



Inspiring *(and being inspired by)* the next generation

At the end of May, we held our first BTO Bird Camp at our Thetford HQ. Generously funded by the Cameron Bespolka Trust, this event brought together birders aged 12 to 17 to share their passion and enthusiasm, and to learn more about birds, each other and BTO. Here, young birders **Luke Nash, Ben Moyes, Toby Carter, Mya Bambrick, Paddy Lewin, Zach Haynes** and **Elliot Montieth** describe their experiences of the weekend

27 May 2016. It was the event that 19 young birders across the country had been waiting for. Upon arrival, we made our way to the group of people many of us had met over Twitter. Later that evening we were treated to an introduction by none other than Paul Stancliffe, and a brief word from organiser Ieuan Evans. After that, we made our way to the campsite, listening to the distant hooting of a Tawny Owl coming from the trees alongside the nearby River Little Ouse.

We were out of our tipis and in the car by 5 o'clock on Saturday morning, on our way to the BTO's Nunnery Lakes reserve for a morning of bird ringing, nest recording and bird surveying. Nest recording was taught by Mike Toms, who showed us an active Willow Warbler nest. We were then told how to go about finding nests, simply by tapping a bush, and waiting to see if a bird moved or flew out. The first nest of the morning was a

Linnet's, followed by a Whitethroat's and the first Nunnery Lakes' Yellowhammer nest found in 2016.

At the ringing demo, we were introduced to Lee Barber and Justin Walker. Here, we ringed Reed Warblers, a Garden Warbler, Long-tailed Tits, Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers and loads more. It was great to see bird ringing being carried out and witness the step-by-step process that was fabulously demonstrated by the BTO team.

We then moved on to bird surveying, led by Su Gough. Our mission was to record all warbler species that we heard or saw, and clarify how we found them. It was something that most of us hadn't done before, so it was great to learn a new dimension of bird recording. The final activity of the morning was general birding, led by Paul Stancliffe. The highlight of this came via a hepatic Cuckoo and we also managed to see a good variety of birds and reptiles.

FAST LEARNERS

We spent Saturday afternoon at RSPB Lakenheath Fen, where the group split into two smaller groups as we all participated in our own bird race. By the end of race both teams has seen 56 species, with many highlights including close views of Cuckoo, Bittern and Bearded Tit. Even though the teams drew,

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▲ BTO Bird Campers trying to spot a Crane at Lakenheath Fen



Zach Haynes a satisfied customer!

I loved being at Bird Camp. Being with the group was really amazing as I got to talk about nature with people that love it just as much as I do, which is something I don't really get with my friends from school. It was also great to have so many amazing birders, moth trappers, and people that were really knowledgeable about all aspects of nature. The BTO hosts were really helpful and I was quite sad to leave, but I gained a great new set of friends that I can't wait to see again. Thank you everyone!!

◀ BTO Bird Campers got up bright and early each day

this was a brilliant way to interact with the other young birders and make friends with people.

As the sun set we arrived in Thetford Forest, enthusiastic to see Nightjars being tagged and ringed! First we met BTO's Greg Conway who explained GPS tagging. Suddenly the instantly recognisable sound of churring filled our ears. Fifteen minutes later, while Greg and Josie Hewitt (from A Focus On Nature) set the mist nets, a silhouette swooped above our heads. A Nightjar!

We could see a flickering light as Josie and Greg walked towards us with a bag in their hand. Greg took the bird out, and it was amazing to see the Nightjar so close

“While Greg and Josie Hewitt set the mist nets, a silhouette swooped above our heads. A Nightjar!”

up! Being a first summer male it wasn't GPS tagged, but Greg did ring the bird and take all the necessary measurements. We then went back to our campsite for all of four hours' sleep before heading off to Landguard Observatory the next morning.

BTO Director Andy Clements joined us at Landguard, where we were given a fascinating tour by Observatory staff Nigel Odin and Chris Bridge. A combination of the high winds and the migration season coming to a close meant that there wasn't much ringing, but the moth traps delivered, with species ranging from a Small Elephant Hawk Moth to the first Pearly Underwing of the year!

We then headed off to Hollesley Common to search for some archetypal heathland specialists. Almost as soon as we arrived we all got great views of a magnificent Dartford Warbler flying to and from its nest. We also saw a Kestrel and Stonechats as well as hearing Skylarks and a Woodlark in full song!

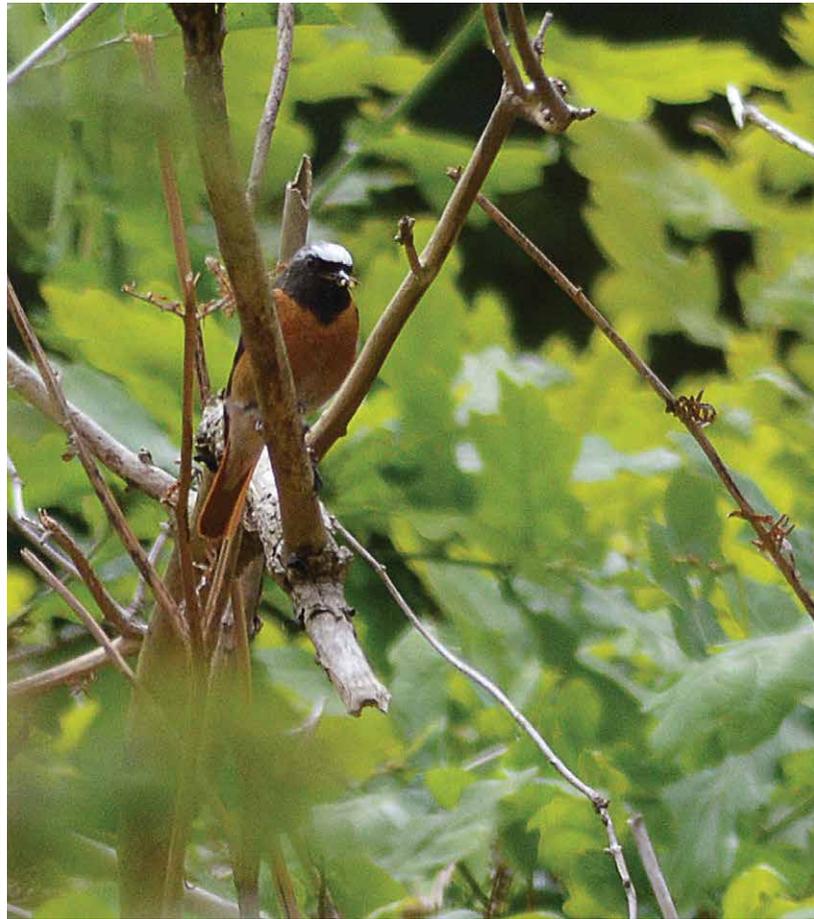
We then made two more stops. The first

▼ Examining the wing to identify this Nightjar in Thetford Forest as a first year male bird



▼ BTO Bird Camp was a lot of fun for the young birders and BTO staff alike

▶ A male Redstart brings food to its nest at a breeding site in Suffolk



was to see one of Britain's most beautiful birds at his nest – a male Redstart! Next was RSPB Boyton Marshes where, we were informed, you couldn't fail to see a Turtle Dove. Just when everyone was heading back to the minibus a few of the group caught a glimpse of a pair of Turtle Doves shooting overhead.

After lunch, we stopped off in the King's Forest to add one last species to our list – Tree Pipit. After three Woodlark sightings, a small brown bird appeared. Woodlark seemed the likely ID but, with the help of 20 pairs of binoculars we could clearly see that it was a Tree Pipit! That took us to our final total of 108 species for just the one weekend!

A MAGICAL WEEKEND

So there it is folks, BTO Bird Camp 2016, a magical weekend, jam-packed with ebullience, education, birding and friendship. Massive thank to all those who made BTO Bird Camp 2016 possible; the BTO's Ieuan Evans, Paul Stancliffe, Viola Ross-Smith, Su Gough, Lee Barber, Andy Clements, Mike Toms, Justin Walker and Greg Conway. Huge thanks also to the Landguard wardens Nigel and Chris for giving us a superb tour and to David Walsh, Josie Hewitt and Mark Haynes for accompanying the group throughout the weekend. And of course we must thank A Focus on Nature (AFON) and Next

Generation Birders (NGB).

Now it's time to say thank you to the Cameron Bespolka Trust, which was set up after 16 year old birder Cameron Bespolka sadly lost his life back in 2013. Cameron had a global reputation for both his passion for birds and knowledge. If it wasn't for the Trust, then the funding for the BTO Bird Camp would have never happened, so on behalf of everyone at the BTO and the 19 lucky young birders from across the country, thank you. ■

The Cameron Bespolka Trust paid for BTO Bird Camper Amy Hall to attend the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's 'Young Birders Event' in July 2016. Read about Amy's experiences in the next *BTO News*.



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nextgenerationbirders.blogspot.co.uk

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▼ The BTO Bird Campers saw nesting Ringed Plovers on the beach at Landguard

