

The breeding birds of Kelling Heath 2011

A reasonably successful breeding season this year bearing in mind the prolonged period of very dry spring weather which must have adversely affected plants and therefore the number of insects available as bird food.

Parent birds will have been weakened by struggling to find enough food for themselves: and their young. The young will have

suffered from erratic growth rates and possibly death from starvation. Also let's not forget the severity of the cold winter which must have affected the survival rates of birds of breeding age.

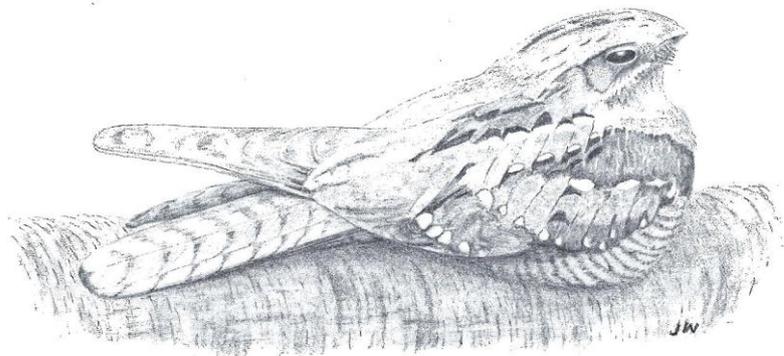
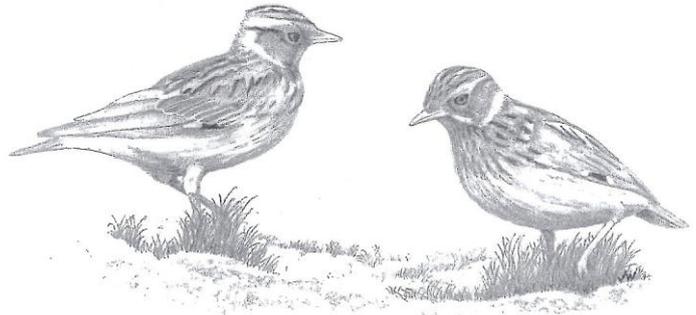
I am pleased to report that 2 pairs of Woodlarks, 2 pairs of Dartford Warblers and 1 pair of Stonechats' bred successfully this year. Not so pleased, though, that no more than 3 adult Turtle Doves were seen or heard during any 1 of my visits during spring and early summer. On 9th July I saw a pair of adults with a juvenile - my only evidence that breeding may have occurred on the heath.

On 1 evening visit for Nightjars in late June I watched a female and 2 males in flight whilst 3 other males were churring from other parts of the heath. This was my best total from 15 evening visits. As birds were seen, or churring was heard, from the same areas on each visit I assume there were up to 7 breeding territories involved. Maybe 7 pairs bred, hopefully with success, but of course I cannot be certain.

As with last year Linnets were the most numerous breeding birds with at least 24 nesting pairs and subsequently large numbers of successfully fledged young

were seen. At least half a dozen pairs of

Yellowhammers and Common Whitethroats were seen with juveniles. I saw



no Lesser Whitethroats this year and no Tree Pipits although 2 were seen by a fellow birder on 9th May.

Several species which I am certain did not do so well this year, compared to last year, were Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Greenfinch and Chaffinch. Maybe no more than 3 or 4 pairs of each from my evidence. Although I heard 3 singing Garden Warblers, apparently holding territories, I have no proof that they bred. What I was able to prove, however, on 1st September was that a pair of Bullfinches had produced 3 juveniles.

Whilst I must confess I don't make a conscious effort to count them I am certain the numbers of Tit species, Goldcrests, Wrens and Dunnocks were somewhat reduced this year.

John Wagstaff