

The breeding birds of Kelling Heath 2009

An unusual year disappointing in some ways but interesting and rewarding in others. First, the bad news:
- No positive evidence of breeding Woodlarks, Tree Pipits, Dartford Warblers or Turtle Doves.

Woodlark. Up to 3 were seen in song flight over the heath on several days in March and April but they drifted away from the heath before dropping down onto farmland. Very few sightings of birds feeding on the heath. On May 8th and 11th I saw a pair with 2 fully-grown young in the horse paddocks just outside the heath boundary. Tree Pipit. I neither saw nor heard any but other local birders reported brief sightings of singles. Dartford Warbler. Up to 3 males and a female during the winter and early spring but only up to 2 males seen during the summer. I understand breeding numbers elsewhere in England have fallen dramatically this year. Turtle Dove. On 22nd May I saw and heard 3 males apparently holding territory and on several later occasions saw singles or pairs in flight. A lone juvenile in the car park on 22nd July may have been raised on the heath.

Now for some better news. I believe at least 15 pairs of Linnets nested successfully, of which 1 brood from each of 6 pairs was ringed in the nest using metal rings. This species is on the 'Red List', being of 'High conservation concern', and it was good that the ringer, Noel Elms, was able to submit 6 nest record cards to the BTO. Yellowhammers also did well with 7 pairs found with young. At least the same number of Common Whitethroat pairs were seen with youngsters. The 3 male Lesser Whitethroats which spent the summer on the heath may have paired, and bred, as may the 2 male Garden Warblers.

From my 12 visits for Nightjars I am certain I found at least 7 males on territory and so maybe 7 pairs bred. Females were seen occasionally early on but later in the season I found it difficult to identify any juveniles.

Several family parties of Blue, Great and Coal Tits were seen and a flock of more than 24 Long-tailed Tits provided entertainment in early autumn but may not have bred on the heath. There were probably 5 or 6 pairs each of Greenfinches, Chaffinches and Blackcaps and, I suspect, a similar number of pairs of Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers but I saw no young of these 2 species. A pair of Bullfinches was seen with 2 young. I also feel certain that a few pairs of Wrens and Dunnocks were successful but they are not easy to watch. They spend so much time on the ground or under cover that I wonder why they were given wings in the first place!

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