

The breeding birds of Kelling Heath 2012

Unlike last year, with its very dry spring weather, this year some species suffered from the continual wet weather early in the season and then the rapid growth of vegetation after a warm spell.

This year, as last year, only 1 pair of Stonechat bred. The male of this year's pair bred last year with his female sibling but, after spending last winter on the heath, he found an unrelated female this time! They appear to have been adversely affected by the weather. A nest with 5 eggs was found in April but this contained only 3 nestlings in May. These 3 were colour ringed and are known to have successfully fledged. The second nest containing 6 eggs was found in June and 6 nestling were colour ringed in July. After fledging, 1 youngster was found dead near the nest and only 3 others are known to have definitely survived. No third nest was attempted.

Woodlarks appeared to breed late this year, unless we missed the first broods! A nest with 4 eggs in May held only 2 youngsters later that month. These were both colour ringed, as were 4 from a different pair found in June. A male Woodlark, colour ringed on the heath last year as a pullus, was seen flying with food in mid July but the nest site was not located.

Although we have no idea how many young fledged, we know that 2 pairs of Dartford Warblers bred successfully and a pair seen with 4 young late in the season may have been a 3rd, but late breeding, pair.

There were 2 pairs of Turtle Doves and 2 other males apparently on territory but as usual no positive signs of breeding. Nor was there proof of how many Nightjars, if any, bred successfully but on one of the evenings when jet aircraft found somewhere else to play I counted 9 males. I am confident that a few pair bred.

Once again Linnets were the most common and productive breeders with maybe as many as 30 pairs. Something in the region 8 to 10 pairs of both Yellowhammers and Common Whitethroats are thought to have done well but breeding Tree Pipits are surely a thing of the past. Bullfinches did well, with 3 pairs, on different parts of the heath being seen with young. Only 2 pair of Blackcaps are known to have produced young but there was no evidence of success by Garden Warblers.

Several visiting birders commented on the general lack of birds on the heath this year. I hope they are not blaming us!

John Wagstaff with help from Noel Elms