

Westbere Marsh Bird Monitoring Report 2013

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 2013.

Introduction

Bird 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 2013

There was very little ringling at Westbere during 2013.

Year	Number of Birds Processed
2013	30
2012	210
2011	685

Several factors impacted on the ringling effort.

1. The early season ringling along the railway line was abandoned in 2012 after British Rail undertook clearance work and relocated the crossing point some 300m to the east of the original. This site provided relatively dry access early in the season enabling ringling. There has been no landscape work to reinstate shrub and tree cover in this area and with additional disturbance by users of the footpath no further ringling is anticipated here in the foreseeable future.
2. Management works resulted in burning of areas of the reedbed such that the established net rides were unsuitable for ringling. When re-grown the reeds should provide productive ringling in future years.
3. The weather during 2013, as during 2012, was wet and windy. This resulted in fewer opportunities to mist net.
4. Poor breeding resulting in relatively few young birds.

Sessions:

Only 3 ringling sessions were carried out during 2013.

The first on 1st April 2013 was to try and catch snipe which were present in reasonable numbers within areas of the marsh where tree clearance and ditching works were being undertaken. The catch was experimental and resulted in the ringling of a single water rail.

2 visits were made to the reedbed on the 1 June and 30 June 2013.

Only 7 birds were caught on the first visit and 8 on the second. To put this into context, the

lowest catch during 2012 was 22 birds and the highest 53!

On the 1 June the catch included 6 new birds and a retrap blue tit. This was a bird in breeding condition. It was originally ringed as a pullus in a nest box on the nearby Brett works on the 14 May 2012.

On the 30 June the catch included 6 new birds and 2 retraps, a whitethroat first ringed at the site on 23 July 2009 and a reed warbler first ringed at the site on 26 July 2009.

During site visits, there were relatively few birds noted in the reed bed. In particular there were no reed buntings seen or heard during the ringing visits. For the record 24 out of 210 birds ringed at the site in 2012 were reed buntings, i.e. 11% of the catch. It is interesting that this species had almost disappeared from our ringing site at Stodmarsh so it is not thought that the reduced numbers at Westbere had anything to do with management works.

Birds caught:

The totals of birds caught at the Westbere site in 2013 are shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Species ringing totals 2013 - Westbere

Species	Ringed 2013	Caught previously at Westbere
11 Species		
Water Rail	1	
Kingfisher	1	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1	
Robin	1	
Cetti's Warbler	1	
Sedge Warbler	1	
Reed Warbler	4	1
Whitethroat	1	1
Blackcap	1	
Chiffchaff	1	
Blue Tit		1
Totals	13	3

Control Data

During 2013 we had a report of a sedge warbler ringed at Westbere on 29 July 2012 being controlled, (i.e. caught, ring read and bird released to continue its migration), at Mouscron, Hainault in Belgium on the 24 August 2012.

Birds ringed at Westbere and subsequently caught elsewhere:

Sedge Warbler

L245749	3J	10/07/2011	Westbere Marshes: 51°18'N 1°8'E (TR1960) (Kent)
	R	29/07/2012	Mouscron, Hainault: 50°44'N 3°13'E (Belgium) 159km ESE 26days

Note: R caught and released by ringer

Summary

Ringling surveys at Westbere Marsh during 2013 provided data in respect of 11 species of bird, and made a small contribution 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.