

WARBLERS ON HOLT ISLAND IN 2022

This has been an interesting year for warblers with Cetti’s Warblers breeding for the first time and with significant changes in numbers of other species: Reed Warblers decreasing whilst Chiffchaffs increased.

This year, the weather was more “normal”, in that we did not have a cold spring, but we did have a very hot spell in the summer which affected the flora of the Island. This in turn appears to have had a knock on effect on both the food available, and the birds looking for it. The year was also the driest on record.

The overall numbers of warblers caught was similar to 2021, but there were, some differences in the abundance of each species. It is clear that the Island remains an important feeding area for those warblers that are passing through.

Species	New Birds	New Juveniles	New Adults	Re-trap Birds	Re-trap Juveniles	Re-trap Adults	Total
Cetti’s Warbler	6	4	2	18	3	15	24
Sedge Warbler	7	3	4	6	0	6	13
Reed Warbler	34	22	12	17	4	13	51
Garden Warbler	5	1	4	3	0	3	8
Blackcap	53	25	28	25	6	19	78
Chiffchaff	44	7	37	19	14	5	63
Willow Warbler	21	21	0	2	2	0	23
Total	170	83	87	90	29	61	260

Cetti’s Warbler: Cetti’s first bred in the UK in the early 1970’s and has rapidly expanded its range across the country. 2022 was time it has bred on the Island, and seems to be resident all the year round. There were two males singing and it appeared that two broods of young were hatched with two new adults and four juveniles caught. They seemed to still be around at the beginning of October.

Sedge Warbler: With just one being caught in 2021. In 2022 four new adults were caught, producing at least three young. It is hoped that they will now come back in greater numbers.



Juvenile Cetti’s Warbler



Juvenile Sedge Warbler



Juvenile Reed Warbler

Reed Warbler: The numbers of adults returning this summer was much smaller than in the last two years. This has also been the case in other Huntingdonshire sites such as Woodwalton Fen. In 2021, 35 new adults were caught, and 32 were re-trapped whereas this year only 12 new adults were caught and 13 re-trapped. However, they seemed to produce almost as many young: 26 being caught in 2021, and 22 this year. It would appear that something happened either on migration or in the wintering grounds, affecting breeding numbers in 2022.

Garden Warbler: This species was much as previous years with one pair that appears to have bred, and one juvenile was caught.

Blackcap: The numbers appear to be similar to previous years, but with more adults passing through the Island. About the same number of re-trapped birds suggests about ten pairs breeding, producing similar numbers of young.

Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler: The numbers of these warblers were both significantly higher in 2022, but for different reasons. A study of these species by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), has found that their breeding numbers are associated with the ground temperature. The optimum for Chiffchaffs is 13.5°C and for Willow Warblers is 11°C. As a result of global warming the south of the UK has got warmer, too warm for Willow Warblers. As a result there are many fewer breeding or heard singing in this area. All the Willow Warblers caught on the Island were juveniles passing through, feeding for a short while on their way south.

Chiffchaffs, which have now been caught in all months of the year, have increased in number, producing more young, which has been reflected in numbers ringed. Juveniles, were a mixture of locally bred birds and birds passing through. Many of these were re-trapped, suggesting they are staying longer on the Island. One of the juveniles caught in October weighed 11.2 gm which is almost 50% heavier than normal; it must have been about to fly south.



Juvenile Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler



Juvenile Willow Warbler

Summary

A number of significant changes have occurred this year with far fewer Reed Warblers returning and the subtle effects noted in Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff numbers as they respond to climate change.