



STANFORD RINGING GROUP – ANNUAL REPORT 2011

Summary

- 2011 was an excellent, record-breaking, year. Stanford Ringing Group ringed 6627 birds. Of these, 5727 birds were ringed at our main site, Stanford Reservoir (where 8672 birds were processed of 53 species).
- Most warbler species were ringed in record numbers, as were Tree Sparrows, Linnet, Reed Buntings and Greenfinch. An unprecedented warbler and finch autumn movement was observed. However, the success of our ringing of thrushes during the winter of 2010/2011, was not repeated in 2011/12 as the birds were virtually absent due to the mild conditions.
- The breeding season was good with 161 nests recorded. No obvious impact was observed from the previous hard winter (with possible exception of Barn Owls).
- Higher than average controls were recorded, but the recovery rate was poor.
- Environmental work effort has been higher and more successful than ever before.
- Website and Blog features were expanded during 2011.
- Stanford Ringing Group has taken on more new trainees/helpers during 2011 than in previous years.
- Many thanks to all who have helped during the past year - you have all made this possible.

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Annual Review – Ringing at Stanford Reservoir

Jan-March: Habitat Management

The winter of 2010/2011 will be remembered most for being the coldest winter in 100 years. The freezing, icy conditions enabled us to catch good numbers of thrushes from Oct-Dec 2010 (indeed, at this one site, we caught more Redwing than any other UK county in 2010). However, by the start of 2011 the thrush numbers had dropped significantly and we reverted to our usual January-March routine of site maintenance.



We undertake this scrub and tree clearance to retain the excellent habitat that we have created at Stanford Reservoir for warblers and buntings. Although often gruelling and tiring work, we are rewarded in the following years with increased bird-life and a greater diversity of species (if anyone would like to do some survey work at Stanford on any aspect of its Flora and Flora then do please get in touch – we need you!).

April – May: Early Warblers

Habitat maintenance somewhat precludes bird ringing so by the end of March we had only ringed 120 birds. Consequently by April we became rather excited at the prospect of the warblers arriving. In 2011 we did not have to wait long as the first Sedge Warbler was heard singing on the 2nd and the following week, on the 9th, we caught a Common Whitethroat. These birds are the earliest site records to date, but after these initial surprises, April and May then proceeded in a usual manner with quite unspectacular numbers of birds being ringed. The only bird of real note trapped during this period was a Common Whitethroat only 95 days short of the UK longest lived record. On closer inspection, we realised that this 2011 retrap is technically older than the record holder (another Stanford bird), as it was originally ringed as an adult whilst the record holder was ringed as a juvenile (UK records are established from the date ringed not the age at ringing).

June – August: Record Catches

BANG! An unremarkable year of ringing suddenly exploded into life. The six months from June to November saw us record the highest ringing totals for these months in 35 years at Stanford Reservoir.

During June we ringed a total of 846 birds, 419 of which were warblers. Whitethroat and Blackcap featured most with 126 and 86 respectively. Of the resident species we ringed a notable 59 Tree Sparrow and 54 Reed Bunting (both Red Data Book species).

On the last day of June we ringed a Northern Willow Warbler (*below*) – an early date as normally this race of Willow Warbler starts its southerly migration at the end of July. This individual was sexed as female by virtue of the remnants of a brood patch and is the second record for Northamptonshire – the first being another Stanford bird ringed on 23rd August 2008.



July continued in the same vein with 972 birds ringed of which 576 were warblers of which Whitethroat were 153 and Sedge Warbler 132. The resident species were again dominated by Tree Sparrow (98) and Reed Bunting (93).

August ringing totals fell a little in comparison to the previous two months (due both to the onset of migration and post juvenile dispersal). Nevertheless, 704 birds were ringed with warblers accounting for 491. Predictably Whitethroat (158) and Blackcap (112) were highest. Willow Warblers move through Stanford at this time of year and the 76 that were ringed represented a good effort. Tree Sparrow (51) and Reed Bunting (32) were again the highest ringed residents. A Wheatear in August was only the second ringed for the site.

Sept – Nov: Massive Movement

When September arrived we were hit with unprecedented numbers of birds. We ringed 1179 birds during the month, a figure which exceeds some of our annual ringing totals! Warblers comprised 673 birds, of which Blackcap (354) and Chiffchaff (236) numbers were huge. Daily totals were impressive e.g. on the 28th Sept, 57 Blackcap and 44 Chiffchaff were ringed, with a further 51 Blackcap and 15 Chiffchaff on 30th. Meadow Pipit totals were equally surprising, with the 180 ringed during this month annihilating the previous *annual* site total of 30. A Redstart, an unusual species for the site, was also caught during September.

Contrary to our expectations, October catches of new birds continued to be high with another 933 birds ringed. Warblers accounted for 97 of these, mostly late Blackcap (59) and Chiffchaff (37). A Grasshopper Warbler, retrapped on 8th October, was the latest record for Stanford Reservoir.

However, in October it was the finches that dominated with hundreds passing through. Greenfinch (149), Lesser Redpoll (94) and Goldfinch (85) were supported by Tree Sparrow (128) and Reed Bunting (47) to complete a truly remarkable month.

November finally saw the catches tail off although the 355 birds ringed was still a record total for Stanford during November. Tree Sparrow (59), Goldfinch (49) and Lesser Redpoll (43) were the pick of the catch.

December: Habitat Management

From mid November it was clear that the winter thrushes were virtually absent. This dearth of birds together with the constantly windy and wet weather resulted in us abandoning ringing and turning once again to ride clearance and habitat management – in particular, taking advantage of the reservoir's low water level to cut back overhanging trees.

Warblers in 2011

Nine warbler species breed regularly at Stanford Reservoir and of these the Grasshopper Warbler has the most precarious status with between zero and 5 breeding pairs. The remaining species populations are in good health with only the Willow Warbler showing any sign of decline during the past 35 years.

2011 was an exceptional year for warblers and a total of 2469 were caught and ringed. This is an increase of roughly 1000 compared to 2010 (which in turn was an increase of 500 on 2009).

Rising warbler numbers at Stanford might be explained by two factors:

- (a) An increase in ringing effort (during the summer we ringed three times more frequently than we did in 2009)
- (b) Improving breeding success and more birds using the area. During the mid-90's the habitat had changed so much that the Grasshopper Warbler disappeared as a breeding bird from Stanford Reservoir. In 1999 we started our programme of scrub management and the following year they returned to breed and have done so in all the years since.

17 Grasshopper Warblers were caught this year, the best showing since 1981 when we also caught 17. Back in the late 70's and early 80's we would retrap a number of Grasshopper Warblers from previous years, illustrating some site faithfulness. It is interesting to note that we no longer experience this and have not retrapped a previous year bird since 1989. Has this species changed its habits or has Stanford Reservoir become a marginal habitat for this species?

Reed and Sedge Warblers represent *Acrocephalus* warblers at Stanford Reservoir. Both species have probably increased in numbers over the past 35 years. The most notable being Sedge Warbler which has taken advantage of the new habitat that we have provided with the winter scrub management programme. This year we caught and ringed 259 Sedge Warblers (our 2nd best year ever) and 287 Reed Warblers (our best year).

Sylvia warblers have, as a species group, benefited most from the scrub clearance with an explosion of numbers (both breeding and passage). The Lesser Whitethroat is the scarcest breeder. Following a record year in 2010 for the species, we were hoping for an increase in breeding numbers in 2011 but this did not happen (possibly due to a poor migration or over-wintering issues in Africa). However, we still managed to ring 50 birds (our 3rd best year ever).

Common Whitethroat seem to breed in every bit of available habitat and the 491 ringed this year was our highest annual total ever recorded, with many birds returning to breed at the site.

Garden Warblers were a little disappointing. Having enjoyed our best year in 2010 we expected more birds this year, but this did not materialise (although we still recorded our 2nd best year total of 84). This species shows a high degree of site faithfulness, unlike Blackcap (which breed in broadly similar habitat).



The Blackcap numbers in 2011 were exceptional. Excellent numbers in spring and early summer indicated a good survival rate from 2010. A strong breeding season then followed, resulting in a phenomenal autumn passage. The 710 birds ringed in 2011 obliterated the 2010 total of 262 and now stands as the record for our 'most ringed' species in a year (a far cry from the early years when catching 20 Blackcaps a year was considered good).



Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler represent *Phylloscopus* warblers. Over the years, these two species have had quite different fortunes at Stanford Reservoir. Chiffchaff have exploding in numbers whilst Willow Warbler have generally decreased. During 2011, both species numbers were good in the spring and, like Blackcap, this then carried through to the totals of birds ringed in the late summer / early autumn period. 192 Willow Warblers were caught in 2011 (our 2nd best year). However this total was dwarfed by the Chiffchaff total of 379 (a record year comfortably exceeding 2010's 248 birds). Surely these numbers can only be explained by a genuine increase in population?

Nest Recording

The highlight this year was undoubtedly the two pairs of Tree Sparrows using the boxes for the first time in many years and raising four broods. A disappointment was another year without Barn Owls breeding at the site - presumably already low populations further weakened by the hard winter of 2010/11. Nests found are summarised below -

Mute Swan	Twelve young were raised from four nests. Adults with broods of 2, 3, 2 & 5 respectively were recorded near nests.
Mallard	One nest found had six chicks but only three were seen with adults in subsequent weeks.
Great Crested Grebe	Two nests were unsuccessful at egg stage.
Kestrel	Five pulli were ringed, an improvement on the failed attempt in the same box last year.
Coot	Ten nests were recorded with a total of thirty-two eggs, only two chicks were seen near any of the nests.
Stock Dove	Twenty-six nests was also a new record. Seventeen pulli and two adults were ringed.
Woodpigeon	Eleven nest records was our second best year. However, predators took their toll on the total of twenty-one eggs such that only four pulli were ringed.
Tawny Owl	Only the second year that we have experienced as many as three nesting attempts. Single pulli were ringed in two boxes whilst the third nest attempt was predated at the egg stage.
Swallow	A lack of suitable nesting areas seriously limits the number of attempts at the reservoir for this species. This is the first since recording began and was situated in the entrance to the tunnel behind the dam. Three young close to fledging were ringed.
Wren	Nest attempts in nest boxes by Wrens are fairly uncommon but when they occur it sometimes allows us the opportunity to gain access to the contents. A nest in a box revealed 6 eggs that all hatched and five pulli survived to the ringing stage, which gave one of our trainees some valuable pulli ringing experience.
Robin	One attempt in an open nest box was predated at the egg stage.
Song Thrush	Only two nests were found this year. One had an addled egg and the other was deserted at the egg stage.
Reed Warbler	Thirty-five nests is a record for Stanford Reservoir since nest recording began in 2001. Fifty-three pulli were ringed with 17 (32%) being retrapped after fledging. This low recovery rate was due to ringing after most fledglings had left the reedbed and should not be used as an accurate indicator of survival rates.
Blackcap	A nest found with four near fledged young was the only record this year. As they were quite well advanced when found, they remained unringed.
Blue Tit	From a total of twenty nests recorded we ringed 134 pulli.
Great Tit	A total of twenty six nests resulted in 190 pulli ringed.
Jackdaw	Four nest attempts exceeds last year's record of three. However, only two pulli were ringed out of 16 eggs due to predation at either egg or nestling stage.
Tree Sparrow	Considering we ringed over 280 Tree Sparrows in 2010, four nest records this year was not a total surprise but one pair raising three broods certainly was! This pair breeding in a box sited on one of the Poplar trees raised an amazing three broods of 5, 5 and 6 young which added considerably to the combined total of 21 pulli ringed.
Chaffinch	Four nests found had adults incubating but alas all were predated at egg stage.
Bullfinch	Two nests found failed at egg stage. One nest was deserted and the other predated.
Reed Bunting	Five young were ringed in the only nest record, the first since 2009. A far cry from the twenty to thirty nests regularly found annually in the 1980's.

Controls & Recoveries

Controls

19 controls were recorded at Stanford in 2011 – a better than average year in comparison to the previous decade.

None of the controls were that remarkable in themselves, although a Tree Sparrow from Lincolnshire (112 km, 154 days) was a notable distance for this species.

A first control species for us was Whitethroat, which, although only travelling 15km in 671 days from Countesthorpe, Leicestershire (via Africa - twice), was our first ever Whitethroat control in over 3,400 Whitethroats that we have ringed!

A Dutch ringed Robin and a British Kestrel are potentially the pick of our controls but we are awaiting the initial ringing information on these two birds.

Recoveries

A really poor year for recoveries with only eleven received to date. In the past two years we have ringed more than 10,000 birds so this is a disappointing return for the effort spent. Our recovery rate in 2011 is roughly 0.19%, that is one recovery for every 520 birds ringed. Our average for the previous decade was 0.35% (one per 328).

Of the eleven recoveries received to date, just four birds travelled away from the Midlands. These birds (a Lesser Redpoll to Kent, a Reed Warbler to Dorset and Sedge Warblers to South Wales and Hampshire) were the only recoveries of the 5727 birds actually ringed by us at Stanford in 2011.

New Species Recorded at Stanford in 2011

Two new bird species were recorded this year:

Purple Heron on 16th April was found by Mark Piper
Pectoral Sandpiper, present from 23rd to 29th September was found by Rita Nichols

New species of other fauna were:

Roe Deer on 30th April (Adam Homer)
Fallow Deer 12th November (David Jaynes)
White-legged Damselfly 26th June (Mark Piper)
Hummingbird Hawkmoth 2nd July (Mark Piper)

Miscellaneous Group Activities

Web Site Development

Our web site (www.stanfordrg.org.uk) was launched in October 2010 as a platform to report current ringing activities as well as recording 35 years history of ringing at Stanford Reservoir.

Additionally we have uploaded historic records and images pertaining to all types of flora and fauna in order to bring them into a central location.

In 2011, several new pages of Ringing Statistics have been added including the complete list of controls and recoveries for Stanford Reservoir.

The web site Blog is updated on a regular basis and during 2011 we added the popular 'Latest - Sightings' page to record recent species sightings reported by visiting naturalists.

We continue to add web site pages on a variety of topics – the latest being a collection of images of birds with bill deformities (following an increase in recorded deformities in 2011, which also affected, for the first time, several warbler species). These topical pages can be viewed by following the “Articles” link on the left hand side of web site Home page.

Ringling Demonstrations

During 2011 we put on several ringing demonstrations for local residents, a photographic group as well as two separate groups from The University of the Third Age.



Team

The Stanford Ringing Group has increased in size this year with the addition of 3 Trainee Ringers plus the award of 2 ‘C’ Permits. Additional ‘Helpers’ have also been most welcome.