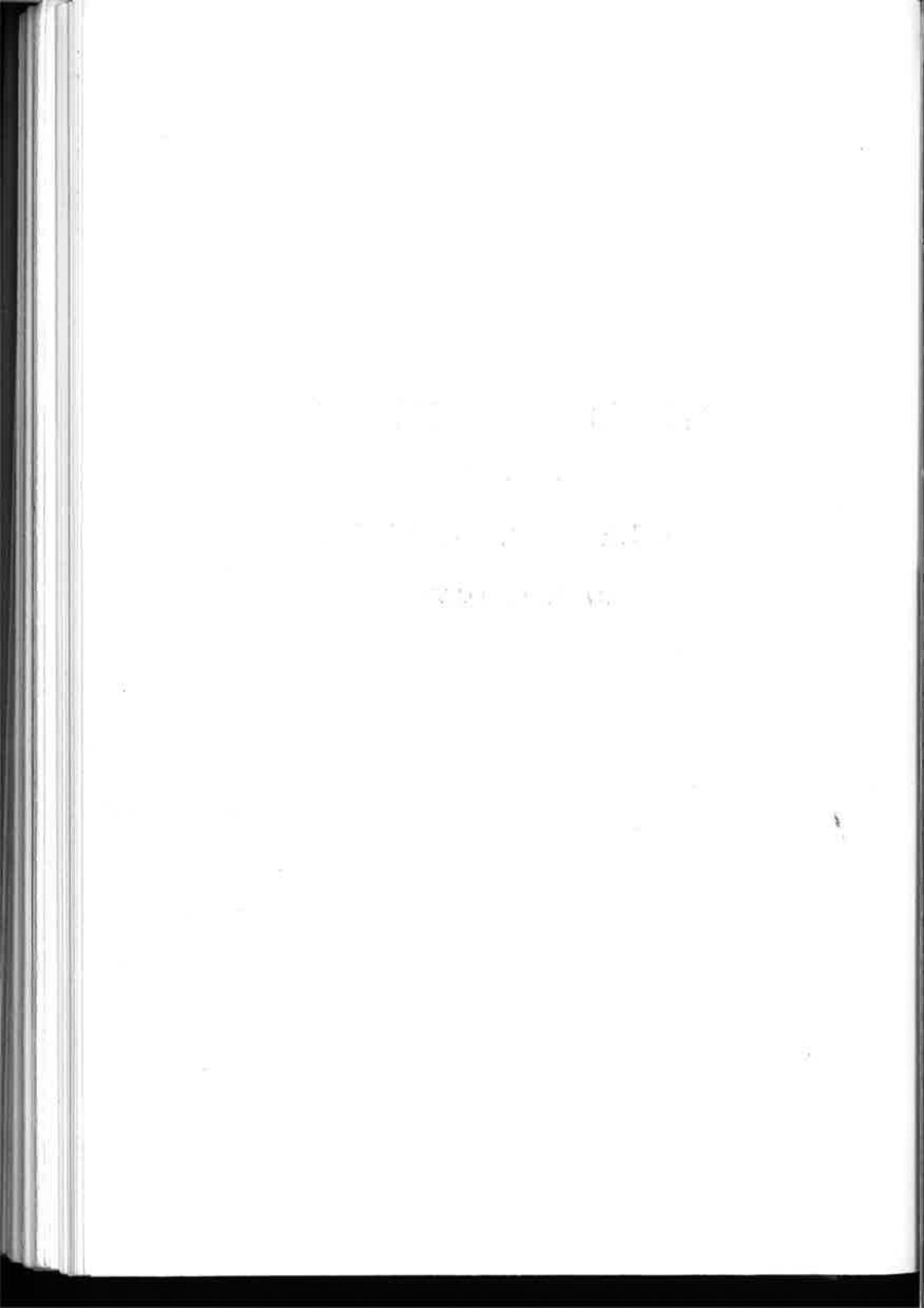


BIRD RINGING  
IN THE  
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Bird ringing has been carried out in this country since 1909. Originally there were two schemes, one organised by H. F. Witherby using rings marked 'Witherby, High Holborn, London' and one by A. Landsborough Thompson with rings marked 'Aberdeen University'. Of these, the first developed into the present national scheme; the second came to an end during the First World War although its promoter afterwards became associated with Witherby's scheme and is still, in fact, its Chairman.

In 1937 Witherby transferred his scheme to the British Trust for Ornithology, the headquarters were transferred to the British Museum (Natural History) and the Museum address was used on the rings, so that each ring now carries the inscription 'British Museum, London, S.W.7' and a serial number. In the case of the larger sizes the word 'inform' precedes the address.

In order to qualify for a ringing permit a ringer must first ring a minimum of one hundred birds under the supervision of an instructor who has been approved by the B.T.O. If he wishes to use mist nets for trapping purposes he must also satisfy the Ringing Committee of the B.T.O. that he has removed at least fifty birds, of a variety of species, from a mist net—again under supervision—and if he wishes to ring nestlings he must again ring at least fifty as a trainee before he can ask for a full 'A' permit. In all cases the instructor is expected to submit a report to the Ringing Committee and only if this report is considered satisfactory is the permit granted. An independent referee must also state that the applicant has sufficient ornithological knowledge to be able to identify the birds he is likely to trap. Two other forms of permit are also issued: a 'B' permit which is issued to Observatory workers who do not wish to ring privately, and a 'C' permit for ringers who work with an 'A' ringer and for whom the 'A' ringer is completely responsible.

The ringer is expected to enter details of each bird ringed on a schedule prepared for the purpose; these details include species, date and place of ringing and, if possible, age and sex of the bird. If a bird is either found dead or caught again and the finder reports the recovery to the British Museum both the finder and the ringer receive a form giving all these details plus the recovery details—distance travelled, date and place of recovery and, if known, how the bird was killed. Swans frequently fly into power cables or telephone wires; Blackbirds, Thrushes and Finches are often recovered from the radiators of cars; Jackdaws and Starlings have a habit of falling down chimneys and the writer has also had records of a

Bullfinch 'strangled by a fishing line', a Bluetit 'drowned in a water butt' and a Longtailed tit caught 'flying around the bedroom'! The latter was, of course, released alive after the ring details had been recorded.

Early in 1963 the British Trust for Ornithology bought a large house at Tring, Hertfordshire, where the Nest Record Scheme, the Library and the Ringing scheme are now housed under one roof, but the inscription on the rings remains the same and the finder of any ringed bird is still asked to forward either the ring or, in the case of a live bird subsequently released, the ring details, to the British Museum (Natural History), S.W.7.

For many years the scheme was self-supporting, all ringers paying, as they still do, for the rings they use, but after the second World War its rapid growth made it impossible to maintain the headquarters work on a voluntary basis although some help towards expenses was afforded from the general funds of the Trust. Fortunately the Nature Conservancy agreed to give financial support—from 1954 in an annual amount to cover the salaries of a full-time Ringing Officer and other staff.

A report of progress with a selected list of recoveries is published each year in 'British Birds', a separate number being devoted to this and related subjects.

Since May, 1960, just over 8,000 birds of eighty-eight species have been ringed in the Haslemere area and the following is a summary of the results achieved so far.

The number of each species varies considerably, of course; from one in the case of Woodcock, Buzzard and Water Rail to over 1,500 in the case of the Blue tit, the six most commonly ringed birds being Blue tit 1,533, Chaffinch 721, Blackbird 537, Robin 405, Greenfinch 402 and Great tit 392. Of the species which are generally accepted as true migrants the Willow warbler heads the list with 319, followed by Whitethroat 197, Meadow pipit 127, Wood warbler 94, Spotted flycatcher 78 and Swallow 77.

About three-quarters of the birds ringed are trapped and ringed as adults but certain species are very difficult to trap by normal methods; Wood warblers, for example, spend most of their lives in the tops of trees and for some reason which has never been explained they are practically never trapped on migration at the coastal ringing stations. As these are the species about which we know comparatively little a special effort has been made to ring the young while they are still in the nest. Since it is undoubtedly true that repeated visits to a nest are an open invitation to all other predators to investigate the spot a technique has been evolved to cut down the number of visits—ideally to one, although up to three

are occasionally necessary. Practically no straightforward nest hunting is practised, the danger of disturbing the site is too great. Birds seen to be nest building or suspected of having nests in the area are watched and the details recorded in a notebook. From 'The Handbook of British Birds' and from previous experience the probable date of hatching is worked out, a few extra days are added to allow the young to reach a suitable size for ringing and the area is again visited. If all has gone well, food is usually carried in to the nestlings within a matter of minutes, the nest is located and the young ringed. Great care is taken to ensure that the surrounding vegetation is not disturbed and that any tracks to the nest are eliminated. It is often possible to judge whether a brood is ready for ringing by the size of the 'bundles' of food which the parent birds are taking in—very tiny young receive very small bundles!

For the commoner species no further visits are made; the number of nests under observation in May and June makes this impossible. For the rarer species, or where it is particularly desirable to know if fledging has been successful, a visit seven to ten days after ringing will usually disclose a family party. During 1963 only one case of predation after the young had been ringed was suspected although losses of nests and eggs in the earlier part of the year had been particularly heavy due to the lateness of the spring. In the Haslemere district Jays, Magpies, Crows, Jackdaws and Grey Squirrels take a very heavy toll until the vegetation is thick enough to afford some protection.

While the recovery abroad of birds ringed in Great Britain is undoubtedly the most glamorous part of the ringing scheme it is by no means the only object. Surprisingly little accurate information is available on the numerical strength of even the commoner species and in these days of poison sprays it is vital to have this information. It is of little use to try to save a species when it is on the verge of extinction. Again, after the disastrous winter of 1962/3 it was obvious that many species had been badly hit and it was suggested that the revoking of the clause of the Protection of Birds Act (1954) which permitted the taking of the eggs of certain common species, would help these species to build up their numbers again. The Government was sympathetic but asked for evidence that the numbers were, in fact, down; the only figures available were the vastly increased numbers of ringed birds found dead during the period. This evidence was passed on by the Nature Conservancy, it was accepted and the clause was revoked.

These are some of the more important results of bird ringing, but there are many minor discoveries which the ringer makes—often of a purely local nature—which are of absorbing interest. During April and May and again from late August to the end of October when migrant birds are pouring through the country, the casual

observer will see only a fraction of this movement. But a mist net—an almost invisible net hung across a flight line—is non-selective; it will catch anything which flies into it. In this way we have recorded such species as Lesser Whitethroat and Whinchat at Marley—species which have never, as far as I know, been recorded here before; and in August and September of this year eleven Blackcaps were ringed in this garden although none were seen until the moment of capture. In 1960 a 'pair' of Greater Spotted Woodpeckers were visiting the bird table. A female was trapped and ringed, and then another, and another. . . . In ten weeks nine different birds were ringed, yet we have never seen more than two birds of this species in the garden at any one time. Similarly in 1961, a party of Longtailed tits began to pay regular visits to the garden. No more than ten were ever counted at any one time, yet by the end of the winter we had ringed no less than twenty-nine. Again, in February, 1961, well over a hundred Blue tits were ringed in the garden, at least four times the usual number for a winter month, and the fact that recoveries from this invasion were reported, in most cases many months later, from Chichester, Havant, Hindhead, Thursley and Ewhurst seems to indicate that some kind of movement was in progress. Nothing like this had ever happened here before, nor has it since.

A summary of the more distant recoveries of birds ringed within a ten mile radius of Haslemere is given opposite. Even on this small scale the effects of the past winter are very obvious and there were, of course, many other birds recovered dead locally.

<i>Species</i>	<i>Age/sex</i>	<i>Ringed on</i>	<i>Recovered on</i>	<i>at</i>
Heron	Nestling	25th May, '62	16th Feb., '63	Found dead—emaciated—in snow at Bussiere St. Georges, near Bussac, FRANCE.
Moorhen	Juvenile	25th May, '62	21st Jan., '63	'Caught' at Ailresford, Hants (16 miles W.S.W.).
Mistle thrush	Full grown	3rd Aug., '62	2nd Feb., '63	Found in weak condition, cared for, but died. Olonne-sur-Mer, Vendee, FRANCE.
Mistle thrush	Juvenile	1st Jan., '63	3rd Jan., '63	Emsworth, Hants. Found in weak condition; recovered; released.
Song thrush	Full grown	8th July, '61	Mid-Feb., '63	Found dead in snow near Brest, Finisterre, FRANCE.
Blue tit	Full grown	22nd Dec., '62	22nd Nov., '63	Found dead at Honiton, Devon (110 miles West).
Whitethroat	Juvenile	6th Aug., '62	28th Sept., '63	Shot at Sacavem, Nr. Lisbon, PORTUGAL.
Meadow pipit	Full grown	30th Aug., '60	24th April, '63	Found dead at Killiecrankie, Perthshire (405 miles W.N.W.).
Meadow pipit	Nestling	9th June, '61	9th Jan., '62	Caught and released, Sao Marco de Serra, Algarve, PORTUGAL.
Tree pipit	Nestling	29th June, '62	20th Sept., '62	'Caught' Montemor-o-Velho, Beira, PORTUGAL.
Starling	Juvenile	28th May, '62	5th Aug., '62	Shot in cherry orchard, Easton-in-Gordano, Bristol (87 miles West).
Greenfinch	Male	7th March, '62	16th Jan., '63	Caught in weak state, released later. Ashford, Kent (70 miles East).
Greenfinch	Male	12th Jan., '63	7th May, '63	Caught slightly injured, released when recovered. Ryde, I.O.W. (30 miles S.W.).
Greenfinch	Female	13th March, '62	21st June, '63	Killed by car near Grantham, Lincs (120 miles North).
Redpoll	Male	25th Feb., '61	29th Oct., '61	Caught and released, Geest-Gerompont, Petit-Rosiere, Brahan, BELGIUM.
Chaffinch	Female	7th March, '62	8th May, '62	Found dead on road. Staines, Middlesex (25 miles N.N.E.).
Brambling	Female	22nd Dec., '62	17th Feb., '63	Found dead in snow near Plouescat, Finisterre, FRANCE.