

Report on the Birds Caught on Holt Island in 2022

During 2022 we were able to go ringing on Holt Island 18 times, with monthly visits to the Island to see what was around and some extra shorter visits in the summer targeting warblers. During the year we caught 27 species and a total of 1232 birds of which 50% (615 birds) were new birds.

We have also been able to do a comparison with the last five years. Generally the trends are very similar to the national trends. Our nest boxes had a good year producing 45 fledglings. We had two new species, namely the Merlin and the Lesser Redpolls.

Notable catches during the year included catching 12 Siskins and 6 Lesser Redpolls one morning in March. A group of these birds had been roosting regularly in the willow scrub by the main reed bed. By opening the nets before dawn we were able to catch a group as they started the morning forage for Alder seeds and other seeds working their way west along the river. One of the Lesser Redpolls was caught 21 days later by another ringing group at Budby Corner Plantation, Carburton, Notts.

Species	Pulli	New Adults	New Juveniles	Re-trap Birds	Total
Mute Swan				3	3
Merlin			1		1
Green Woodpecker		1	2		3
Great Spotted Woodpecker		1	1		2
Wren		5	37	31	73
Dunnock		6	27	71	104
Cetti's Warbler		2	6	21	29
Sedge Warbler		4	3	6	13
Reed Warbler		12	22	17	51
Garden Warbler		4	1	3	8
Blackcap		28	28	25	81
Willow Warbler			21	2	23
Chiffchaff		7	42	20	69
Goldcrest			3	1	4
Robin		2	16	34	52
Blackbird		19	9	33	61
Song Thrush		4	1	6	11
Long tailed Tit		13	6	24	43
Blue Tit	31	27	120	200	378
Great Tit	14	8	46	98	166
Tree creeper		1	3	8	12
Reed Bunting		7	1	12	20
Chaffinch		4			4
Siskin		12			12
Goldfinch		2			2
Lesser Redpoll		6			6
Magpie			1		1
Total	45	174	396	617	1232



Male Siskin



Female Siskin



Male Lesser Redpoll

Another memorable day was when we caught good numbers of Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs towards the end of August. The former were making their way along the river during their autumn passage. That day the Island was alive with these birds all over the place. Willow Warblers require a lower ground temperature than Chiffchaffs to breed, so due to climate change they are now breeding further north with fewer in this area. Many of the Chiffchaffs were in the middle of moulting and stayed around for some time but the Willow Warblers who had finished their moult were passing through with only two re-trapped. Chiffchaffs were still being caught in December.



Female Redpoll



Willow Warbler



Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler

Many Blackcaps winter in the south of France and Spain and in North Africa, although many remain in this country, so much so that we have caught new birds in November and December. One male caught in May 2022 was re-trapped in Gibraltar on 17th and 24th October. They are one of the first warblers back and start breeding early, this seems to be a successful strategy as numbers of birds caught has gone up significantly in recent years.

Last winter was a bad one for Reed Warblers with very few birds making it back to breed. This was noticed elsewhere in Huntingdonshire. About a third of the number of returning adults were caught, but the number of young produced appears to have been similar to previous years, it would appear that something happened on the wintering grounds or during passage which had an adverse effect on numbers. One of the Reed Warblers was ringed at Sandouville, Seine-Maritime in France in August 2021 and was re-trapped on the Island in May 2022

Sedge Warblers had a very bad year in 2021 with only one being caught but 2022 was better with four new adults and three juveniles being caught.

Cetti's Warblers continue to increase in number and have been caught in most months. Two broods of young were produced on the Island with four recently fledged young being caught.

The Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers who have the Island in their territory both produced fledglings which were caught.



Juvenile Green Woodpecker



Adult Male



Great Spotted Woodpecker

Wrens had a good year this year with numbers increasing significantly after a poor year in 2021.

Dunnocks seem to have been consistently good and stable for the last few years, in spite of the avian pox that has been found in St Ives, none has been found on the Island suggesting the Island birds do not mix and can find sufficient food on the Island. Similarly Robins were fairly stable for the last few years.

Blackbird numbers are always higher in the winter months with birds coming in from the continent, breeding was difficult this year due to the dry summer baking the ground, and very few juveniles were caught. Song Thrushes also suffered with very few juveniles but overall numbers were fairly consistent.

Blue Tits and Great Tits remain the most numerous birds on the Island. Blue Tit numbers have oscillated over the years having gone down in 2020 due to the very cold spring they are now back up due to a very successful year in 2022. Great Tits similarly had a bad year in 2020, again their numbers have gone back up but not to such an extent as the Blue Tits. These birds disperse in the spring to breed, and return in the autumn. One of the Blue Tits caught in December was ringed in January 2015 so is seven years and eleven months old. The oldest recorded bird was 9 years eight month and 16 days.

Chaffinch, as elsewhere are declining and numbers caught on the Island have also gone down steadily over the last five years, this partly due to the mites that cause lesions on the legs. A number of these were found in past years but none in 2022.

Few Goldfinches have been caught mainly because they spend most of their time at the tops of trees without coming down so avoid being caught.

The Reed Bunting numbers have come down as fewer are using the reed bed to breed in. It will be interesting to see if their numbers go back up following the experimental cutting of the reed bed.

The changes to the Island are affecting the numbers of birds breeding on the island and in turn the numbers caught. However the effects of climate change are having an even greater effect particularly with the extremes of temperature that we have been experiencing and frequency of the flooding.