

The breeding birds of Kelling Heath 2013

A big disappointment this year has been the complete lack of any **Stonechats** during the breeding season. Last year's colour-ringed breeding male remained on the heath until the first snow in mid-January and was then not seen again. A female appeared for 10 days in March and an un-ringed male for 4 days in April. After that - no more!

Most of our **Dartford Warblers** survived a few spells of cold winter weather and 2 pairs are known to have successfully raised 2 broods each. Fledged young from all 4 broods were seen but it was not possible to confirm numbers. The adults and juveniles have proved harder to find during this autumn than in previous years.

There were 2 pairs of **Woodlark**, both of which had 2 broods and we were able to find the nests and colour-ring pulli. We believe a 3rd pair may have nested in the edge of a field adjoining the heath. Regrettably a fledgling was found dead on bare soil beside a footpath. It showed no obvious signs of injury and we believe it was accidentally trodden on. After seeing 2 Woodlarks on 23rd July I saw no more until I found 2 on 30th September.

I am confident 2 pairs of **Turtle Dove** bred, possibly 3 pairs, but they are so difficult to find when the trees are in full leaf. No young were seen and the last adult was seen on 19th August.

Nightjars are almost impossible to count accurately or find proof of breeding. I heard 7 males churring from separate areas at the end of July and this could mean they were on breeding territory. This could therefore allow an estimate of 6 or 7 pairs but will not tell us how successful they were.

There was an obvious reduction in the number of breeding pairs of some other species. **Linnets** were down to c20 pairs (c30 last year). **Common Whitethroats** were down by 50% to 4 or 5 pairs, only 1 pair of **Bullfinches** known to succeed and no evidence of successful **Blackcaps**. **Yellowhammers** did well, 7 or 8 pairs, and a few young **Chiffchaff** and **Willow Warblers** were found. I saw what I believe was a family party of **Garden Warblers**, 4 birds together, but I could not distinguish adults from young. **Dunlocks**, **Wrens**, **Goldcrests** and **Tit** species showed no obvious drop in numbers of adults but very few young were found.

A pair of **Mallard** was seen entering and leaving an area of heather on several occasions. We saw no evidence of breeding and it would surely not be an ideal place to nest!

John Wagstaff with help from Noel Elms