

Dartford Warblers on Kelling Heath.

The Dartford Warbler, *Sylvia undata*, was first proven to breed in Norfolk when 2 pairs were seen nest-building on Kelling Heath in the summer of 2007 and later, young successfully fledged from both nests. An active nest was located the following year but was not visited for the purpose of nest recording as it was considered that to do so, would cause sufficient habitat damage to incur the risk of exposing the nest to predators. This proved to be a sensible decision and the young fledged successfully in due course. In 2009, up to 3 males spent the entire breeding season in vigorous and far-ranging song flights but a female was never proven to put in an appearance and no young were seen. Reports of a female present in the breeding season may have been due to one of the males lacking the usual intensity of grey and wine-red in the plumage.

It was in 2010 before a nest was located considered safe to visit for the purposes of nest recording and to colour-ring the nestlings. It would be irresponsible to try to deny that visiting any nest poses the potential risk of exposing the nest to predators or the parent birds to desert which explains why a licensed bird ringer needs an additional permit endorsement to ring nestlings and a further endorsement to ring nestlings of species given special protection under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in which Dartford Warblers are included. These additional permissions are not given unless the applicant is able to provide proof of the necessary experience with the species involved.

While the presence of breeding Dartford Warblers on Kelling Heath is widely known, it is considered that explicit details of nest locations, hatching and fledging dates should not be in the public domain at present if concern for the bird's continued welfare is to be paramount. This and other detailed information is on record for posterity in the files of the British Trust for Ornithology and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. However, it is considered appropriate to share the images of Dartford Warbler nests and nestlings which accompany this article. Apart from the image of the cock's nest taken by the writer, the others are the work of Dave Nye. Evidence suggests that other images may exist of Dartford Warbler nests/nestlings on Kelling Heath but these would have been taken illegally and it is doubted if the photographer/s would be willing to risk prosecution by putting their images in the public domain.

Noel Elms.
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Cock's nest, a number of these flimsy structures are built by the male of which the female chooses one to complete and lay her eggs in. The white feathers around the rim, typical of a Dartford Warbler nest are already evident at this stage.



Brood of 5 nestlings, 5-7 days old.



Nestling, 5-7 days old.