

Westbere Marsh Bird Monitoring Report 2012

A report on behalf of the Kent Stour Ringing Group



This document is a summary of bird monitoring carried out at Westbere, near Sturry, Kent during 2012.

Introduction

Ringing has been carried out at Westbere for over 25 years. The area to the north of the Boot Lake, which lies on the western edge of the Wild Spaces Site, was ringed under the BTO Constant Effort Scheme (CES) from 1984 until 2006. Marked declines in the numbers of birds being caught on the CES site lead to this ringing project being suspended. Drying out of the reedbed and establishment of willow scrub are factors considered to have led in part to these declines.

General incidental bird ringing has continued since in two areas at Westbere:

- Around the lakes and reedbeds at Westbere (Reedbed site)
- To the north of the site close to the railway line (Railway site).

In 2008 part of the eastern end of the site was purchased by the Kent Wildfowling and Conservation Association (KWCA). They, in agreement with Natural England and supported by funding from The Wild Spaces Fund, have started management of the site in order to retain the reedbed habitat.

From 2009 onwards exploratory bird ringing was undertaken on the Wild Spaces Site to the east of the former CES site. During this period extensive management has taken place, in particular:

- clearing of the existing ditches
- repair and maintenance of the sluices, enabling more effective control of the water levels
- creation of two pool areas at intersections of ditches
- removal of trees

The Kent Stour Ringing Group have been monitoring the birds using Westbere Marsh to contribute to local, national, and international population monitoring projects. All ringing sessions are led by fully licensed British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) trained bird ringers, qualified to safely trap, identify, ring, examine, measure, and release wild birds.

Ornithological Objectives

We plan to record bird species using the area, either by trapping and ringing or by sight/call recognition, with a focus on species of conservation concern, to determine long-term trends of bird activity on the marsh, reflecting the results of local management and national and international influences on bird populations. To do this we plan:

- to establish a basis for regular ringing at the site
- to provide baseline information for monitor the future bird populations breeding at and passing through the site.
- to provide information in respect of the breeding bird population
- to assess the potential for re-establishing CES ringing at a future date

Trapping the birds offers several advantages over sight records:

- A lightweight metal ring with a unique identification number can be attached to the leg so that, if the bird is caught again or found dead in later years, data can be provided on its movement and longevity. Marking the birds as individuals also provides a good indication of abundance on site.
- Examining the bird in the hand provides data on age/sex ratios in the population that cannot be gathered in any other way, and informs the BTO and their European partners about general population trends and breeding success each year that can be compared with long-term data to monitor the status of the species.
- There is a possibility of catching birds that have been ringed elsewhere to inform us about their historical movements and behaviour, or retrapping birds in future years that have been ringed previously at Westbere Marsh, to provide data on how faithful they are to the site.

Ringling during 2012

Several factors impacted on the ringling effort during 2012 with the result that fewer birds were caught during the season than in 2011 (210 caught in 2012, 685 caught in 2011).

1. The proposed early season ringling along the railway line was abandoned as British Rail undertook clearance work during March and April, immediately adjacent to the net rides used during 2011. Trees and scrub were removed and new footpaths installed each side of the railway line, connecting to a relocated crossing point some 300m to the east of the original, and located adjacent to the eastern section of the netting site. It is unlikely that ringling will continue at this location.

Consideration will be given to alternative locations nearby but the success of ringling here will depend on the levels of disturbance arising from use of the new footpath and crossing.

2. The weather during 2012, particularly during July and August, was very wet and windy. This resulted in fewer opportunities to mistnet and ring later in the year.
3. Poor breeding resulting in relatively few young birds.
4. There were further changes to the condition of the reed bed. This is to be expected as the new management regime is being implemented. Whilst notable changes within the marsh are ongoing we will be unable to establish a CES project, but may be able to do so when the management settles into a routine.

Ringling Data

The following table provides a record of the species and numbers of birds ringling at Westbere Marsh during 2012 or caught after ringling at the site in earlier years.

Sessions:

Because of the of clearance work and realignment of the footpath by British Rail, no visits were made to the Railway site during 2012.

Six visits were made to the Reedbed site during the period July and August. This is the period when ringling is expected to be most productive as the marsh should have a population of both adult and young birds. The details of the dates are included in Table 1. A total of 210 birds were caught of which 185 were new for the year. 12 were birds re-caught within the season, and 12 were birds ringling in previous years and 1 reed warbler was controlled having been ringling in August 2010 at Icklesham, nr Rye.

Table 1: Ringing sessions 2012 at the Reedbed site, Westbere.

Date	New birds	Westbere Retraps	Controls	Total
7 July	50	3		
15 July	32	5		
29 July	36	4		
5 August	17	5		
11 August	20	3	1	
19 August	30	4		
Totals	185	24	1	210

Birds caught:

The totals of birds caught at the Westbere site in 2012 are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Species ringing totals 2012 - Westbere

Species	Ringed 2012	Ringed previously at Westbere	Ringed elsewhere
15 Species			
Kingfisher	1		
Wren	9	2	
Robin	2	1	
Cetti's Warbler	1		
Sedge Warbler	48	4	
Reed Warbler	50	12	1
Whitethroat	14		
Garden Warbler	1		
Blackcap	4		
Chiffchaff	12		
Willow Warbler	3		
Long-tailed Tit	5	2	
Blue Tit	2		
Great Tit	8		
Reed Bunting	25	3	
Totals	185	24	1

Of the birds ringed previously at Westbere, a reed warbler was first ringed in 2009, 2 long-tailed tits in 2010 and 1 wren, 1 sedge warbler, 6 reed warblers and 1 reed bunting were ringed in 2011.

The numbers of reed buntings caught did not decline proportionately to the reduced ringing effort during the season. 25 birds were ringed compared with 32 in 2011. However, of the 25 birds, 13 (over 50%), were adult birds. This does indicate the poor breeding season as only 20 to 25 % of the capture might be expected to be adults in a 'normal' year.

Control Data

Only one bird ringed at Westbere was reported back during 2012. This was a sedge warbler which was controlled (ie caught, ring read and bird released to continue its migration), in France.

One bird ringed at Icklesham near Rye, in 2010 was controlled at Westbere during 2012.

Birds ringed at Westbere and subsequently caught elsewhere:

Sedge Warbler

L245749	3J	10/07/2011	Westbere 2: 51°18'N 1°9'E (TR2060) (Kent)
	R	29/07/2012	Tour aux Moutons Donges Loire-Atlantique: 47°19'N 2°4'W (France) 500km SSW 1 yr 19days

Birds ringed elsewhere and subsequently caught at Westbere:

Reed Warbler

L381126	3	05/08/2010	Icklesham: 50°54'N 0°40'E (TQ8815) (East Sussex)
	R	11/08/2012	Westbere Marshes: 51°18'N 1°8'E (TR1960) (Kent) 55km NE 2 yrs 6days

Note: R caught and released by ringer

Summary

Ringing surveys at Westbere Marsh during 2012 provided data in respect of 15 species of bird, and contributed to the national monitoring of species of conservation concern.

Continuation of monitoring is important as this provides a useful comparison of species, numbers, breeding success and age structure within the population each year.

The sympathetic management of Westbere Marsh provides a greater range of opportunities than might be expected from a more intensively managed land holding, and is an important and valuable resource for wildlife.

The group would like to thank the KWCA for giving permission to monitor birds on Westbere Marsh and for their support and encouragement.