

## Sorby-Breck Ringing Group

March Newsletter 2006

*"To provide data from ringing activities to support the conservation and knowledge of bird species in Derbyshire and South Yorkshire."*

### Diary Dates for Group Members

2006

5<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> April

Visit to Cyprus

### Common Snipe-The 2005/06 Winter So Far

Ringing Common Snipe and Jack Snipe at Williamthorpe Marsh became a weekly activity from October to December 2006. Numbers ringed varied according to weather conditions with icy calm conditions being the most productive (providing that nets are erected before dawn).

2005/06 will be the second winter of ringing at the site. From the first two Common Snipe caught in the 2005/06 winter was a retrap from the previous year. Common Snipe XS49676 is an interesting example. It was ringed on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2004, retrapped later in the same winter on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2005 (15days), retrapped the following winter on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2005 and again on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2005 (56days). The four occasions provide evidence of an extended stay at the site during both winters and a return the following winter. Two further Common Snipe XS49696 and XS49697 were ringed together on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2005 and surprisingly retrapped together nearly a year later on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2005. Finally, a further Common Snipe XS51656 was ringed on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2005 and retrapped again on the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2005. All four examples had returned to Williamthorpe the following winter.

Common Snipe	Wing(mm)	Bill to anterior edge of nostril (mm)	Weight (gms)
Range 2004/5	132-142	55-65	110.1-135.7
2005/6	132-143	55-68	93.2-142.5
Mean	137	60	122.6
2005/6	137	62	117.9
Number of birds			
2004/5	51	38	4
2005/6	32 (to Dec.2005)	29	23

As adult birds year old retraps provided an ideal opportunity to test plumage as an age criteria and for all birds to provide a range of measurements for comparison with data from elsewhere.

The range of weights of birds ringed confirms the suitability of Williamthorpe as a wintering site. In all 14 out of 23 Common Snipe were over the mean weight of 117.4. A smaller sample of four birds weighed the previous winter had arranged of 110.1 to 135.7 and a mean of 122.6. Comparisons with other studies of weight indicate a wide range for the species. Weights of birds at Williamthorpe show weight levels suitable for coping with local weather extremes accounting for examples of wintering and extended stays.

#### Editor's note

Its an old adage I know that the years get shorter, but no sooner have we rounded off 2005's ringing that we are into March and the prospect of breeding birds.

#### Uppertown

David Atkinson and myself enjoyed a pleasant morning ringing with George at his site at Uppertown. The sheltered upland site has been managed and fed by George with tables and feeders kept well stocked throughout the year. It's a site with a 'big' sky and binoculars are a must at the ringing station vantage point. On the 18<sup>th</sup> February 2006 we had a flight of pink-feet, large flocks of Lapwing and Golden Plover. With an eastern slope to the coast I couldn't help thinking of the site's merit as a regular migration point. Clearly in winter the food available is a magnet on this upland fringe. We handled over fifty birds in the morning, most from one net. With over twenty Greenfinches ringed, not doubt on route to somewhere, recoveries can be reasonably expected.

For those who would like to know how to manage and ring a site well, get in touch with George. David and myself were certainly made welcome and aware of the countless possibilities from 'similar' sites.

Thanks George.

Geoff.

#### Avian Flu

Much has been written about 'Avian Flu' in 2006, a more considered response can be gained on the BTO web-site. DEFRA have ordered its bird inspectors to have flu jabs and issued bio-protection in the form of mask and gloves etc. Certainly a sensible precaution if you find any dead birds.

My recommendation to all ringers is to 'up' the hygiene practices during ringing occasions. Medical wipes, clean bird-bags and a first aid kit should be, as suggested by BTO, normal good practice.

### Williamthorpe - 2006, Reed Bunting

The new feed-site at Williamthorpe has produced its surprises this winter. Eleven Common Redpoll are the highlight so far, but 17, Reed Buntings on the 19<sup>th</sup> February was also satisfying. Reed Buntings have been in decline at the site in recent years, but is this a sign of a reverse? With nine retraps and a control the species has survived the winter well. Individuals were as follows: -

Reed Buntings.

Ring No.	Age/sex	N= New, R= Retrap, C= Control	Date Ringed
P273863	6M	R	12/05/02
T530358	5F	R	16/10/05
P355845	4M	C	?
T210044	6M	R	04/07/04
T531424	5M	N	
T531425	5M	N	
T531243	4F	R	21/01/06
T531426	6F	N	
T531427	4M	N	
T531429	6F	N	
T531430	5M	N	
T530342	4F	R	16/10/05
T355608	6M	R	11/09/04
T500157	5M	R	02/05/05
T531207	5M	R	14/01/06
T530390	4M	R	23/10/05
T531423	5M	N	

There were 12 males and 5 females. The females were new or had been ringed this winter. The males included adult males, one in his seventh year. Female Reed Buntings tend to travel greater distances than males so that the sex ratio probably indicates a more local gathering augmented by individuals from further a field. The control is awaited with interest.

## Annual Report 2005

Thank you for your comments about the 2005 report. BTO commented favourably on its content. I have included below a question from Derbyshire's Countryside Services following the article included, which featured results from the Constant Effort Site.

"What are the implications of changing species mix for future management? Last paragraph implies marshland spp down and woodland spp up. Inevitable I guess but how do we maintain the site's viability as an important marshland habitat?"

Clearly, marshland needs thoughtful management. Willow scrub soon becomes Willow 'Woodland' with the marshland vegetation increasingly 'hemmed' in by a barrier of 'thirsty' trees encroaching into the reed bed. The reeds themselves build up a deep thatch reducing the amount of new growth possible encouraging the reed to move out into the water margins, reducing the amount of surface water and reed-free edges.

Bird species at the site begin to change with this maturity. The management needed is annual and expensive. Only the wisdom of repeated management and monitoring will maintain the habitat's strengths. On the plus side it has enormous long-term benefits for our marshland species and joins together our field work with organisations such as Derbyshire Countryside Services who manage the site.

### April Newsletter

An early return of ringing during March would be appreciated if the April Newsletter is to be circulated before our Cyprus visit.  
Geoff Mawson.

### Ringing Sheets

On a recent ringing course in North Notts, I noticed that Jez Blackburn was using some excellent ringing sheets that he had designed himself. Given that we are all being encouraged to start recording more data routinely (the most obvious being moult codes, but also things like brood patch codes), I thought it would be really useful for people to see an example. Basically, the idea is that by having extra columns for additional information, people will be more inclined to record all of the data! Many of us note features on the birds we handle, but do not record the data in a useful way. A classic example is the number of OGCs on first year birds - this information is only really useful if it is recorded for EVERY individual caught ie. even if all the greater coverts are old or all are new.

And how many of us regularly record activity codes? It really doesn't require much additional effort!

I get the impression from Jez that in the future, all ringing notebooks will look something like this. Of course, the best bet is probably for everyone to have a sheet that is modified to their own needs. I have Jez's sheet as an Excel file (and so it's easy to modify) if anyone is interested.

Stuart

After Christmas, new year and a trip to Australia, it is due time to say: Thank you! Some of you might wonder what for, but let me explain. Last December I managed to change my life considerably and finally leave the status of a poor PhD student to join the world of proper people earning proper money. But to get to this point I depended enormously on other people's help during the past three years and many of them are members of the Sorby Breck Ringing group.

But let me start at the beginning... exactly three years ago I arrived in wintry Sheffield not knowing what to expect except for the certainty that I would work on birds. Until that moment, I saw ornithologists belonging to a unique set of people, who always keep their eyes directed towards the sky rather than on the path right in front of them, often shouting strange names into the air that mean nothing to normal people. Names such as "lesser whitethroat" or "great spotted woodpecker"-shouted in such excitement that it alienates every non-ornithologist nearby. However, it was soon clear that I had to join this world if I ever wanted to get anywhere with my study of the morphology of bird sperm. The finding that bird sperm could be extracted from male birds' faeces stressed the need to go out into the wilderness and catch birds.

As a complete ignorant, I depended heavily on professional birders - and that's when I met Geoff. We met on an early Saturday morning outside the University of Sheffield, where he picked me up for my first bird ringing experience. I was very excited to get to know the "wild world" of birds a bit better - and the wild world proved to be Geoff's garden surrounding Moonpenny Farm. Besides my first ringed birds I learned a lot about plants growing all over the world, about rugby and about Yorkshire primary school headteachers (whom not even the Queen can avoid laying her hands on). Having passed the first suitability exam he then took me on the first "proper" ringing experience - at a sewage works

called Treeton! Two people were already waiting for us there - as if there was nothing else to do on a cold April Saturday early morning in Sheffield - Steve and Phil.

I soon realized that the world of birds was nothing as wild as I expected but rather a stomach driven issue - sewage works are many birds' favourite location, offering a wide range of flies and mosquitoes - Hathersage, Staveley, Treeton and Williamthorpe are just a few. However, it proved to be just as exciting if not more than imagined and I was fascinated by every bird I held in my hands. I got more and more addicted to the world of birds - and it seemed less strange to wake up in the middle of the night to drive in the dark to a place where the sun rises over the warm sewage pits. And I too started to shout strange names into the air - often wrong to start with - yet slowly and steadily even the Garden warbler became more familiar and I was able to distinguish between common and lesser whitethroat, and the willow-chiffchaff rule suddenly had a meaning.

Highlights during these three years were visits to Mike's farm - to listen to Mike's stories and to strive through the willow to find male bullfinches (my first self extracted bird). The walks around Ladybower to find goshawk nests were fantastic. And so was a drizzly Wednesday morning at Treeton when it was raining swifts. Not to mention the flatfly I found the same afternoon in my ear whilst working at my computer... Other highlights were the mute swan at Renishaw, the visit to the donkey sanctuary and "my" own chair. I also have dear memories of the trip to the swallow roost when Stuart forgot to mention that it actually was reed bed and Wellies would be wise. The amount of swallows caught was such that I had to forget about wet feet and walk knee deep into the marsh. And mentioning Stuart - what about our endless evenings spent near Strines waiting for the odd nightjar to eventually fly into the net?! Don't tell anybody that we were sitting in the car warming our hands whilst a male nightjar bounced into our net - it is a known rule to wait near the net to catch nightjars.

After about two years of great mornings and evenings spent somewhere in South Yorkshire or Derbyshire, Geoff thought me capable of becoming more independent at the passerine front. I got a restricted C license to try my luck on my own. Full of enthusiasm, me and Sara decided on a morning in June to go to Lodge Lane and give it a go on our own for the first time. Already driving there was exciting not to mention the preparation of the gear, the putting up of the nets and the first caught blackbird. But a willow warbler also found its way into our net and I filled

in the first line on my personally designed spread sheet: species, sex and age, wing length and weight - all done and off you go bird - and only then I realised that the crucial thing was missing - THE RING! After that things got more under control. Our second trip on our own to Staveley tested our nerves again - flocks of fledgling blue tits and great tits - possibly all at the same time and tightly wrapping the net around their feet - and a tongued blackbird made it an unforgettable experience and forced us to close the nets early.

But besides learning an enormous amount about British birdlife I also managed to collect an incredible amount of faecal samples. And this allowed me to get my PhD over and done with very smoothly and to obtain really nice results. And therefore I would like to thank the Sorby Breck Ringing group and particularly Geoff, Steve, Phil, Stuart and Ray for their help and their unceasing enthusiasm. I really enjoyed every second out there in the "wilderness"!

Simone.

February 2006 Totals  
Monthly Species Totals Report

	Jan 2006	Feb 2006				Total 2006	Jan- Feb 2005
Mute Swan	4					4	22
Greylag Goose		1				1	
Canada Goose	4					4	2
<b>WIGEON</b>		1				1	
Teal	1					1	2
Mallard		1				1	1
Sparrowhawk							2
Moorhen	1					1	1
Coot		2				2	1
Jack Snipe	1					1	4
Snipe	3	2				5	16
Woodpigeon		2				2	
Collared Dove							3
Great Spotted Woodpecker		1				1	3
Meadow Pipit		1				1	
Grey Wagtail	1	4				5	4
Pied Wagtail	6	13				19	2
Waxwing	38	1				39	187
Dipper		5				5	1
Wren	7	9				16	11
Duncock	7	10				17	38
Robin	9	13				22	25
Blackbird	23	9				32	55
Fieldfare							1



**Chaffinch**

N802366	05/12/1998	3M	Uppertown, Derbys (GB)	
	19/02/2006	R	Uppertown (GB)	0 km, 2633 days
				<i>Long-term retrap</i>
P392462	23/03/2001	5F	Braham, Wetherby, W Yorks	
	09/11/2005	R	Agden, S Yorks (DG)	54 km, 1661 days

*David Williams*