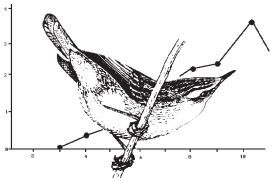


CES *News*

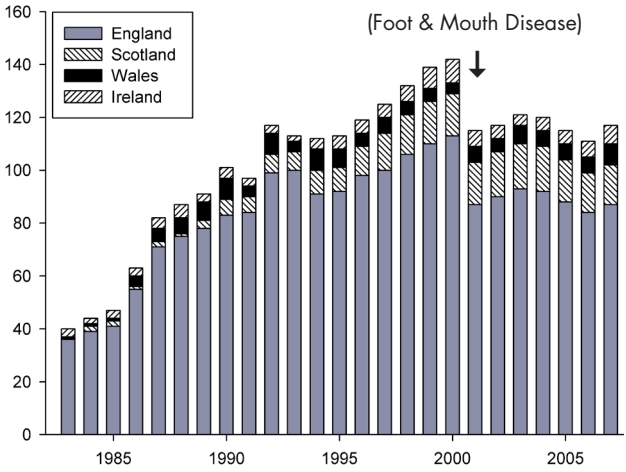
Number 21 June 2008

A look back at 25 years of CES ringing

As the BTO's Constant Effort Sites Scheme reaches its 25th year, we should all give ourselves a very well deserved pat on the back for what has been an incredibly productive project which has led the world in standardised monitoring by mist-netting. The project has been such a success thanks to the partnership between you the ringers, religiously ringing sites through the summer year after year, persisting through the quiet times and the early mornings, and the statisticians and programmers at the BTO, turning your captures into real and useful indicators of change.

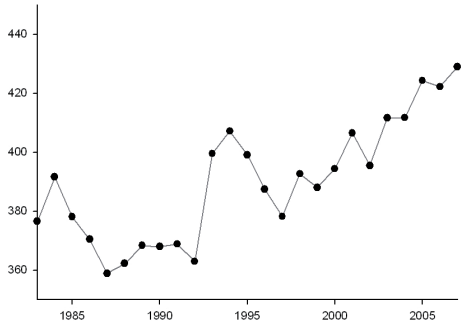
Oddly, I think I lie somewhere just off centre between these two ends of the CES spectrum, though definitely leaning towards the fanatical ringer and not the programmer! But we do need both, and this is our chance to say a very big THANK YOU to everyone who over the last 25 years has slashed a CES ride, carried a CES pole, put up a CES net, ringed a CES bird or made the CES tea. Your contributions have been, and remain, incredibly valuable to the success of the scheme, and long may it continue.

The early days of the Scheme saw fewer than 50 sites taking part, but this soon grew as the value of the data being collected became more apparent. Numbers of sites grew steadily over the next 15 years, and it was only in 2001 that the scheme faltered slightly. As you'll all know, 2001 was the Foot & Mouth year, and many sites that couldn't be operated in that year never got going again. So sadly, the number of sites dropped from 142 to just 115, and after a few years of recovery, the increasingly wet and windy conditions have been the final nail in the coffin of more sites (see chart below). But there is light at the end of the tunnel, and in 2007, a total of 117 sites were run, a slight, but welcome, increase on last year's 115. Add to this a few new sites coming into the scheme for 2008 and the future is looking good!



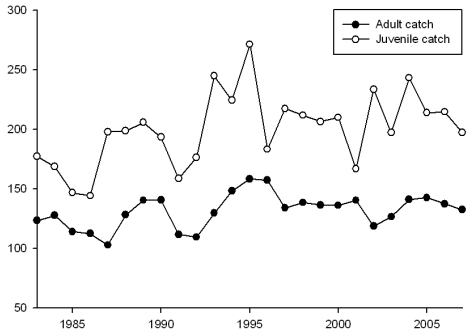
Number of CE sites by country over the last 25 years

Interestingly, even though the number of sites operated now is still lower than the pre Foot & Mouth years, the effort put into these sites has been increasing steadily. The average net length on sites was just 360-380 feet in the 1980s, 400 feet in the 1990s, and continued to increase through the noughties to the current figure of just under 430 feet, the highest ever (see below). This could just reflect an increase in the number of CE sites being run by groups rather than individuals though, allowing more nets to be operated.



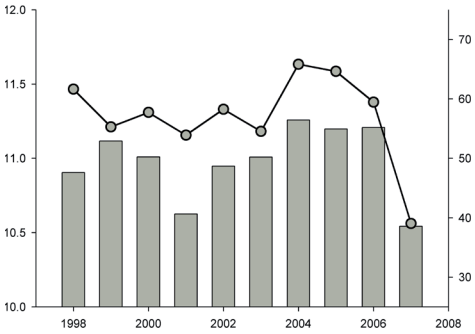
Changes in average net length (in feet) on CE sites over the last 25 years

So has this drastically affected the catch total on sites? With more feet of netting operated, catch totals have increased, but actually only slightly. Site by site, the average catch of adults reached a peak in 1995, which was a notably good breeding season, but since then has dropped off slightly, and interestingly, the average catch (of adults and juveniles) per foot of netting hasn't really changed over the period, despite what we all might think! So how does your site compare to the average?



Changes in average catch totals, by age, on CE sites over the last 25 years

Perhaps countering some of the increases in net length operated, the weather has recently made it more difficult to complete all 12 visits, and 2007 saw only 40% of sites achieving this, with many sites missing visits for the first time.



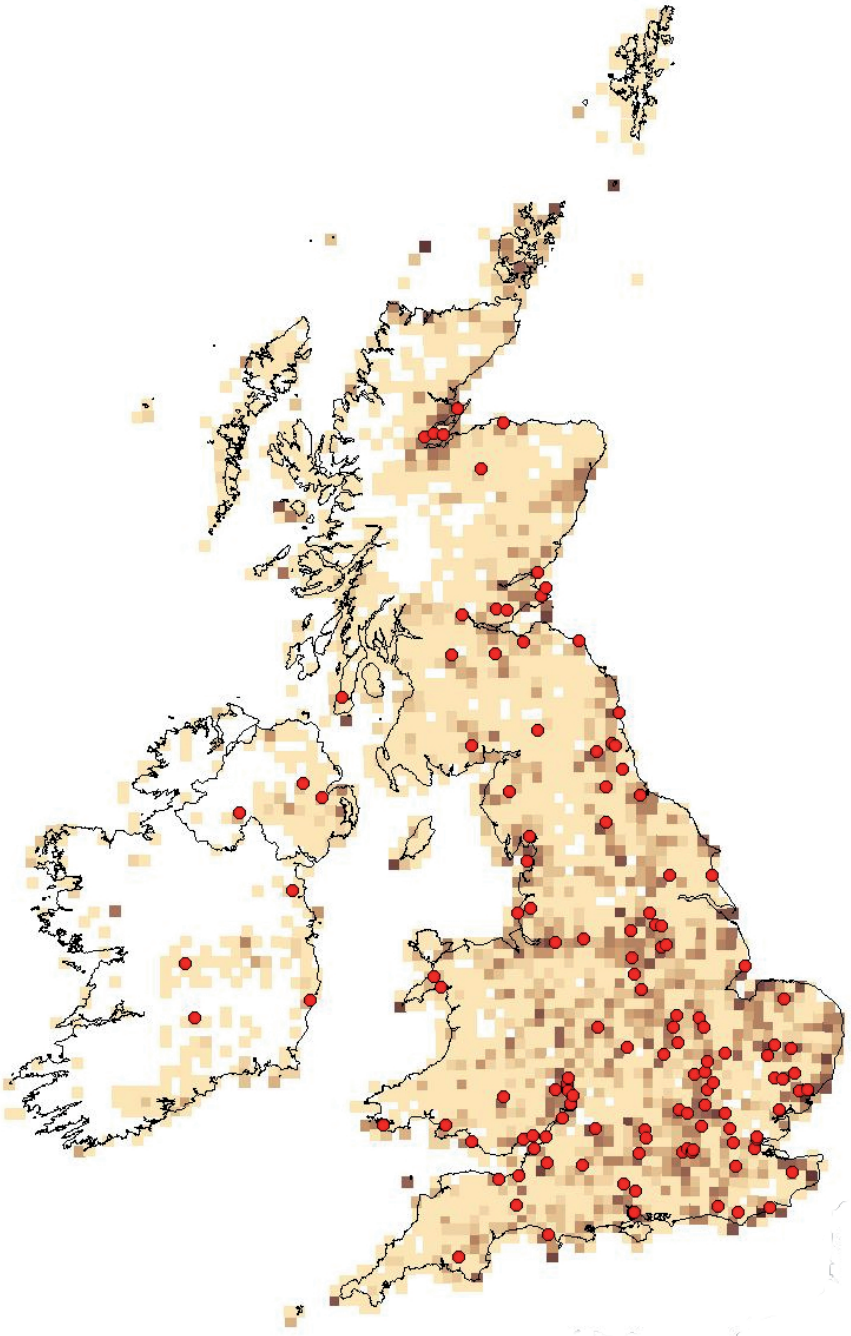
Average number of visits to CE sites over the last ten years (bars), and the percentage of sites completing all 12 visits (points).

So what do the next 25 years have in store for the scheme?

At the moment, we're finalising analyses that will allow us to produce adult survival rates using CES captures. For many species this will be the first time such figures have been produced, so this will be an exciting development.

We are also very close to being able to provide regional CES results, so watch this space for more details. We should be able to split the country into four broad regions and still produce significant results, but further recruitment in some regions will allow us to do a lot more with your data.

Mark Grantham



Location of CE sites operated in 2007 (red) and density of general ringing effort since 2000 (darker colours show more ringing effort), highlighting areas where ringers are active but where there are no CE sites.

2007: the worst breeding season yet?

In this the 25th full year of CES ringing, the real value of the Scheme was shown to great effect. As you will all be aware, the summer flooding made life very difficult for many species (and ringers), whether they suffered flooded nests, lack of prey items or just chilling. In West Yorkshire, even Tree Sparrows in nest boxes eight feet up were being flooded out! For a quick summary of the weather for the year, the Met Office provides annual, seasonal and monthly climate figures for the UK, and these are available online:

www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/

Throughout the country, the summer saw rainfall well above average (the 30 year mean runs from 1961-1990); 170% in England, 162% in Wales, 128% in Scotland and 160% in Northern Ireland. Regionally, the English Midlands were worst hit, with 189% of average rainfall. This had quite a mixed effect on breeding, and the timing of the heaviest rain in relation to breeding stage was key to whether or not a nest would survive the weather.

Admittedly we were expecting the figures to show a poor year for some species, but hadn't quite expected how badly so many species had done (see table). Of the 25 core species monitored by CES, six had their worst breeding season since the Scheme began, with productivity at an all time low: Reed Warbler, Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Willow Tit, Blue Tit and Treecreeper.

Looking at the long-term changes in productivity (compared to the average over 1983-2006), of the 25 core species, eleven had productivity that was significantly lower than average. Those faring worst were the tits, with productivity of Willow Tit 66% down, Blue Tit 47% down, Great Tit 35% down and Treecreeper 42% down. This poor productivity was really evident over the winter whilst out birding and covering winter Atlas TTVs, with winter tit flocks being dominated by Long-tailed Tits. The other species with significantly low productivity were Dunnock, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Great Tit. In some parts of the country, entire CE sites were devastated, with obvious impacts on breeding birds, and it will be interesting to see how these sites recover in 2008.

Surprisingly, it wasn't all bad news though, with the timing of breeding in some species meaning they were lucky enough to survive the worst of the weather. Long-tailed Tits fared best, with productivity at an all time high, and compared to the other tits, their success is presumably because they breed slightly earlier in the year, and so managed to find the one narrow window of reasonable weather during the summer.

Rainy summer causes a severe case of empty nest syndrome

Valerie Elliott Countryside Editor

Blue tits and great tits suffered their worst breeding season on record because of the cold, wet summer, the British Trust for Ornithology has said.

The reed warbler, whitethroat, willow warbler, treecreeper and willow tit also had the lowest number of surviving chicks since the trust started to record bird numbers 25 years ago.

The young died because they did not have enough feathers to protect them from the heavy downpours. There was also a shortage of food.

If weather patterns continue to be unpredictable in spring and bird species. The long-tailed tit produced bumper nestfuls of chicks, almost doubling the number of young, because they nest early, in February and March. When chicks were ready to leave the nest in April they were able to take advantage of the good early summer weather and abundance of insects for food.

There is particular concern for the blue tit because the number of young birds that survived this year was 48 per cent below the long-term average. Great tits were down by a third.

Graham Appleton, for the trust, said that the adult birds had found it incredibly tough to find feed for the chicks.

Most breeding pairs of tits have about ten eggs, he said, and each chick needs 100 caterpillars a day for food. "That means that the adults have to find 1,000 caterpillars a day, but the wet weather washed them off the trees. Drastic efforts had to be made for adults to raise their chicks. With the poor weather it was no mean feat."

He said that the birds would recover in numbers if the climate was right next year, because the average nest had 8 to 12 eggs and most lost only one chick. The problems started in the South but the rain had a bigger impact in the Midlands and the North. The trust found that some young blue tits in the South had flown their nest before the wet teer bird ringers to understand why bird numbers are changing, said: "For resident birds such as the blue and great tits, it will be interesting to see how they cope with the poor season.

"Most may well be able to bounce back next year, but it is more serious for the migratory species — reed warbler, whitethroat and willow warbler. These are already suffering problems both on migration and in Africa, so a poor breeding season adds to their plight."

Volunteers ring more than 850,000 birds a year. Trained ringers put up the same nets in the same sites 12

Summer rains kill 10m blue tit chicks

By Graham Tibbetts

AS many as 10 million blue tit chicks died from a food shortage over the wet summer, experts believe.

Figures released yesterday by the British Trust for Ornithology show that almost half this year's young were killed.

The blue tit was one of seven species that suffered a sharp decline in numbers. Others include the great tit and the willow warbler.

The population slump was discovered by volunteers for the BTO's Constant Effort Sites Scheme (CES).

"This is an alarm bell for these birds," said Paul Stancliffe, a BTO spokesman. "Around the time blue tits would be hatching we had cold, wet weather. It didn't last just a few days, it was May, June and July.

"One young blue tit

Preliminary CES results appeared widely in the press, including full pages in The Times (left) and Telegraph (right), really emphasising the value of the scheme.

Changes in captures on CE Sites between 2006 and 2007

		Adult numbers		Productivity		
		% change vs 2006	Long-term trend	% change vs 2006	% change vs 1983–2006	Long-term trend
Wren	*Troglodytes troglodytes*	+ 7	↑	+14	– 6	↔
Dunnock	*Prunella modularis*	0	↔	**+ 8 ***	**–17 ***	↓
Robin	*Erithacus rubecula*	**+24***	↑	–10	–10	↓
Blackbird	*Turdus merula*	– 2	↓	+ 1	**+18 ***	↔
Song Thrush	*Turdus philomelos*	**+18***	↓↑	+18	+ 7	↔
Cetti's Warbler	*Cettia cetti*	+ 22	↑	**+96 ***	+17	↔
Sedge Warbler	*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*	**–28***	↓	– 8	– 8	↓
Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*	**–11***	↓	–31	**–27 ***	↔
Lesser Whitethroat	*Sylvia curruca*	**–35***	↓	+38	+21	↔
Whitethroat	*Sylvia communis*	**–32***	↓	**–18 ***	**–21 ***	↓
Garden Warbler	*Sylvia borin*	+ 11	↓	–18	**–22 ***	↓
Blackcap	*Sylvia atricapilla*	**+16***	↑	**–27 ***	**–26 ***	↔
Chiffchaff	*Phylloscopus collybita*	**+21***	↑	– 6	**–24 ***	↔
Willow Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochilus*	– 3	↓	**–17 ***	–18	↓
Long-tailed Tit	*Aegithalos caudatus*	**+15***	↑	**–54 ***	**+43 ***	↔
Willow Tit	*Poecile montanus*	+ 31	↓	**–76 ***	**–66 ***	↓
Blue Tit	*Cyanistes caeruleus*	**+22***	↑	**–51 ***	**–47 ***	↓
Great Tit	*Parus major*	**+14***	↑	**–37 ***	**–35 ***	↓
Treecreeper	*Certhia familiaris*	+ 4	↑	–29	**–42 ***	↔
Chaffinch	*Fringilla montifringilla*	– 10	↑	– 4	+ 6	↓↑
Greenfinch	*Carduelis chloris*	**–34***	↑	+23	**+29 ***	↓↔
Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*	+ 9	↔	**+93 ***	+47	↔
Linnet	*Carduelis cannabina*	**–45***	↓	+76	**+94 ***	↓
Bullfinch	*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*	**+14***	↓	+36	+ 8	↔
Reed Bunting	*Emberiza schoeniclus*	**–28***	↓	+10	–16	↓

The % changes shown are between the 2006 season and the 2007 season. For productivity, the % change is also shown compared to when the scheme began in 1983.

The long-term trends indicate if the general trend during the whole period of the CES Scheme shows an increase (↑), a decrease (↓) or stability (↔). Where trends have noticeably changed direction over the period, more than one symbol is used. For more details on these trends, see the Wider Countryside Report on the BTO website (www.bto.org/birdtrends).

Significant changes are indicated with an asterisk.

Continued declines in four key species

The 2007 results also showed the continuing declines in the abundance of several species, with adult numbers of four species (Sedge Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Linnet and Reed Bunting) at their lowest ever level in 2007. Additionally, Reed Warbler abundance has only been lower in 1991. Significant increases in adult abundance were seen for Robin, Blackcap and Treecreeper, and these possibly also benefited from increased access to soil invertebrates during the mild winter.

Reed Warblers were a bit of a conundrum late in the season, as a large number of adults seemed to be in body moult. This could be that birds that had bred early, or had failed attempts, and had subsequently started their body moult early before migration.

"*We caught two '1J' REEWA last Sunday so these may be replacement or second broods, and one female REEWA had a BP3 (retrapped from 2 weeks ago when she had a BP2) so is still incubating. Another REEWA the same day had a BP5 so we have a real mix of breeding stages (as you might expect)*" - Northumberland, 7 August

"*Reed Warbler juv numbers are down and we noticed that adult birds feathering up early in June and moving.*" - Suffolk

"*Reed and Sedge leaving a little earlier I fancy and much more body moult than I usually see on the REEWAs*" - Dorset

25 years of trends

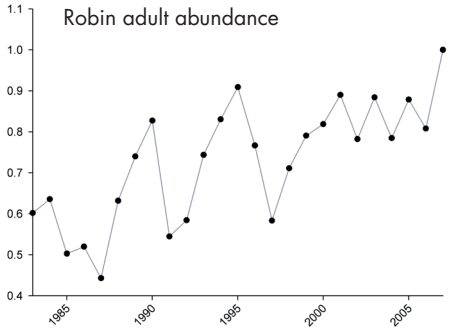
Which species are the winners and which the losers since the start of the CES Scheme?

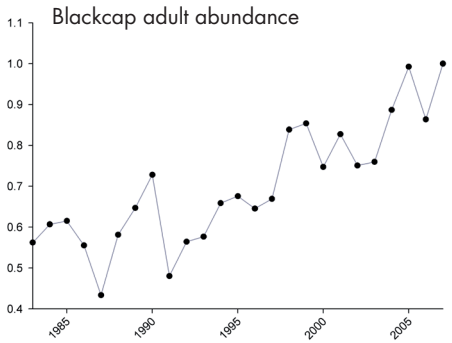
It seems that some of the biggest winners over the period have been our resident insectivores, with adult abundance increasing year on year. This is presumably due in part to a recent run of mild winters, which are likely to have increased over-winter survival. Add to this the fact that many of these species have early breeding seasons, meaning they avoid the worst impacts of the recent wet springs, and the prospects for these species continue to look good.

One of the most dramatic increases has been in the abundance of adult Robin, with 2007 seeing the highest ever abundance.

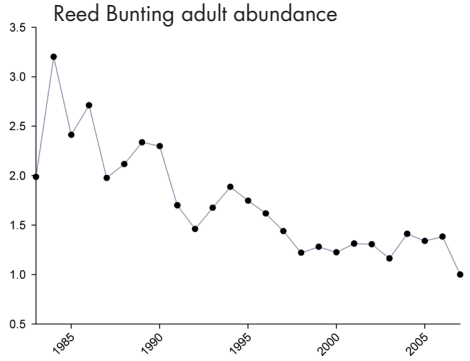
Several other species have also been increasing more generally, including Chaffinch and some of our shorter distance, early-returning migrants (such as Blackcap and Chiffchaff).

Of course, it is never all good news, and declines in many species are well documented in the CES Scheme.

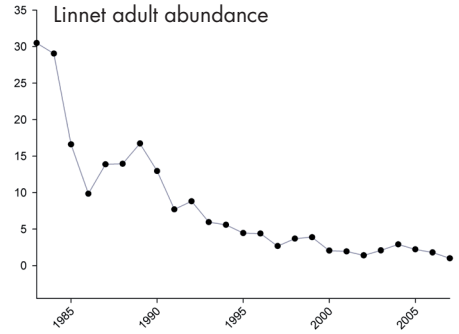




Declines in numbers of several reedbed species (eg Reed Bunting and Sedge Warbler) have continued in recent years. Reed Bunting is currently red-listed as a species of conservation concern, with the massive population decline (62% over the period 1974 and 1999) probably due to decreased survival rates. The population of Sedge Warbler is also driven primarily by changes in adult survival rates, but for quite different reasons. Short-term variation can be explained by rainfall patterns in the Sahel region of Africa, as highlighted by CES results.

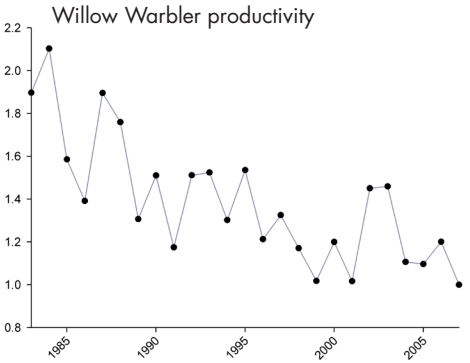


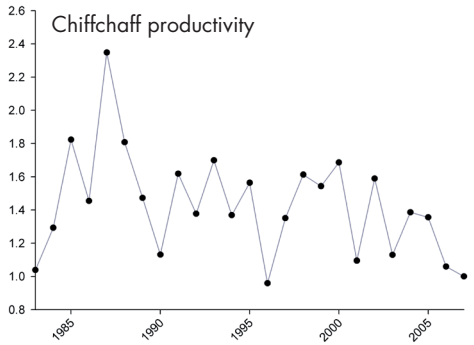
Significant declines are also evident in many granivorous passerines, and farmland species such as Linnet have fared particularly badly. The general population decline in this species is thought to be driven by decreased productivity due to habitat change.



Perhaps the most dramatic, and complex, of these declines has been seen in Willow Warbler (see *CES News* 20 for more details). The adult population has dramatically crashed, though the population in Scotland and northern England has fared much better. It is interesting to compare the long-term trends in productivity for both Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff, with the former decreasing and the latter remaining relatively stable (but on the downturn in recent years?).

This decline is the subject of an ongoing PhD at the University of East Anglia, and CES ringers catching Willow Warblers have been approached to collect feathers (under licence) to help determine the stable isotope signature of feathers moulted in the winter quarters. This will help to identify differences in wintering areas between northern and southern populations.





Some CES News headlines of years gone by...

1989

One Hundred Sites!!

Ringers' Conference

Those of you who witnessed the volume of BTO wine consumed at the Research Meeting for CES ringers on Saturday evening at the Swanwick Ringers' Conference are probably surprised to see I am still employed at Beech Grove. Whilst the obvious popularity of this event (particularly from the Dyfed contingent!) necessitates its continuation at future Swanwicks, BTO alcohol provisions are likely to be severely restricted. I suggest, therefore, that next year's CES Research Meeting be made a 'Bring-A-Bottle' affair.

1991

CES Ring Subsidy Increases to 50% of ring prices

B-RING computer package for CES ringers

B-RING is available for use on both PCs and BBCs. The package costs only £20.00 (this covers discs and manual)... ...When ordering B-RING, PC users should specify the disc size they require (5.25 or 3.5 inch) and BBC users should specify the disc density they require (80 track or 40 track). Why not invest the money you save on rings in a personal computer?!

1995

Mike Netherwood and Mick Cook turned up for their first CES visit of 1995 only to be targeted by a gang who had been camping illegally at their ringing site. The gang chased the CES ringers, shooting at them with air rifles and pistols. Fortunately they emerged unscathed and called the police who turned up with an armed response unit and arrested members of the gang. What lengths some CES ringers will go to avoid a CES visit!

1996

The Poorest Breeding Season on record

For six species, the percentage of young birds caught was lower in 1996 than any other summer since the start of CES ringing in 1983. These species were Dunnock, Robin, Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tit, Great Tit and Blue Tit, most of which nest early in the season suggesting that this is when conditions were most difficult.

"The most depressing, demoralising empty year I've ever ringed"

1997

Lesser Whitethroats continue to decline

Catches of adults and juveniles are at an all-time low. Numbers on Common Bird Census plots also plummeted between 1996-97, with a 45% decline in the number of territories recorded.

Information from an impressive 131 sites operated in 1997 has been received. This makes 1997 the best ever in terms of coverage.

1998

New long-term trends in productivity

Our new Ecological Statistician Steve Freeman has started work to develop new methods of looking at data on productivity (breeding success) on Constant Effort Sites. CE Sites provide unique information on productivity and until now these data have not been used to the full.

2000

Willow Warblers continue to decline

"*Only 12 juvenile Willow Warblers (in 2000) is by far the lowest total I have recorded since starting ringing in 1977*" – Richard Ward-Smith, then in West Yorkshire

2001

Impact of Foot & Mouth Disease

2001 will be remembered by most as the year of Foot & Mouth disease... ...thankfully we have no reason to believe that Foot & Mouth has introduced much spatial bias into the CES results this year.

2002

Not another b****y Blue Tit!

A new email group has been set up for CES ringers using the well-established Yahoo! Groups Internet website.

2003

Cetti's Warbler – can CES monitor them?

In 2003 Cetti's Warbler were caught on 16 CE sites, which surprisingly, is double the number of sites Willow Tits were caught on. The number of sites catching Willow Tit has gradually declined to such a low level that we may not be able to monitor it using CES for much longer.

Red letter day

Having just completed my 16th CES year without missing a single visit, it is still fantastic and exciting when you have a 'red letter' day. Mine for 2003 was visit nine on 27 July. Incredibly two Green, a Great Spotted and the elusive Lesser Spotted Woodpecker were all caught and ringed on the same day!

...and some of the scheme's most unusual captures

1987: Savi's Warbler, Barred Warbler, Cetti's Warbler (*those were the days when this was still an exceptional capture! - Eds*), Greenshank, Red-backed Shrike.

1988: Spotted Crake, Aquatic Warbler, Great Grey Shrike.

1989: Savi's Warbler (ringed in Warwickshire in May, controlled in Herts in July), Icterine Warbler, Hobby.

1990: Aquatic Warbler (controlled in Avon bearing a Polish ring. A second bird wearing the consecutive ring number was controlled on the same day in south-west England!), Great Reed Warbler.

1993: Tufted Duck, Lapwing, Scarlet Rosefinch.

1994: Grey Heron, Shelduck, Teal, Merlin, Peking Robin.

1995: Rook, Dipper, Hawfinch, Tree Pipit (ringed in Fife and found dead eight days later in Iceland).

1996: Thrush Nightingale, Redwing, Short-eared Owl.

1997: Rook, Dipper, Hawfinch, Redwing, Grey Partridge.

1998: Pochard, Marsh Warbler, Great Reed Warbler, Icterine Warbler.

1999: Pintail, Barred Warbler, Snipe.

2000: Melodious Warbler, Nightjar, Mute Swan ("*I was particularly concerned as I had for the first time put up five brand new Ronaldsay superfines in replacement of my old ones.*" – Jan Legg).

2001: Little Owl.

2002: Green Sandpiper, Black Redstart.

2003: Shelduck, Crossbill.

2004: Merlin, Bluethroat, Brambling.

2005: Gadwall, Buzzard, Coot, Paddyfield Warbler (first record for Wales).

2006: Woodcock, Dipper, Savi's Warbler, Western Bonelli's Warbler.

Selected 2007 season recoveries

Chiffchaff

ESI AM9888 was ringed as a 2 on 25 December 2005 at Burgillos, Bailen, Spain. It was then controlled as a 4M on 28 April 2006 at Formby CES, Merseyside, and then twice more that season (1,722km). It was recaught back at Formby CES on 5 April 2007, and twice more in that season as well.

This bird was presumably wintering in southern Spain, instead of making the long crossing of the Sahara. It is only the 12th Spanish-ringed Chiffchaff found in Britain & Ireland, with four of the previous 11 being in the last five years.

Lesser Whitethroat

BLB 9708512 was ringed as a 4 on 22 April 2006 at Uebersyren, Luxembourg. It was then controlled at Waterloo Thorns CES, Bedfordshire, on 14 May 2006.

Details of this bird have only just been received, but it is the first record of a movement of Lesser Whitethroat from Luxembourg to Britain & Ireland, and there have only been six from Belgium. This late spring arrival is typical of the species, as is the case with most migrants from the east.

Willow Warbler

BVV146 was ringed as a 3F on 26 August 2006 at Wintersett Reservoir, Wakefield, West Yorkshire. It was controlled on 3 May 2007 at Rainton Meadows CES, Tyne & Wear, (134km).

This bird was presumably on autumn passage when ringed and had returned to breed in Tyne & Wear.

Paxton Pits Blackcaps

Extra visits at Paxton Pits CES, Cambridgeshire, produced some very interesting early Blackcap movements, with birds controlled from the northwest, northeast and southeast!

V482294 was ringed as a 3M on 4 September 2007 at Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory, Kent, before being controlled at Paxton two days later (157km).

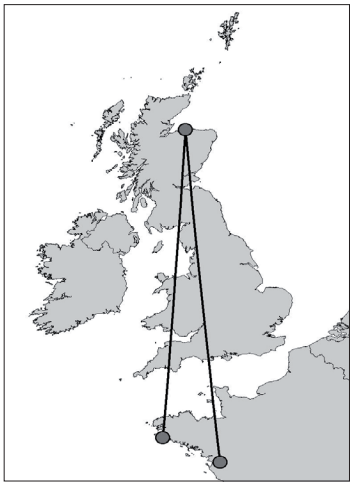
V378184 was ringed as a 3M on 8 August 2007 at Pensthorpe CES, Norfolk, being controlled at Paxton on 9 September (101km).

Slightly later in the year, T694723 was ringed as a 3 on 3 August 2007 at Hillhead, Strathclyde, and was controlled as a 3F at Paxton on 22 September (451km).

Sedge Warblers
T292268 was ringed as a 3J on 29 July 2006 at Loch Spynie CES, Grampian, and controlled on 23 August 2006 at Trunvel, Treogat, Finistere, France (1,086km).

T292291 was also ringed as a 3J at Loch Spynie CES, on 4 August 2006, and controlled just 18 days later on 22 August 2006 at Mars-Ouest, Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu, Loire-Atlantique, France (1,187 km).

Both of these are quite typical movements for Sedge Warblers, but the speed of their passage south is interesting. This also highlights how quickly 3J Sedge Warblers can leave breeding areas, and how careful we need to be analysing 3J records for the species.



Lesser Redpoll
T570433 was ringed as a 3 on an extra visit at Barry Links CES, Tayside, on 20 September 2005. It was then controlled as a 4M on 2 December 2006 at Turf Lea, Strines, Greater Manchester.

Sedge Warbler
NLA AJ61273 was ringed as a 3 on 19 August 2006 at Elburg, Kamperdijk, Netherlands, and controlled as a 4M on 17 July 2007 at Barry Links CES.

This is quite far north for a Sedge Warbler on autumn passage (more typical are the two movements above involving Loch Spynie), and is only the sixth Dutch-ringed Sedge Warbler to be found in Britain & Ireland.

Sedge Warbler
R373249 was ringed as a 3 on the very early date of 31 July 2004 at Dungeness Bird Observatory, Kent. It was then controlled as a breeding female at North Haugh CES, Lanarkshire, on 24 June 2006 (633km).

Garden Warbler
T370776 was ringed as a 3 at Shoreham, Sussex, on 21 August 2005 and controlled at North Haugh CES on 30 July 2006 (604km).

Both of these records show Lanarkshire bred birds ringed on autumn migration on the south coast.

Ashleworth ham: a most average CES

Looking back, the most average CES will have been running now for 10 years, operating 429 feet of netting in wet scrub and annually catch 137 adults and 215 juveniles. Ashleworth ham in Gloucestershire (site 395), is as close to this as we can get: a ten-year site running 360 feet of netting and catching an average of 152 adults and 265 juveniles annually. Here Mervyn Greening summarises his site, and the disaster that was 2007.

Ashleworth ham is a large area of flood plain, the name ham meaning 'an area that floods'. The traditional management of the meadows was the taking of a hay crop followed by grazing, usually by cattle, but sheep as well in recent years.

Our CES is in the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust reserve formerly known as "The Duckeries", an old meander of the River Severn that was very attractive to winter wildfowl. The hay meadows and associated drainage ditches have their own botanical interest, and the old hedges are particularly attractive to Sedge Warblers and Reed Buntings, both of which breed in high densities in a relatively small part of the ham. Redstarts provide much interest for us, breeding in the pollarded willows and present in good numbers (five singing males just in the ringing area in 2007).

A ringing session at Ashleworth is always preceded by the usual anxious scanning of the weather reports. Being part of a flat flood plain, and largely open fields, all nets run through hedges or remains of hedges, so the site is very susceptible to wind! Unfortunately in recent years, wind free days have nearly always been cloud free, sunny days, so some of the nets can be quite obvious. I am always praying for overcast conditions.

The day always starts 40 minutes before the sunrise time as published in the local paper, gathering at the end of the appropriately named "Dirty Lane". From there we trek across two large fields, and early in the season the ground can still be soggy or even under water. Later in the season, as the grasses and sedges get going, we wade through a sea of soaking grass, often taller than us by the end of June. Anyone not in full snorkelling gear is pretty uncomfortable by the time we reach base camp.

An average day, if such a thing exists, results in 49 birds being caught, with the range stretching from 15 to 173. We always finish at 10am, which strangely is the time that everything goes quiet here, no matter what the time of year. By closing at ten we are usually away from the site just in time for a local hostelry to open to enable essential fluids and nutrients to be replaced.

Most years we manage to get the full 12 visits in, occasionally some extra visits, and usually a good number of autumn visits, when we experience a good passage of Meadow Pipits and Reed Buntings. The 2007 season was an exceptional one for the number of visits missed, as for all of July, water stood up to 12 feet deep over the ham. Rain in May had caused the first ground nests to be washed out as well, so breeding largely just didn't happen in 2007. The effect of a prolonged, deep flood was incredibly damaging. By the time we regained access to the site there was little evidence of life. Everything was covered in silt, which was brown where it had dried, all bound together by the dead, flattened vegetation, and below the surface was a black anaerobic sludge. Gradually the plants made a comeback, and by November, all was green again. It remains to be seen what the long-term damage has been and, luckily, ten years of monitoring will allow close comparisons to be made.

The continuous rain during summer 2007 took a great toll on Ashleworth ham. Early spring growth (left) was swamped by flood water, and even after receding, left the site a barren, invertebrate free area (right).

Kimpton Mill: a full 25 years

There are six CE Sites that have been running since the very start of the scheme (four during the pilot years), and here Tom Kittle shares some thoughts on his long-running site in Hertfordshire.

When ringing in the 1970s, filling out annual returns involved mention of whether you had made any extra or less effort in catching any species. Comments might subsequently appear in the Ringing Report indicating whether you could use the ringing totals to judge whether your totals had followed the national trend. In those days, this was the nearest thing to CES before the first trials in 1981 at 20-30 sites (Kimpton Mill was site number 17).

Kimpton Mill CES is a small wetland site among extensive farmland and woodland, the latter allowed to survive in the past to maintain the shooting potential of the area. Keeping the site constant isn't easy, not only because of succession, but also natural events, such as drought and flooding. The latter, however, must affect other sites in a similar way and the effect on results should broadly reflect the real situation. From 1990 to 1992, a drought dropped the water table to more than a metre below ground level and the whole site became dry, making it possible to operate the site in boots rather than waders! Nearly ten years later, in 2001, an event at the other end of the spectrum occurred. After a 100-year absence, the River Kyme reappeared, with the water table breaking through the chalk several miles "upstream", flooding many acres of farmland, eventually being diverted down Kimpton High Street. The emergency flash flood lagoon walls were intentionally broken some 200 yards from the CES site and when I arrived I found I could not access some areas, even in waders.

Measured by the number of handlings, Great Tit and Blue Tit are the commonest species on the site, followed by Wren, Whitethroat, Dunnock, Robin, Blackcap and Long Tailed Tit. I described the site as being a small wetland site, so where are the wetland birds? Sedge Warbler comes 14th on the list but only on account of its occurrence before the drought years. Since then, there has only been the odd record despite the maintenance of net sites where they were commonly caught. Reed Bunting follows Sedge Warbler on the list and puts in a steady appearance except in the drought years.

Whitethroat, fourth on the list did not really make an appearance until the Sedge Warblers disappeared, and since 1995 I have looked forward to catching birds that I had ringed the previous year or even two years previously. It is only through CES methods that I can monitor these changes, and really start to understand the bird populations at Kimpton.

Tom putting up at Kimpton.

I will finish by mentioning some of the birds that turned up on a CES session but did not get caught in my nets. The Wryneck which spent all morning singing in the tops of the trees, the Little Egret that spent some time walking up and down a net ride and the Egyptian Goose that just last year made a neat hole in the top of a net. It is these birds that make up for the occasional visits with few, or even no, birds caught!

2007 species highlights

2007 seemed to be a very quiet year for species variety, with very few exceptional species being caught on CE sites.

Not exactly rare, but a CES Cuckoo is always memorable. This bird (right) was ringed on 29 July 2007 at North Haugh CES, Lanarkshire, and was, unfortunately, found dead just 25 days later at Whitley Bay, Tyne & Wear. This was a distance of 180km in just 25 days, and seems quite an early movement for the species.

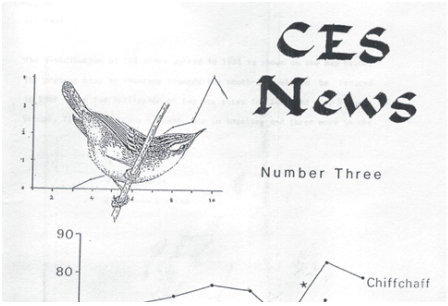
There have only been 137 recoveries of BTO-ringed Cuckoos, 11 of which were ringed in Scotland. Others have been found in The Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Germany, with two birds found in Italy.

CES News on the web

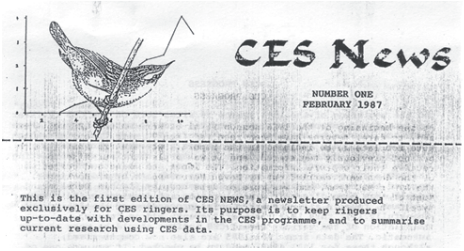
We've received a few requests recently for back issues of *CES News*, particularly of the very early issues. As some of these are very rare now, we've recently scanned all of the back issues and they are all now available on the website. It really is fascinating to look back at some of these, and to see how they've changed over the years.

Hopefully most of you will have already found the latest copies of *CES News* on the BTO website, so the back issues have been added to the same pages:

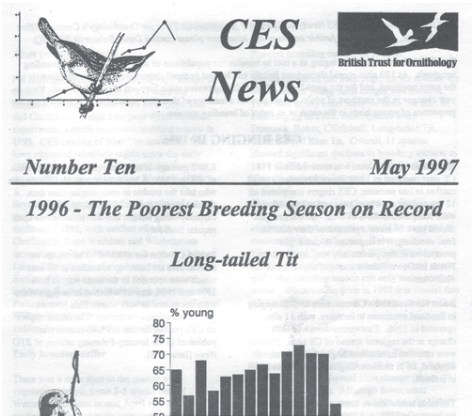
www.bto.org/goto/cesnews.htm



A slight change of design for issue number three in 1988



The very first *CES News* from February 1983



Another change of style in 1997, coincidentally also reporting what was then the poorest breeding season on record

CES birthdays

25 years – Formby (Dave Fletcher, SW Lancs RG); Kimpton Mill (Tom Kittle); Llangorse Lake (Jerry Lewis, Llangorse RG); Marsworth (Stuart Downhill, Aylesbury Vale RG); Tewinbury (Robin Cole); Treswell Wood (Chris du Feu, Treswell Wood IG).

20 years – Finningley Park (Dave Hazard, Doncaster RG); Flatt (Rob Shaw), Gosforth Park (Chris Redfern, Nat. Hist. Soc. Northumbria); Waterloo Thorns (Errol Newman, Ivel RG).

15 years – Abberton Reservoir II (Chris Harris, Abberton RG); Conon Islands (Mike Thompson & Ronnie Graham); Foxglove Covert (Tony Crease, Swaledale RG); Rye Meads South & North (Chris Dee, Rye Meads RG); Thatcham Marsh (Jan Legg, Newbury RG); Wraysbury Gravel Pits (Andrew Kingston, Runnymede RG).

10 years – Fogart (Philip Grosse); Ashleworth ham (Mervyn Greening, Severn Vale RG); Kenfig NNR (David Carrington); Hill of Fortrose (Brian Etheridge).

And welcome to new sites for 2007 - Kintbury (John Swallow); Higham Marsh (Roger Taylor, Dartford RG); Blackburn Meadow LNR (Kevin Bower, Sorby Breck RG); Rainton Meadow NR (Martin Hughes); Paxton Pits (Ian Dillon); Magor Marsh (Ian Vaughan); Misson Carr NR (Steve Wain); Llyn Ystumllyn (Kelvin Jones); Hadfast (Mark O'Brien, Lothian RG); Chard (Richard Ward-Smith); Bawntaaffe (Maura Culligan); Carse (David Philip).

CES News

CES at International Conference

Vanessa Cave will be presenting some initial results from her PhD project (see *CES News* 19) at the International Statistical Ecology Conference in St Andrews, Scotland, on 9–11 July 2008. A satellite of the International Biometric Conference held in Dublin the following week, the meeting will attract leading statisticians and ecologists from all over the world, and so an exciting programme is guaranteed.

Using records of *Acrocephalus* warblers ringed on CE sites for illustration, Vanessa will be describing how she has united the calculation of trends in abundance and productivity of the kind described in *CES News* into a range of population models. Through such models, she will be investigating the relationships between these trends and the species' over-winter mortality rates. Vanessa's first paper is shortly to appear in Environmental and Ecological Statistics, and a full summary of results from the project will be provided in the 2009 edition of *CES News*.

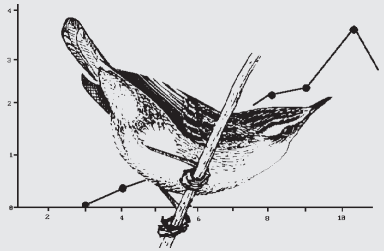
CES staff change

Sadly the CES Scheme has recently lost the services of Steve Freeman, who has driven many of the developments in the analysis of CES data over the last 10 years. We'd like to thank Steve for all of his work with the scheme, and wish him well in his new post at CEH.

Cetti's Warblers in print

Just in case this passed anyone by, the following paper was published in 2007, using CES (and other ringing) data to investigate the continued expansion of Cetti's Warblers in the UK.

Robinson, R.A., Freeman, S.N., Balmer, D.E. & Grantham, M.J. (2007) Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti:* analysis of an expanding population. *Bird Study* **54**, 230–235.



This is the twenty-first edition of *CES News*, the newsletter for the British Trust for Ornithology's Constant Effort Sites Scheme. For further copies, contact Mark Grantham at the address below.

BTO
The Nunnery
Thetford
Norfolk
IP24 2PU
Tel: 01842 750050
Fax: 01842 750030
Email: ces@bto.org

Editors
Mark Grantham and Rob Robinson

Desk Top Publishing
Jane Waters and Mark Grantham

Photos & illustrations
Ashleworth ham (Mervyn Greening), Kimpton Mill (David Waterhouse), Cuckoo (Iain Livingstone), Nightjar (D A Thelwell).

The Constant Effort Sites Scheme is supported by the BTO and the JNCC Partnership and is also part of the BTO Ringing Scheme which is funded by a partnership of the British Trust for Ornithology, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales, and also on behalf of the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland), The National Parks and Wildlife Service (Ireland) and the ringers themselves.