, and for the Isle of May 1,601). If this is the normal behaviour of young Willow Warblers at the beginning of their migration, then maybe these daytime southerly movements are weather influenced and depending on the prevailing winds at the time may follow different paths in different years. Any patterns might be picked up in CES sites across the country.

Briefly, if one makes the assumption that no Willow Warbler hatched in the south starts migrating before 15 July, in mid-Britain before 21 July and birds hatched in the north before the 28 July then the average daily rate of movement from the national recovery database is 17 km, 20 km and 27 km respectively. Recovery data are obviously difficult to interpret since one usually has just the two dates of ringing and recovery. They could be making 100 km plus moves and then hanging about, though I have retrapped less than 1% of juveniles caught in August on



BTO collection

subsequent days. Willow Warblers are, however, very net shy and I dye-marked juveniles but never subsequently saw any of these birds. All this evidence suggests that Willow Warblers move short distances daily, possibly right down into France.

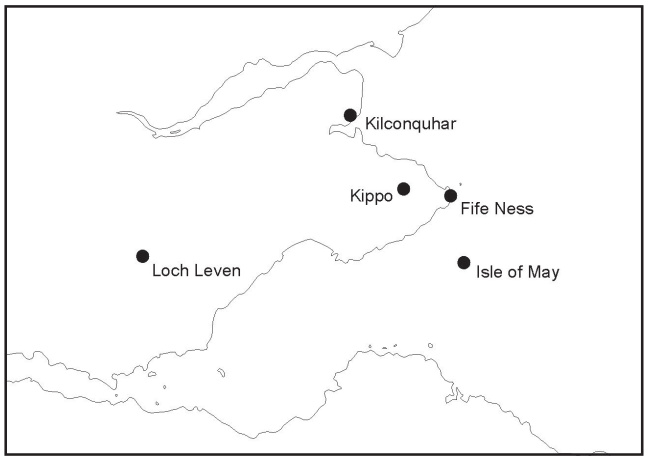
All Willow Warblers ringed at Kippo have fat scores recorded, only very few showed any fat at all and most weighed less than 9 g. Alan Lauder (who trained with me at Kippo) initiated a CES site at Loch Leven once he was independent and quickly started finding Willow Warblers with fat scores of three and weight up to 11 g. To be honest I was a bit sceptical, but in the last three years I have had the privilege of ringing in a reed bed at the Kilconquhar (south Fife). I now find some Willow Warblers have high fat scores and weights. The question is are there two different strategies in UK Willow Warblers, one doing short daily hops and the other doing big movements after pre-migratory fattening using reedbeds? Or might these 'fat' Willow Warblers be Scandinavian migrants using the long night flight strategy?

So two requests: could CES ringers look at the numbers of Willow Warblers caught in late July/August on their sites; and can reedbed CES and non-reedbed CES sites record fat data to see if we can achieve a greater understanding of Willow Warbler migration. IPMR is such an extraordinarily powerful tool that looking at data in this way is really not a chore and one can just export the data to Excel and email it! If anyone is happy to help please send an email to jamescobb@kingsbarns.fsnet.co.uk or use the address below. Please contact me before sending files to ensure the formats are compatible. One final note, I have now started on Chaffinches, the second most common breeding species on the Kippo CES. If anyone has already done such a study and has advice on catching them (tape lures etc) general behaviour or nest finding I would be most grateful.

I ring because I enjoy it and still find it just as fascinating as when I started as a schoolboy, but I do think the way forward is to form informal species groups. A real understanding of much of the basic biology would be a very valuable conservation tool for many passerine species, but the work does need to have clear objectives and proper co-ordination. If there is any one out there who wants to be part of a species study on Willow Warblers or Chaffinches and communicate by Email please get in touch.

Jim Cobb
3 Station Road, Kings Barns, Fife, KY16 8TB

Note from editor: This is exactly the kind of discussion that could take place on the new CES Forum (see details on page 11).



Not another b****y Blue Tit!
by Chris Hughes

Derek Robertson

I suppose like all ringers I've had my share of memorable moments during a CES season. These range from the time I became aware of a 'presence' near my shoulder when I was erecting a 18 m net and whipping round in the half light to see a Nightjar 'hanging' there, to being completely ignored by two squabbling Green Woodpeckers intent on sorting each other out as they scrabbled about under my feet. However, a completely different 'memorable moment' happened in 2002.

My ringing 'station' is set back about 20 m from a public footpath running alongside the River Nene at Ferry Meadows Country Park, Peterborough and, needless to say, I get my fair share of inquisitive passers-by. Most make polite enquiry and all, without exception, seem genuinely interested in what's going on. Last year, amongst many hundreds of people who passed the site, I was visited by a young family from Liverpool.

So what's memorable about a family from Liverpool? I'd just returned to my car with a number of birds to be greeted by that classic British phrase "What you got there mister?" Waiting for me was a young lad and his mother and I started to explain what I was doing and invited them to watch. First bird out of the bag was a Blue Tit. "What bird is this then?" I asked. "Don't know. Never seen one of them before" says the youth. " It's a Blue Tit. You sure you've never seen one of them before?" "Yeah", says the lad. "We don't get them in Liverpool". "Really. I bet you do", says I. "No", his mother pipes up. "We don't. Honest". They then went on to explain where they lived in a tower block, with no garden etc and it struck me how much we take things for granted. The family hung around for ages watching me ring…….yes, 34 Blue Tits, one after the other! And, believe me, they were thrilled to bits.

So, next time you get yet another b****y Blue Tit……

Chris Hughes

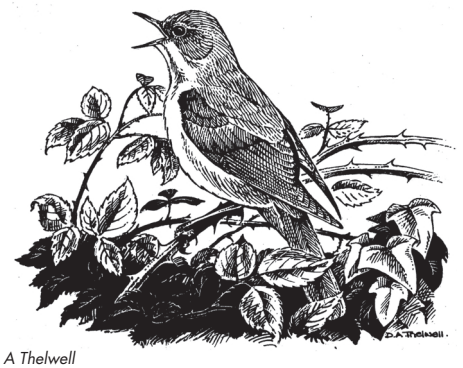
Note from Editors: Chris's article clearly shows the value of taking time to talk to the public. A few minutes of your time to promote ringing, CES and conservation will make an enormous impression. If you need any extra copies of the free Bird Ringing leaflet please contact the Ringing Unit.

Constant Effort ringing in Europe

Interest in CES ringing across Europe has grown enormously over the last twenty years. Following the establishment of the CES scheme in Britain and Ireland in 1983 (pilot work in 1981 and 1982), several other ringing schemes in Europe set up similar projects largely based on the methods trialed by BTO ringers. Table 2 shows the current picture of CES ringing across Europe. We are also delighted to hear that CES ringing started in Italy (13 sites) and Belgium (10 sites) in 2002. Just this week we have heard that the Czech Republic are also interested in getting a project off the ground along the lines of CES.

A quick look at Table 2 shows that all schemes, with the exception of France, undertake 10-12 visits spread evenly throughout the breeding season, allowing breeding success throughout most of the season to be effectively monitored. In France a different approach is taken; a large number of nets are used on just three visits (early/mid May to early/mid-July) and the nets are concentrated (3-5 nets per hectare) to ensure a high capture rate. Because such a large number of nets are used, the overall number of birds trapped each season is high and changes in adult abundance can be detected, although only the early part of the breeding season can be monitored.

Two CES schemes exist in Spain. One scheme (SYLVIA) covers Catalunya and is organised by the Institut Català d'Ornitologia (ICO) and includes constant effort ringing throughout both the breeding season and the winter (see page 12). The second scheme (PASER) covers the rest of Spain and is co-ordinated by Sociedad Española de Ornitologia (SEO)/Birdlife.



D A Thelwell

Table 2. Established CES schemes in Europe

	Year started	Number of sites	Number visits	Average number of nets	Is the breeding season monitored?
Britain & Ireland	1983	140	12	6-12	Yes
Finland	1987	35	12	6-20	Yes
France	1989	30	3	12-50	Early
Spain SYLVIA	1991	38	10	7-15	Yes
The Netherlands	1994	38	12	6-12	Yes
Spain PASER	1995	46	10	2-13	Yes
Sweden	1996	29	12	3-15	Yes
Poland	1999	10	12	8-10	Yes
Germany	1999	35	12	6-20	Yes

Interesting controls and retraps

N755810	Blackcap	3J	02.07.2000	Strathclyde CP
		4	30.01.2002	Tipaza, Algeria

577 days, 2,128 km. An excellent example of a Blackcap found in the wintering grounds.

P429073	Redstart	3	24.08.2000	Dubbs Moss CES (Cumbria)
		4	14.10.2002	Elgara, Morocco

This bird could be passing through Morocco or may be one of the small number of Redstarts that winter north of the Sahara.

K854568	Reed Warbler	4M	09.06.2000	Little Crosswaite CES (Cumbria)
		4	18.07.2000	Helton Tarn CES (Cumbria)

An early departure of a breeding bird - perhaps it had failed?

E872034	Reed Warbler	4M	25.07.1988	Bainton CES (Cambs)
		4M	16.07.2001	Bainton CES (Cambs)

This is a new longevity record for Reed Warbler in Britain and Ireland - 12 years, 11 months and 21 days!

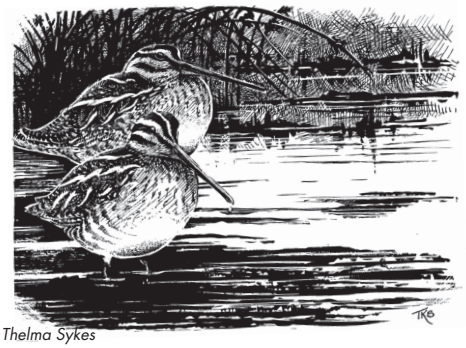
4422867	Sedge Warbler	3	10.08.2001	Loire-Atlantique, France
		4	12.05.2002	Loch Spynie CES (Grampian)

Caught during migration south in France and trapped as an adult in Scotland. 275 days, 1,163 km

4U1549	Willow Warbler	4M	07.06.2002	Oxford Island CES (Co Armagh)
		2	10.08.2002	Hilbre Island (Merseyside)

An interesting eastwards movement of an adult bird - another failed breeder?

Unusual captures



Thelma Sykes

Green Sandpiper - Hertfordshire

Redwing - Borders

Wheatear - Borders

Water Rail - Essex

Snipe - Highland

Black Redstart - Northumberland

News Items

CES email group

A new email group has been set up for CES ringers using the well-established Yahoo! Groups Internet website. The idea of the CES email group is for interested ringers to share ideas, discuss the progress of the season and to exchange views. Membership of the group will be open to ringers only and all new members will have to be approved by the group moderators (Dawn Balmer and Rob Robinson). All messages will be moderated too. If you have not already joined one of the very many email groups already in existence you will have to register (free) at the Yahoo! Groups website (http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/). To subscribe to the CES email group please send an email to: btocesforum-subscribe@yahoogroups.co.uk This is a great chance to improve communications between CES ringers and to stimulate further research using CES data.

CES staff changes

There have been a few staff changes in the CES Scheme in the last six months. Chris Wernham moved from BTO HQ to take up a new role at the BTO office in Stirling. Chris was responsible for overseeing the CES Scheme, as well as the RAS Project and a number of other ringing projects. Chris is currently on maternity leave following the birth of her son, Craig. We thank Chris for her support and guidance and wish her well at the BTO office in Stirling. Dr Rob Robinson has taken over the role of Senior Research Ecologist (Ringing) and will oversee the running of the CES Scheme. Rob has helped out at a CES site near Norwich for three years and also helps with the CES at the Nunnery in Thetford (requiring a very early start from Norwich) and is about to start a third, halfway in between! Rob has worked at the BTO for four years and is a keen ringer; he is particularly interested in farmland birds and waders. Linda Milne left the Ringing Unit in mid-January to move to Scotland; Linda helped writing to ringers at the end of the season during the last two years. We wish Linda well with her new job in Scotland.

Habitat Forms

Thanks to all ringers who sent in habitat forms for their site at the end of last season; if you haven't sent in your form yet there is still time! Please send it to BTO HQ as soon as possible. We will be analysing all the habitat data during the summer to see if any trends emerge.

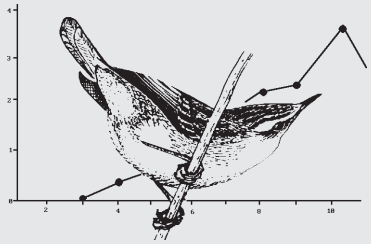
Brood patches

Many CES ringers are recording the presence and absence of brood patches; this is great. Please continue to record brood patch codes against each bird you catch and enter the data into IPMR or BRING. We can then link the brood patch information you submit as a part of your normal ringing data submission with your CES data using ring numbers. We hope that information on the stage of development of the brood patch will provide an insight into the timing of the breeding season, and perhaps the number of broods.

Constant Nest Monitoring Plots

CES ringers might be interested in the new BTO project called Constant Nest Monitoring Plots. CNMP is designed to complement the existing Nest Record Scheme by providing additional information on breeding success throughout the season and relationships between productivity and habitat. The programme is being developed as a way to achieve a more structured and standardised form of nest recording and will allow us to answer even more questions about our breeding birds.

For further details please contact Dave Leech at BTO HQ.



CES News
Newsletter No 16

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CES in Catalunya


programaSylvia

Contingut

Un hivern extraordinàriament dur

I was very privileged to be invited by Gabriel Gargallo to give a talk on CES ringing at the annual Ringers' Conference of the Institut Català d'Ornitologia (ICO) at the end of March. The weekend conference was held in the delightful small village of Sant Boi de Llucanès, north of Barcelona. There are about 200 ringers in Catalunya, many of whom take part in constant effort ringing and migration programmes organised by ICO. Around 70 ringers attended the conference and some local people from the village also came to the talks - intrigued to find out more about ringing. My talk was translated into Catalan by the President of ICO, Raül Aymí, sentence by sentence!

In 1991, the ICO developed a CES style-ringing project called SYLVIA, based largely on the methodology used here in Britain and Ireland. The aim of the SYLVIA project is to monitor the population dynamics as well as the main demographic parameters of a number of species using constant effort mist-netting data from both the breeding and the winter season. The sites are operated in a standardized way one morning in each of 10 consecutive 10-day periods between 1 May and 8 August and one morning in each of five consecutive 15-day periods between 16 December and 28 February. A range of biometrics is taken together with details of fat, muscle, moult and brood patch score.

The sites cover a range of habitats including maquia, pines, reedbeds and scrub. Some sites are located in very open habitat with sparse cover - the kind of area ringers in Britain and Ireland wouldn't dream of putting nets! **Dawn Balmer**