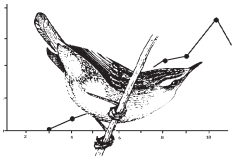


CES News

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

Number 23 **April 2010**

Finally after the terrible spring weather of the last two years we had a season that was almost ideal, and most sites enjoyed a fantastic year of near record catches. As is often the case though, it wasn't all roses, and the weather wasn't as clement in the north, where productivity was again quite low.

The breeding seasons of 2007 and 2008 saw significantly reduced productivity for 11 of the 25 core species monitored by the scheme, and the lowest in the 25-year history of the scheme for nine species. However, with a much more settled spring across most of the country, 2009 was a complete contrast!

We have received data for 115 sites for 2009 (Table 1, Fig 1), slightly down on 2008 (119, the highest since 2004), though we do expect a few more datasets to come in. This is still below the pre Foot & Mouth Disease high of 143 in 2000 though, and we would like to hit this level again.

You'll notice a bit of a change in the presentation of the results for 2009, following feedback from you at the CES meeting at the annual BTO conference at Swanwick. After such a poor breeding season in 2008, virtually every species showed an increase in 2009, so comparisons don't actually tell us that much. Therefore we are now presenting the results for the current year compared to the average for the previous five.

It may take a bit of getting used to, but we think that these figures are much more useful, so thanks for the suggestion!

After a very poor couple of years, Blue Tit productivity in 2009 showed an increase of 69% compared to the long-term average, as anyone who has been out doing Bird Atlas fieldwork this past winter will have seen.

Table 1. Number of CE Sites by country over the last five years (we still expect several more datasets for 2009).

	England	Scotland	Wales	Rep. of Ireland	N. Ireland	Total
2009	89	13	8	4	1	115
2008	91	15	8	4	1	119
2007	87	15	8	4	3	117
2006	85	15	6	3	3	112
2005	91	16	6	1	4	118

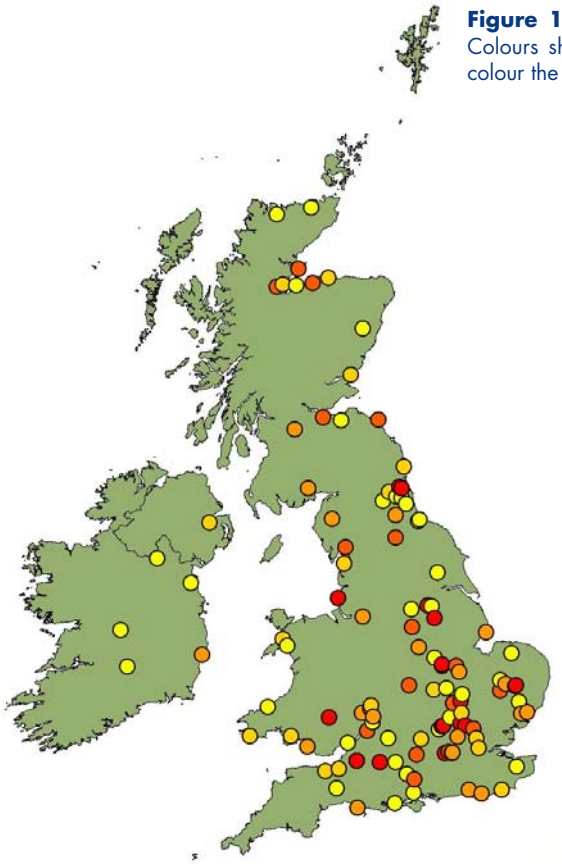


Figure 1. Location of CE Sites operated in 2009. Colours shows the 'age' of the sites; the darker the colour the older the site.

Adult numbers remain low...

Not surprisingly, after two summers of low productivity, adult numbers were very low across most sites in 2009. Of the core species monitored, Linnet reached such a low level in 2009 (Fig 2) that we have now removed it from the list of core species, leaving us with a total of 24 (Table 2).

Of these 24 species, there were significantly fewer adults for 13 compared to the five-year average (Table 2). Those showing the largest declines were Treecreeper (32%), Blue Tit (32%), Lesser Whitethroat (24%), Great Tit (24%) and Blackcap (23%). 2009 also saw the lowest ever adult numbers for Blue Tit, Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting (Fig 3), and second lowest for Lesser Whitethroat.

A few species showed slight increases in abundance, but none of these were significant.

...but productivity soars

Against the backdrop of low adult numbers, 2009 turned out to be an incredibly productive year! Compared to the five-year average, 16 of the 24 core species enjoyed significantly

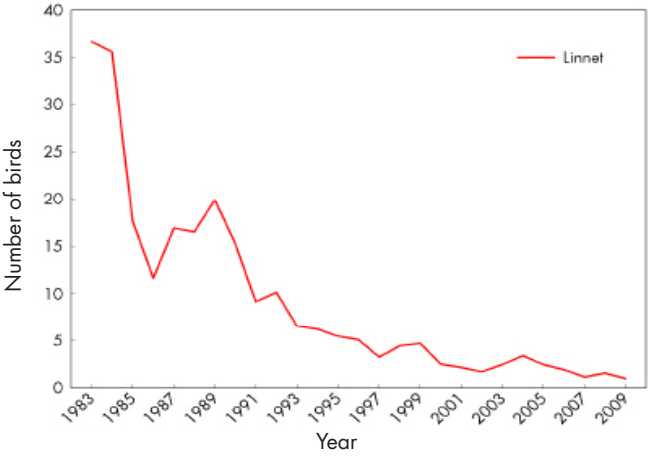


Figure 2. Trend in abundance of adult Linnet on CE Sites 1983–2009. The continued long-term decline mirrors that seen on CBC/BBS plots and has resulted in the species being dropped from the main CES results.

Table 2. Changes in captures on Constant Effort Sites in 2009

		Adult numbers	Productivity		
		2009 vs five-year average	2009 vs five-year average	2009 vs 1983–2008 average	Smoothed trend 1983–2008
Wren	*Troglodytes troglodytes*	**-13%**	**+17%**	**+15%**	-12%
Dunnock	*Prunella modularis*	-4%	**+32%**	**+29%**	-13%
Robin	*Erithacus rubecula*	-9%	+11%	+5%	-12%
Blackbird	*Turdus merula*	+2%	-8%	-6%	-18%
Song Thrush	*Turdus philomelos*	-5%	+4%	+5%	-37%
Cetti's Warbler	*Cettia cetti*	+5%	**+113%**	**+115%**	Sample
Sedge Warbler	*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*	**-19%**	+2%	-5%	-55%
Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*	**-16%**	**+36%**	**+36%**	+24%
Lesser Whitethroat	*Sylvia curruca*	**-24%**	**+39%**	+29%	+36%
Whitethroat	*Sylvia communis*	+1%	**+33%**	**+26%**	+8%
Garden Warbler	*Sylvia borin*	-3%	+15%	+5%	-41%
Blackcap	*Sylvia atricapilla*	**-23%**	**+58%**	**+51%**	-25%
Chiffchaff	*Phylloscopus collybita*	-3%	**+31%**	**+25%**	-24%
Willow Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochilus*	**-11%**	+6%	-2%	-31%
Long-tailed Tit	*Aegithalos caudatus*	**-20%**	**+38%**	**+36%**	-5%
Willow Tit	*Poecile montanus*	+11%	-43%	**-52%**	-15%
Blue Tit	*Cyanistes caeruleus*	**-32%**	**+85%**	**+69%**	-54%
Great Tit	*Parus major*	**-24%**	**+52%**	**+47%**	-32%
Treecreeper	*Certhia familiaris*	**-32%**	+25%	+18%	-31%
Chaffinch	*Fringilla coelebs*	**-12%**	**+48%**	**+66%**	+61%
Greenfinch	*Carduelis chloris*	**-17%**	**+71%**	**+80%**	-32%
Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*	+21%	**+87%**	**+42%**	-63%
Bullfinch	*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*	+9%	**+24%**	**+21%**	+3%
Reed Bunting	*Emberiza schoeniclus*	**-16%**	**+60%**	**+40%**	-54%

Changes in adult numbers shown compare the 2009 season with the running five-year average (2004–08). Productivity in 2009 is also compared to the long-term average since the scheme began in 1983.

The smoothed trends indicate the overall productivity trend since 1983, as shown in the Wider Countryside Report (www.bto.org/birdtrends). Some trends will have changed direction over the period, but the average is shown.

Significant changes are coloured and indicated in bold.

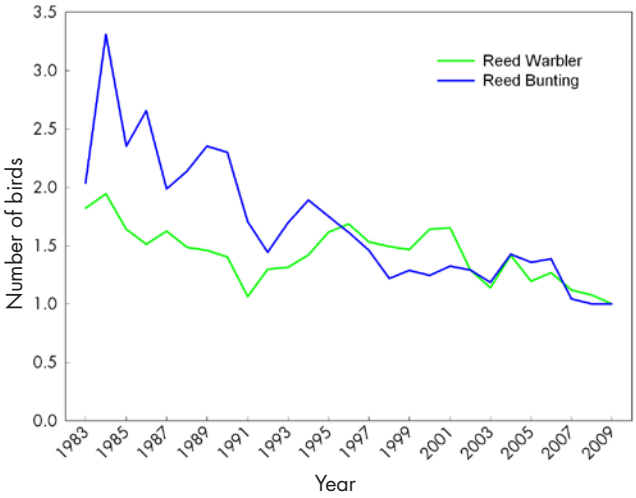


Figure 3. Trends in abundance of adult Reed Warbler (REEWA) and Reed Bunting (REEBU) on CE Sites, 1983-2009. Both continued their long-term declines and were at their lowest ever level in 2009.

increased productivity (as did 14 when compared to the long-term average).

We also saw the highest ever productivity for Cetti's Warbler, Reed Warbler, Long-tailed Tit and Chaffinch.

Although there were plenty of juveniles around in the autumn, it'll be interesting to see the whether the hardest winter for 30 years has any impact, particularly for smaller species such as Wren and Long-tailed Tit.

At the other end of the scale, Willow Tit continues to do very badly indeed, with 2009 seeing its lowest ever productivity, despite a slight (but insignificant) increase in adult abundance.

Productivity in the longer term

Breeding success may fluctuate annually, so it is important to focus on the long-term trends that influence conservation.

Of the core species (excluding Cetti's Warbler, a new colonist), 18 show long-term declines in productivity. With these figures, you can see how one good year won't compensate for this downward slope. The biggest declines (over 50%) were seen in Sedge Warbler, Blue Tit, Goldfinch and Reed Bunting (Wider Countryside Report: www.bto.org/birdtrends).

Catch rates

We are sometimes asked how the catch rates at individual sites compare to the national average. This is rather hard to answer as there are some very large sites (our two largest processed 1,207 and 1,035 birds in the 2009 season) that skew the picture a bit, and also some sites catching few birds (all of which are of course valuable!). Figure

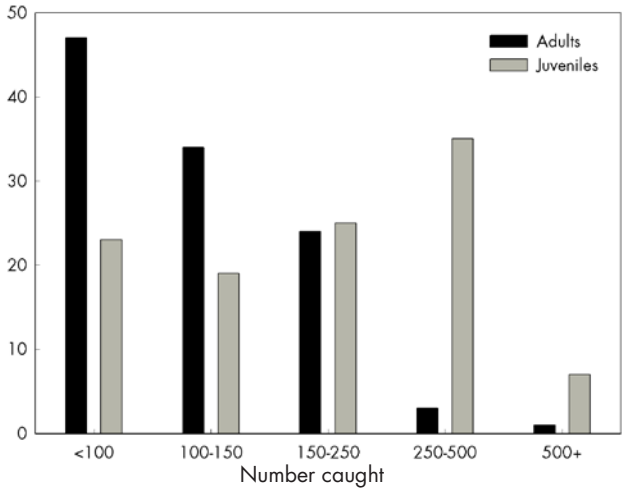


Figure 4. Frequency of catch totals of adults and juveniles on individual CE Sites in 2009.

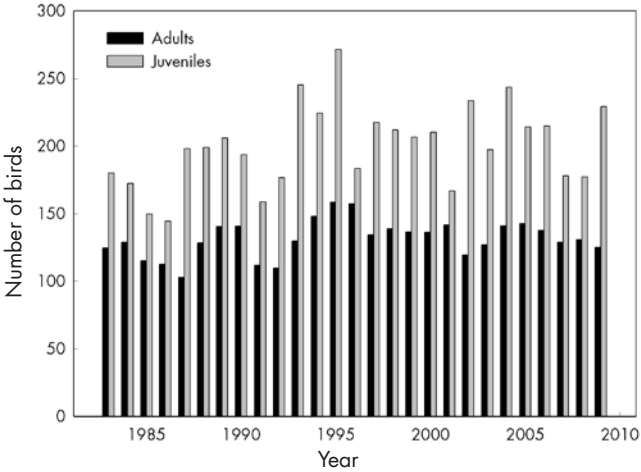


Figure 5. Average catch of adults and juveniles on individual CE Sites since 1983.

4 shows the frequency of catch totals for adults and juveniles on individual sites in 2009, and Figure 5 shows the average catch total across all sites since 1983. In fact, in 2009 the 'most average' CES was Poolbrook Water Works in Herefordshire (run by Ray Bishop and Wychavon Ringing Group), catching 117 adults (the 2009 average was 125) and 242 juveniles (the average was 229). Their season wasn't all average though, as captures included six House Martins, three Grey Wagtails, three Jackdaws and a Carrion Crow!

CES birthdays

20 years

Slimbridge Decoy (Gloucs, Maurice Durham), Brandon Marsh (Warks, Dave Stone), Invererne House (Grampian, Bill Taylor).

15 years

North Haugh (Strathclyde, Iain Livingstone), Abbotsbury Swannery (Dorset, Steve Hales), Nunnery Lakes (Norfolk, Nunnery RG), Queen Mary Reservoir 1 (Surrey, Tony Beasley).

10 years

Five Bells (Somerset, John Webber), Little Wittenham (Oxon, Mike Rogers), Bog Meadows (Antrim, George Hynes), Whittle Wood (Northumberland, Michael Holmes), Loch Spynie (Grampian, Bob Proctor), Roding Valley Meadows (Essex, Anthony Harbott), Heysham Harbour (Lancashire, Alan Draper).

5 years

Lower Parting (Gloucs, Gordon Avery), Allerthorpe (Humbs, Phil Bone), Creeting St Mary (Suffolk, John Walshe), Denge Wood (Kent, John Walder).

New in 2009

Teifi Marsh (Dyfed, Arfon Williams), Drum Lake (Monaghan, Declan Coney), Chalton STW (Beds, Errol Newman), Rowlands Gill STW (Tyne & Wear, Richard Barnes), Loch of Leys (Grampian, Chris Jones), Broubster (Highland, Donald Omand).

Of course we'd also like to thank everyone running a site not celebrating a birthday in 2009 as well! This is your Scheme, and your continued dedication and hard work are, as ever, much appreciated.

Recoveries and Oddities

Controls

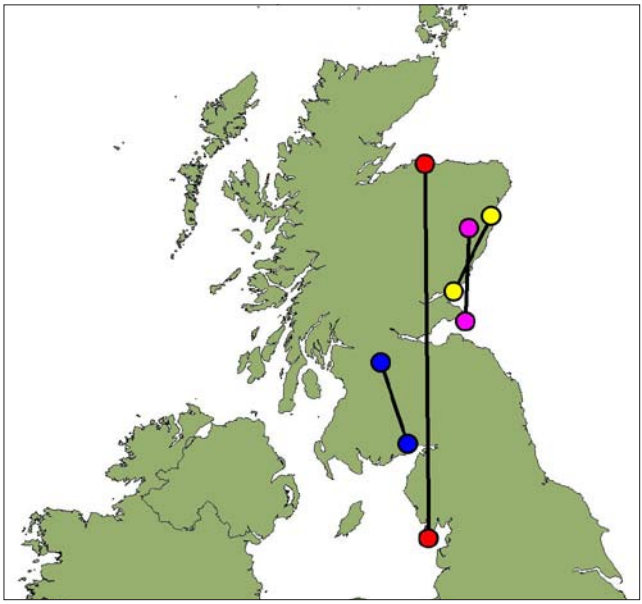


Figure 1. CES controls reported during 2009.

CAH298

This **Long-tailed Tit** movement was the (small) highlight at Barry Links CES. It was ringed on 2 November 2008 near Aberdeen, Grampian, and controlled on 5 May, 89 km away.
Peter Ellis

CDL764

A highlight at the Loch of Leys CES, Grampian, was this **Willow Warbler**. It was ringed on 16 August and controlled just seven days later on the Isle of May, amazingly by the same trainee ringer!
Chris Jones

BKP003

This **Willow Warbler** was ringed as a 4M on 20 April 2007 at South Walney, Cumbria, and recaught as a breeding bird (on four visits) at Loch Spynie CES, Grampian, in 2009. It is intriguing to think where this bird may have bred in 2008.
Bob Proctor

Acro miscellany

V676115

Nothing unusual for many CES ringers, but this **Reed Warbler** (above), caught at Strathclyde Country Park CES on 30 June, was only the third the group have ever caught (with fewer than 10 records for the whole Clyde recording area!). The icing on the cake was that it was ringed! V676115 was originally ringed as a 3J on 22 July 2008, 94 km south at Glencaple, Dumfries.
Iain Livingstone

N696194

Reed Warbler N696194 was of great interest to us. It was ringed as a 3 on 26 August 1998 at Auchenfranco and was last recaught on visit 9 in 2009 (25 July). So it will have completed 11 return visits to its wintering ground. I would be surprised if this isn't a record for Scotland and it could be close to a distance record for a British Reed Warbler if the winter location were discovered. It could be the number of times that its health has been toasted at the North Solway Ringing Group September meeting that is keeping it going!
Duncan Irving

Reed Warbler longevity

The previous longevity record for a Scottish-ringed **Reed Warbler** was ridiculously short,

at just two years, two months (an Orkney bird recaught in The Netherlands). But N696194 is now the final link in a clean up of longevity records for CES!

English (and BTO) record:
E872034 ringed at Bainton CES, Cambridgeshire, and retrapped 12 years, 11 months later.

Welsh record:
B012030 ringed at Kenfig Pool and retrapped there on the current CES 12 years, 10 months later.

Republic of Ireland record:
N535619 ringed at Arklow (a current CES) and retrapped at Ballycotton seven years later.

NB Northern Ireland doesn't do so well with its oldest birds being only two years old (and not a CES bird).

This **Great Reed Warbler** (left and below) was first identified on song on 7 June, and subsequently (and unintentionally) caught on 14 June in an additional CES net at Gosforth Park, Tyne & Wear. At the time the news was suppressed as the bird was singing and held territory right through to the end of July. It was ringed, taking a B ring, and when processed had a wing length of 98 mm!
Chris Redfern

This **Marsh Warbler** (below) was caught on 23 May at a CES on the south coast. Following low catches at the site in 2008 and dreadful weather in 2009, it was a real boost!
Steve Hales

And...

After a quiet morning, I was thinking the Sparrowhawk had been about when I walked around the corner and found this **Hobby** in the net!! When she saw the photos my missus said that she hadn't seen me smile like that since West Ham won the FA cup in 1980!!
John Glazebrook (Alton Water, 2 July)

Sites round up

The good...

Tony Beasley (Surrey)

It has been a truly amazing year but with some wide variations. Post-CES we have continued to catch record numbers and our annual total for the site is now in excess of 4,100 birds ringed, which beats the previous best total by over 500. Blackcap and Chiffchaff numbers are extremely high, but Goldcrest numbers in the autumn were dismal. Latterly Goldfinch, Chaffinch and Greenfinch numbers have been the best for over 30 years and Lesser Redpolls have been caught in record numbers.

Alan Johnston (Tyne & Wear)

The final totals for 2009 were the second best we have ever had. The number of juveniles was the highest since our record year in 1988, although the number of adults was only just above average and well down on 2007 and 2008. A very good year for a change – it makes you look forward to 2010 with eager anticipation.

John Walshe (Suffolk)

483 birds in 10 visits was the third best total of the five years we've been running the site; slightly disappointing as it seemed like a better breeding season than this at most of my other sites. The Creeting Hills CES appears to be struggling to maintain numbers of most species. This may be a result of record numbers of rabbits on site, goats on neighbouring land and a dry year (apart from a wet July) on what is an already dry sandy soil, heath scrub site. Linnet and Whitethroat in particular have crashed after being two of the commonest birds a few years ago.

Jan Legg (Berkshire)

We had a better season this year, with totals closer to what they were in the late 1990s. Early visit numbers were near average for the 17 years of the CES, but from visit 6 the 'rainy season' set in and juvenile captures suffered, particularly Reed and Sedge Warbler, but still not as bad as the last few years. From visit 10 it picked up, with the last visit being very good. Species diversity has also improved, making life for my trainees more interesting.

Maurice Durham (Gloucestershire)

A slightly strange year - numbers slightly below average, especially adults. But just depending which sessions you did, a different impression could be gained. I'm particularly thinking of Dunnock, which seemed scarce - unless you were on visits 5 and 8!

Pete Weisner (Buckinghamshire)

Despite the numbers of adult birds being down on 2008, the number of juveniles trapped more than doubled – so I guess good productivity. Most species did better for us, particularly Chaffinch, Wren and Blackcap. Whitethroat and Chiffchaff also seemed to make reasonable recoveries. The only real loser was probably Song Thrush. Long-tailed Tits are always problematic – lots or none, depending on the luck of the day.

Dave Harris (Greater London)

At last a decent season! Most species could only go up and all obliged. Although some adults were down, juveniles were much better especially for Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, warblers and tits. Only Reed Warblers were odd, with adults well up, but juveniles down. Winter reed cutting had been done near one net but adult captures were similar and included two of the four birds there in 2008, whilst juveniles were the same at five, so I don't think that was an influence. In 2009, juvs appeared a visit earlier and were going well by visit 8, and I think the big gap between visits 8 and 9 was due to missing the peak fledge rather than an actual decrease (visit thwarted by weather and family!). Treecreeper is only the third we have had at this site and House Sparrows added a species for two trainees. The Mallard extractor refused to part with the bird until they had ringed it.

Colin Jakes (Suffolk)

Productivity was much better, in line with the national picture. Thankfully tits had a good year, as did most of the summer visitors, although our Willow Warbler population is now just a couple of pairs and habitat change has reduced the number of Whitethroat. Lesser Whitethroat was much more evident this year and bred successfully. Ground feeders like Robin and the thrushes suffered because of the dry conditions, although in contrast my local town Blackbirds seem to have had an exceptional year with many late broods of three and four fledged young. At Lackford, Reed Warbler numbers were the worst I can remember. We only sample these by running a regular extra net in the reedbed over the last few sessions, but there seemed to be far fewer birds singing this year and subsequently we caught few juveniles. Sadly the chance of retrapping our returning 10 and 12 year-old adults last seen in 2007 seem to have gone.

John Wells (Wiltshire)

Our best year for CES so far I think. At last a year without heavy rain and floods, therefore good productivity, but low adults because of previous poor years. Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs certainly had a good year generally. Immediately after CES we had a 250+ bird morning in the CES nets, mainly Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs.

...the bad...

Terry Robinson (Cumbria)

In the last five years or so the site has been flooded on a regular basis; any birds nesting on or near the ground are doomed to failure. My brother had to wear waders this year to do one of his visits and three other visits were done in about nine inches of water.

Dave Carrington (Glamorgan)

I'm not sure why the year was unproductive compared to previous years or the rest of the UK. Some possible reasons:

- The local birds did not enjoy the generally good weather in July and August that seemed to bless the southeast of England.
- We had some incredibly wet days towards the end of July that may have caused nests to fail.
- Kenfig Pool does seem to have fewer Reed Warblers breeding than a few years ago. I'm not sure why, but don't think it is habitat related. Although the pool has changed little, the dune system is scrubbing over, though the netting area hasn't changed much.

Duncan Irving (Dumfries)

The numbers of juveniles caught would obviously have been better if we could have carried out the final visit but, as for visit 11 in 2008, the site was inaccessible due to flooding. We had very wet weather for much of July and August so this probably had a detrimental effect on productivity. It is difficult to catch many Willow Warblers as the trees are getting quite tall. The landowners are getting used to us being on their land and each year we are allowed to carry out more site management in an attempt to keep the conditions stable, so I am hoping to tackle the problem this spring.

John Hawes (Durham)

Our CES had its worst results since we started back in 1995. We normally average above 250 over the season, but we were over 100 down on the average. Our site had a poor wet start which didn't get much better as the season progressed. Things started to get a bit better in mid-July, but then the Durham floods hit and our site was under over a metre of water and anything that nested below that got washed away. I think we only had five warblers in the whole of August - 20% of the total CES catch were Bullfinches!

...and the bizarre!

Johne Taylor (Hertfordshire)

The adult Common Tern was always a possibility as they come quite low across net ride 1 most years – three went in, but two flipped out. The Buzzard however was a complete surprise being at the top end of net ride 4: I have no idea what it was doing. It didn't even damage the net, a Japanese 60'.

Rainfall and productivity

There are, of course, many direct and indirect effects of rainfall on productivity. In the last *CES News* we detailed how the increased rainfall levels in 2007 and 2008 may have impacted on numbers of various species.

Continuing the theme, how might the weather have affected breeding in 2009? The spring was the driest in England and Wales since 1997, but rainfall was above average in Northern Ireland, Scotland and some parts of northwest England (Fig 1). This pattern changed somewhat into the summer, with rainfall levels generally higher than average but this wasn't uniform across the country. In June, southeast England received less than 30% of average rainfall, but July was the wettest on record in England and Wales in the current series (dating back to 1914). So, although the late summer was actually rather wet, the key period for most species, when young chicks were in the nest, was dry across much of Britain, resulting in a productive breeding season.

This pattern of rainfall may explain why Willow Warblers appeared to buck the national trend in 2009. Whilst 21 of the 24 core species showed increased productivity compared to the five-year average, Willow Warbler (along with Blackbird, Sedge Warbler and Willow Tit) showed a decline.

However, as the Willow Warbler population is centred in Scotland and northern England (Fig 2), they are likely to have suffered more than the more southern, but otherwise quite similar, Chiffchaff. The two species are known to show differing national trends in productivity (as in *CES News 20*), but productivity may also vary regionally. If we look at productivity in 2009 against the long-term trend, then the figure for the north (Scotland and northern England) is rather different to the national figure (Table 1). So whilst both Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff did far worse in the north, this will be more apparent for Willow Warbler, as so many more CES captures come from that region compared to Chiffchaff.

Table 1. Regional differences in productivity of Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff and ratio of each in catches. Comparisons are between national results and those for northern Britain (Scotland and northern England).

	Willow Warbler	Chiffchaff
National productivity	+0%	+21%
Productivity in northern Britain	-18%	-4%
% catch in north	40% (n=3,288)	14% (n=3,359)

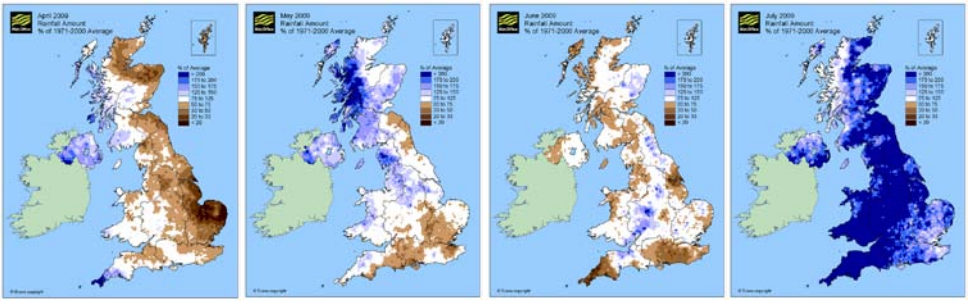


Figure 1. Rainfall anomalies across Britain by month in April–July 2009. Brown below average, blue above average. © Crown copyright 2009, Met Office.

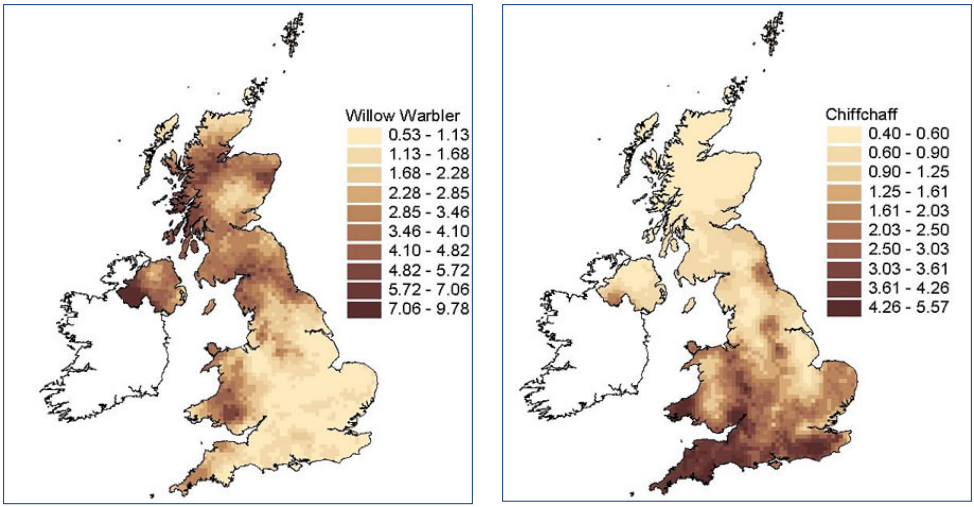


Figure 2. Relative abundance of Willow Warbler (left) and Chiffchaff (right), estimated from BBS data. darker colours indicate higher abundance.

MAPS Chat

The latest edition of *MAPS Chat* (February 2010) is now available on the Institute of Bird Populations website*. This edition looks at the use of MAPS data in the protection of commoner species, disease monitoring using MAPS data (Fig 1) and also has some interesting links to work collating open-wing photographs of birds for use as an online ageing resource.

*www.birdpop.org/downloaddocuments/MAPS_Chat_Feb_2010.pdf

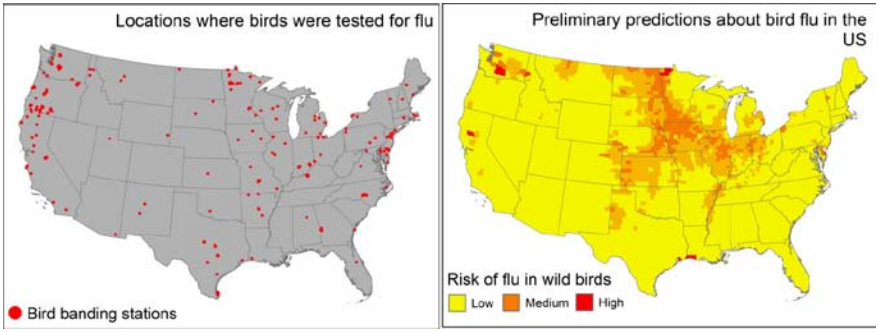


Figure 1. Sampling locations (left) and preliminary predictions of bird flu in wild birds (right) in the USA using data collected from MAPS sites.

(Re)Birth of a CES: a Trainee's view

Observing Red Kite ringing in 2008 inspired me to get more involved and soon after I started my training with Arfon Williams. This was at a time when he was thinking about reinstating a CES, so I was involved with it right from the beginning.

Ringing on the Teifi Marshes Nature Reserve near Cardigan, West Wales, was well established 10 years ago, with a CES running on the site from 1994–2001. The site is a good mix of wet and dry reed bed, scrub on slate waste and regenerating woodland. An ambitious plan was hatched to run 830 feet of net to try to encompass the different habitats on the site. With just one 'A' ringer, one 'C' ringer and three trainees, we were in for a busy summer... We were ready for the off on that first sunny session in May and wow what a start! That morning 208 birds were processed, including 144 Sedge Warblers. One of these had a French ring and we also caught a Reed Warbler with a French ring. Amazingly, the second session lived up to the first, with two more foreign Sedge Warblers, one from France and one from Belgium (see map).

Every session was a steep learning curve for us all, as we didn't have much idea of the species or numbers of birds breeding on the reserve or passing through. As a new Trainee, nor did I realize that in summer, dawn could be so early, or so cold!

Figure 1. Origins (red dots) of three of the four foreign-ringed Sedge Warblers caught on the Teifi Marshes CES (blue dot) in 2009.

CES shouldn't be hard work, so the slate table arrangement was never going to last long at the Teifi Marshes.

Comfort levels increased as the season went on. Starting with a few slates as a 'ringing table', we soon progressed to the luxury of a £2 picnic table and chairs! Great plans were hatched during quiet moments, including a trip to Portland, Swallow and Pied Wagtail roosts and wader dazzling which turned into reality as the year progressed.

Obviously, being the first year at the site we can't draw any conclusions regarding trends; one outstanding figure was the 268 adult Sedge Warblers and only seven juveniles, but for Reed Warblers, 65 adults and 46 juveniles. And how do I have these figures to hand? Well, as the year drew to a close, I became aware of the mysteries of IPMR and somehow volunteered to learn how to use it and enter the data with the help of our 'C' ringer, Richard Dobbins. Many fraught evenings with emails flying between us eventually turned into delight as we discovered the excitement of searching for all sorts of interesting facts and figures with which we have been boring people ever since!

So, has ringing at a CES site been a valuable learning experience for me? Absolutely. Despite the chilblains!

Wendy James became a trainee in 2008 after seeing some Red Kite ringing. As a GP in Cardigan, the Teifi is her local patch and she is an avid birdwatcher just getting into listing.

Combining CES and Nest Recording

I am fortunate to live way out in the sticks in beautiful mixed farming country amongst fine crops and grassland, ancient hedgerows and woodlands. I've been ringing for over 40 years and for the past 11 have run a CES in Brock's Wood, owned by Plumpton College, just half a mile down the road. This is typical 'Wealden' woodland, on clay with an Oak and Ash canopy, Hazel and Hawthorn mid-layer and bramble understory. Like all such woods, rotational coppicing ceased after the Second World War and it became thick, overgrown and derelict. A coppicing regime has now been reinstated and many of the college students are involved in woodland management, hedge-laying and game rearing. This has increased the number of Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps from only four pairs of each before the wood was opened up to between 25 and 30 now.

For many years I have been keen on nesting and pulli ringing. I think that to know the exact age of the bird and to be certain where, geographically, it started life gives some of the most accurate information we could want. My CES and Nest Recording really connect as well. This past summer, we retrapped two Chiffchaffs that had been ringed as nestlings in 2008 within a kilometre of the wood. I find this knowledge of individual returning migrants of known origin really exciting and fulfilling. I have also twice controlled a breeding female Chiffchaff that had been ringed in autumn 2007, 17 km away in West Sussex, but it's not the same not knowing where it was hatched. It is common to recapture breeding migrants for several years, and a female Nightingale was caught in five successive seasons, four of them in exactly the same net.

Though I ring a lot of pulli, over 950 this year alone, credit must go to my Spanish friend Joe, who understands exactly where to find many low-nesting species such as Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Whitethroat and occasionally Nightingale. From their arrival he will note, by song and contact call, where territories are established and, knowing likely nest sites from experience, go on to find the first signs of nest material in the undergrowth. Following these up at weekly intervals, we can record accurate laying dates, clutch sizes and outcomes.

I recognise the privilege I have had in being able to combine these studies and the interesting results and findings we have had from them. I would whole-heartedly encourage anyone with an interest to combine their CES with Nest Recording.

Reg Lanaway was a student at Plumpton Agricultural College in 1954–55, and it was here he took part in surveys and got his ringing permit in 1968. His CES is located in one of the woods on the estate.

In 1982 he moved to the staff teaching species identification and survey work. Despite being retired for 10 years, he still does some part-time teaching.

Nest Recording Courses

The BTO runs several Nest Recording courses every year, and this is an ideal opportunity for CES ringers to develop their nest-finding skills.

These courses are a good introduction to finding and monitoring nests, with a focus on nest finding techniques in a variety of habitats. Each course is led by an experienced nest finder and includes indoor tutorials and lots of practice in the field.

In 2010 there are four residential courses (Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) and a one-day course, all of which are booked on a 'first-come-first-served' basis. For more details, check the NRS website at:
www.bto.org/survey/nest_records/training_courses.htm

Fifteen years of CES at the Swannery

I had been ringing on a farm adjacent to Abbotsbury Swannery for a while when I first met Don Moxom, the Warden of the Fleet Nature Reserve, and we discussed bird ringing in general and special studies. I'd mentioned CES and he suggested a visit to the Swannery. It was apparent that the mixture of habitats would make an ideal site. With plenty of reeds and a large withy bed, there was great potential. There had been some casual ringing over a few autumn weekends by the late Col Prendergast.

The first two birds I caught at the site were Cetti's Warblers and I remember them well! Captures on the site are interesting, with a modest trickle in the early visits slowly accelerating as young birds are caught and then finally, in early August, it explodes with activity as Sedge and Reed Warblers are caught in large numbers. It is these two species that make up the bulk of all captures at the site.

The site is right on the shoreline of the Fleet Nature Reserve, with the English Channel only yards away. This does make it very vulnerable to the weather and the prevailing southwesterly winds and horizontal rain blowing straight off the sea often hinder planned CES visits. I usually manage to get round this – shift work is a great bonus in these instances. Despite the coastal location, I have only exchanged one Reed Warbler and one Sedge Warbler with Slapton, and single Swallow and Greenfinch with Portland Bill, visible on a good day. A few birds do move between Abbotsbury and Radipole Lake and we have a good series of Sedge Warbler controls from Scotland and the northwest of England.

Sedge Warblers caught here don't stay for as long as they do at nearby Radipole Lake; over the 15 years I can almost count the retrapped birds on one hand. I think the coastal location and the probable lack of Plum-reed Aphids may cause this. A future project perhaps?

Of great interest are the returning female Reed Warblers and I always wonder who is returning from previous years. Our oldest bird to date was ringed in 1995 and last retrapped in 2004.

Several rarities have also livened up a session over the years. Marsh Warbler is an infrequent visitor and a Thrush Nightingale in 1996 (below) was a real surprise. I first heard it singing in the withy bed as we arrived at the gates and within half an hour it was in a net.

Aquatic Warblers too (below), often pass through the Swannery if weather and wind conditions are favourable. Of further interest are the species which are actually caught out in the reeds. Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, Robins, Dunnocks and tits all enjoy a foray into the *Phragmites*.

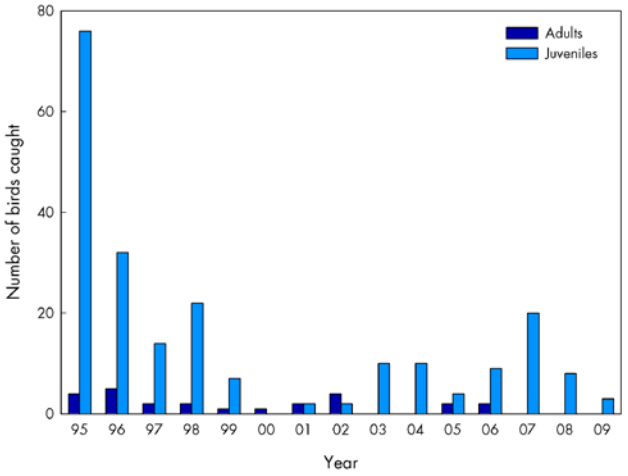
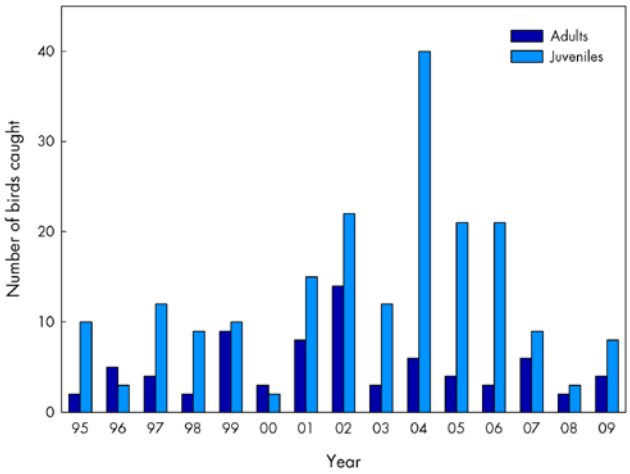


Figure 1. Annual captures of adult and juvenile Willow Warbler (left) on the Abbotsbury CES. Willow Warblers aren't caught at the Swannery in the same numbers as Chiffchaffs, though good numbers were caught in the first year. There are no good hedgerows linking the Swannery to the 'mainland' and perhaps this limits the numbers of birds using the site. It is interesting that Portland Bird Observatory rings a considerable number of Willow Warblers each year and perhaps the1995 figure represents a late spring movement of birds.

Figure 2. Annual captures of adult and juvenile Blackcap (right) on the Abbotsbury CES. Several pairs breed in the Swannery and fairly good numbers move through in the autumn. Most retraps are of returning birds from the previous year, though often older birds will turn up, usually females. This is the only *Sylvia* warbler which breeds, and again the lack of a good hedgerow linking the Swannery to the 'mainland' seems to deter Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat and Garden Warbler. In some years Whitethroat will breed nearby, but Lesser Whitethroat is a real rarity.



The only site management required is the annual coppicing and tidying up of the withy bed where the growth of the Willow (over three metres in a good year) is cut back. The reed growth is kept under control easily with a brush cutter and this management is repeated annually.

I would like to think that we can keep going for another 15 years. Looking back since 1995 the year-on-year figures are interesting and, although they often reveal some signs of gloom as bird totals plummet, some species do recover quickly. On this basis the poor results from a few cold, wet summers should not be taken as the end of the world!

Steve Hales started training under Ted Flatters around 1990 at such wonderful sites as the Army Tank Ranges at Lulworth. A farm near Dorchester with a crop of millet and maize enabled them to catch finches and buntings and Steve is still convinced that Reed Buntings have a moult pattern all to themselves!

He got his first introduction to CES whilst being assessed for his 'A' permit at Chew Valley Lake. Steve now rings on a coastal farm near Abbotsbury, ran a RAS on Sand Martins for many years and has recently developed a fascination with Pied /White Wagtails, colour-ringing them at a roost.

Impacts of constant effort netting on birds

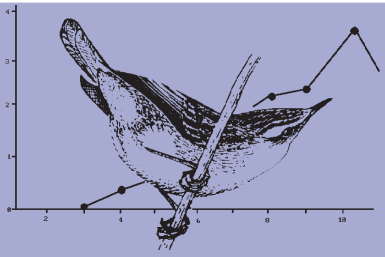
We occasionally hear concerns about potential impacts of regular mist-netting on the breeding performance of birds. A paper published in *Condor* has demonstrated that over a 25-year study in California, the reproductive performance of Wrentit and Song Sparrow wasn't adversely affected by constant effort mist-netting. The analysis compared nest survival, number of young fledged and nestling condition at nests where at least one parent was captured during the breeding season and those where neither parent was caught. They also made the comparison between nests at varying distances from mist nets run at different frequencies.

There was no evidence that mist-netting had an effect on reproductive performance apart from Wrentit nestling condition and Song Sparrow daily nest survival, which appeared to be higher when at least one parent was caught.

Jennings, S. *et al* (2009) Effects of Mist Netting on Reproductive Performance of Wrentits and Song Sparrows in Central Coastal California. *The Condor* **111**, 488–496.

Welcome Greg

We are very pleased to announce that Greg Conway, long-standing 'A' ringer, is taking over as both CES and RAS Organiser. Congratulations to Mark Grantham, who will be working on a new collaborative project between BirdGuides (www.birdguides.com) and BTO, aimed at increasing the quality, quantity and value of bird recording.



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