

Bird Ringing at Littleton Pumping Station 18.07.26

Overwhelmed by Blackcaps!

We spent a lovely morning here with Tony Beasley, a bird ringer of over 50 years' experience of ringing here! This huge site is based near the Queen Mary Reservoir and quarry sites, with nearby River Ash and reed beds.



Tony explained that training to be a ringer is an intensive, time-consuming, multi-year process where volunteers must be trained under the supervision of a licensed trainer to reach different levels of expertise. He showed us the varied sizes of rings, the mist nets, and the various weighing devices to contain the tiny birds. The poor little birds had to suffer the indignity of being carefully plonked upside down in a little pot! All the results, of sex, age, weight, wingspan, etc and if they have been ringed before are kept and carefully recorded and sent to the BTO for their records.

The volunteers started returning, carrying the bags containing the birds which had been caught in the mist nets. There have been far fewer recently because of the excessive heat. However, the success story of the year has been the Blackcap number, there have been over eight hundred caught this year! We saw Sedge, Reed, and a Garden Warbler. The Garden Warbler was identified because of its lack of identifying features! There was also a Chiff chaff, a Whitethroat, a Robin, Blue and Great Tits. The two Great Spotted Woodpeckers were probably from the same brood.

Identification of the birds is difficult especially when the birds are adults or juveniles in various stages of moulting and therefore plumage. The Robin was beginning to lose its juvenile speckly brown plumage, and its red breast was appearing. We could tell that it was a female Blackcap, as its cap was brown.

The noisiest entrants were the Great Spotted Woodpeckers who were evidently very unhappy being kept in a bag, and quite intent on taking chunks out of the handler's fingers! Similarly, the Tits were equally feisty.

Some of us enjoyed the experience of setting the birds free after their capture. And away!

Tony reported that two Hobbies had been nesting in the eucalyptus tree nearby, but we were unable to find their nest.

A very enjoyable morning indeed.



Great Spotted Woodpecker



Ouch!



Displaying new feathers



Sedge Warbler



Great Tit



Female Blackcap

Pictures, with thanks, Lorna & Lenny