

Birds at Borough Fen Decoy in 1960-62

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MUCH has been written about the duck ringing at Borough Fen, Peakirk, which is, of course, the main function of the decoy. The Decoy is however very attractive to "the little brown jobs", being an isolated wood in a largely fen area. The Decoy is composed of fourteen and a half acres of mixed wood. Willow and Elder predominate, but there are also a few of the following trees: Ash, Oak, Poplar, Aspen, Hazel, Hornbeam, Elm, Conifers and a few introduced fruit trees. Evergreen shrubs include Holly, Laurel (three types), Privet, Box, Lonicera, and Rhododendron. This superb habitat surrounds a two and a half acre pond, which in turn contains about half an acre of Common Reed. The Decoy is situated half a mile south of the river Welland, which is a well-used migration route. The fens end four miles to the west and the Wash is only twenty miles away at the nearest point. 106 different species of birds have been recorded during 1960-62, including twelve forms of the Anatidae which I do not propose to discuss here. 2,666 birds of 51 species have been ringed, producing 41 recoveries, of 12 different species, so far.

A daily census has been kept on observatory lines since 1961 and a monthly return is sent to the B.T.O. for inclusion in the "Inland Observation Point" scheme. Nest record cards have also been completed for two years although the breeding species are not very co-operative, laying their eggs in the late spring and early summer when the Decoy maintenance prevents full coverage of all breeding birds. The sedge, nettle and bramble patches are particularly attractive to warblers, and seven species have bred in the past three years. The reed bed houses about fifteen pairs of Reed Warblers and provides a roost for two to three hundred Swallows in September and October.

Small bird ringing is restricted in the summer by the amount of mowing and general repairs. Most of the warblers ringed were caught in mist nets set about six o'clock in the evening and left up until dark. A number of Swallows were also taken this way. Small bird movement in the autumn also coincides with the influx of ducks, but a mist net set near a favourite roost takes the bulk of the Turdidae ringed.

I built a Crow-type trap on the north side of the Decoy measuring 6 feet by 6 feet. This is kept baited most of the winter and can be permanently closed, or the door tripped from fifty yards away. This has been particularly successful for mixed finches and in December, 1961 I trapped 66 Greenfinches at one pull of the string. Catching in this way the bird's feeding activities are only disrupted for a very short time. I do not use mist nets in the hard weather when every minute spent feeding is vital to the birds. Cage-type traps do not upset the birds so much as mist nets. A few sacks of combine cleanings are stored for such times so that easy food and drink is available whenever the trap is in use. By providing this I feel less guilty, as I have ringed and released birds in the hut one hundred yards away and have re-trapped them feeding inside the trap five minutes later. One male Blackbird, ring 45181, takes up residence in the trap about November and stays until the spring.

A number of birds are caught in the Decoy pipes, flushing down with the ducks when shown over. All the Moorhens, Woodcock and Herons were taken by this method.

The following is an abridged account of all species ringed in the Decoy from March, 1960 to December, 1962, with the number of recoveries, if any, so far reported. For the sake of completeness I have included a few recoveries up to January, 1963. Only birds that have travelled more than five miles have been written up in full. The numbers of each species ringed and recovered are shown in brackets after the scientific name. For example (71 : 0) should be read as 71 ringed, none yet recovered.

- HERON *Ardea cinerea*. (3 : 1). Herons feed regularly in the decoy. I have only observed them taking frogs, as there are no fish in the pond other than eels.
514373 1st W. Ringed 23.8.62. Recovered Stonea, March. Cambs., 19 miles ESE. 6.10.62.
- MOORHEN *Gallinula chloropus*. (71 : 0). An apparently static population of about 40 birds have only produced 7 re-traps in three years.
- KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*. (1 : 0). Bred in a disused Magpie nest in 1960.
- WATER RAIL *Rallus aquaticus*. (4 : 0). Regular winter visitor.
- SNIPE *Capella gallinago*. (3 : 0). Recorded in every month of the year. Peak numbers in the autumn.
- WOODCOCK *Scolopax rusticola*. (2 : 0). Autumn visitor.
- STOCK DOVE *Columba oenas*. (1 : 0). Arrive in the late autumn, building up to a maximum of about 200 and staying until the Wood Pigeon flocks break up in the spring.
- WOOD-PIGEON *Columba palumbus*. (149 : 15). Flocks of up to 1500 roost in the Decoy wood. Most of the birds are taken in the pipes when feeding on the landings with the ducks. These Pigeons spoil many potential catches by flying out of the trees when I try to flush feeding duck in the late afternoon.
3068329 Juv. Ringed 4.9.60. Recovered 18.2.61. Wormgay, Kings Lynn, Norfolk. 30 miles E.
3068316 Ad. Ringed 6.8.60. Recovered 15.4.61. Cabourne, Caister, Lincs. 55 miles N.
3068389 F. G. Ringed 6.10.61. Recovered 25.11.61. Holme, Huntingdon. 12 miles S.
3068324 Juv. Ringed 30.8.60. Recovered 3.2.62. Stoke-by-Clare, Nr. Haverhill, Suffolk. 51 miles SE.
3068390 Juv. Ringed 12.10.61. Recovered 13.8.62. Kimbolton, Hants. 24 miles S.
3080647 F. G. Ringed 19.12.62. Recovered 8.1.63. Fleet, nr. Holbeach, Lincs. 17 miles NE.
3080656 1st W. Ringed 10.12.62. Recovered 9.1.63. Wigtoft, Boston, Lincs. 20 miles NNE.
- TURTLE-DOVE *Streptopelia turtur*. (11 : 1). Four breeding pairs in 1961, five in 1962.
2037511 Ad. Ringed 1.7.61. Recovered 1.8.62. Waltham Abbey, Essex. 65 miles S.
- BARN-OWL *Tyto alba*. (1 : 0). Roosts in ivy-covered Willow trees and big Laurel bushes.
- TAWNY OWL *Strix aluco*. (1 : 0). Bred in the Decoy in 1961 and 1962.
- KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*. (4 : 0). Bred in 1959 and 1960.
- GREEN WOODPECKER *Picus viridis*. (1 : 1). Irregular visitor.
2037517. Ringed 29.9.61. Recovered 22.12.62. Market Deeping, Lincs. 4 miles NW.
- SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*. (62 : 0). Caught in mist nets over the pond at dusk in July. The presence of duck prevent the reed-bed roost being exploited to the full.
- CARRION-CROW *Corvus corone*. (3 : 0). Three pulli ringed in 1962: one later fell from the nest and was fed on the ground by both parents. Items of food noted include a Red-legged Partridge, nine Pheasant eggs and seven Wood-Pigeon eggs.
- JAY *Garrulus glandarius*. (2 : 0). A pair resident 1959 to 1961. Bred in 1961 and then disappeared. One irregular in 1962.
- GREAT TIT *Parus major*. (38 : 1, local).
- BLUE TIT *Parus caeruleus*. (53 : 0). Resident population of about 20.
- COAL TIT *Parus ater*. (2 : 0). Irregular visitor.
- MARSH TIT *Parus palustris*. (1 : 0). Only this one ringed specimen identified.
- WILLOW TIT *Parus atricapillus*. (16 : 0). Two pairs resident. Has bred each year since 1958.
- LONG-TAILED TIT *Aegithalos caudatus*. (23 : 0). Semi-resident. Has bred each year since 1958. Leaves the Decoy in very hard weather.
- TREE-CREEPER *Certhia familiaris*. (11 : 0). Two pairs present in 1960 and 1961. Not recorded since April, 1962.
- WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*. (36 : 0). Ties with Tree Sparrow as the commonest breeding species.
- MISTLE THRUSH *Turdus viscivorus*. (10 : 0). Has laid eggs in the four years 1959-1962 but the nest has been robbed on each occasion.

- FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris*. (23 : 1). 67506 X. Ringed 30.10.60. Recovered 29.7.62. Partaharju, nr. Pieksämäki, (Mikkeli) Finland. This is the first British ringed Fieldfare to be recovered in Finland, although the reverse has occurred several times.
- SONG THRUSH *Turdus ericetorum*. (207 : 1, local).
- REDWING *Turdus musicus*. (46 : 0). All trapped Redwings were measured in order to separate birds of the Icelandic and Continental races. None of the Icelandic race has yet been found.
- BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*. (423 : 10). Unusual eggs were found in two nests in 1962. These were pale blue in colour with no flecks or spots. The blue was nearer the Song Thrush colour than the green/blue normal base of the Blackbird's egg. Both clutches were being incubated at the same time, so that there is no possibility of one female being responsible. One clutch hatched and the young were successfully reared. Unfortunately the second nest was robbed before hatching.
67783 X. Ringed 14.1.61. Recovered 29.10.62. Djursdala, nr. Vimmerby, (Kalmer) Sweden.
- ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*. (61 : 0). The population in the Decoy is 6 pairs. Four birds ringed when full-grown in 1960 are still being regularly re-trapped.
- REED-WARBLER *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. (36 : 0). About fifteen breeding pairs in the Decoy. This is the only species I have found as host to a Cuckoo.
- SEDGE-WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*. (6 : 0). Two breeding pairs in 1961; possibly three pairs in 1962.
- BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*. (16 : 0). Four breeding pairs in 1961. Only one pair in 1962.
- GARDEN WARBLER *Sylvia borin*. (7 : 0). Bred in 1961 and 1962.
- WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*. (36 : 0). Commonest warbler recorded in the Decoy.
- LESSER WHITETHROAT *Sylvia curruca*. (2 : 0). One male ringed in each of the past two years. Assumed to be breeding as they are present from May through the summer.
- WILLOW-WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*. (19 : 0). At least four pairs bred in 1961 and three pairs in 1962.
- CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita*. (4 : 0). Passage migrant. No record of breeding in the Decoy. Earliest appearance 13th March, 1961.
- GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*. (4 : 0). Arrive with the migrant Turdidæ and move on as the weather hardens.
- SPOTTED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa striata* (18 : 0). Breeds in the Decoy.
- DUNNOCK *Prunella modularis*. (82 : 0).
- STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*. (46 : 1, local). Six nests found in 1961, five in 1962. 2-300 roost in the reed bed in September and October.
- GREENFINCH *Chloris chloris*. (386 : 7, including 3 local).
28361 S. Ringed 31.8.61. Recovered 4.1.62. Basildon, Essex. 77 miles SSE.
28418 S. Ringed 21.9.61. Recovered 19.12.61. Luton, Beds. 52 miles S.
47763 S. Ringed 3.1.62. Recovered 30.4.62. Tallington, nr. Stamford, Lincs. 5 miles W.
47915 S. Ringed 13.3.62. Recovered 22.4.62. Uffington, nr. Stamford, Lincs. 7 miles W.
- GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis*. (145 : 1).
AC 213319. Ringed 30.8.61. Recovered 8.4.62. Baracaldo, (Vizcaya), Spain. 43.17N, 2.59W.
- LINNET *Carduelis cannabina*. (85 : 0). About five pairs breed in the Decoy. Big flocks build up and roost in the bushes surrounding a ballast pit west of the Decoy. I have netted along the side of this pit and have ringed a total of 509 there in three years. The habitat in the Decoy is similar and I fail to see why this species should not occur more frequently.
- BULLFINCH *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*. (95 : 1, local). Three nests found in two years and six birds are frequently re-trapped. It is puzzling where the rest originated as ringing records show this species to be very sedentary.
- CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*. (95 : 0). Not so common the Decoy as one might expect.
- BRAMBLING *Fringilla montifringilla*. (3 : 0). Regular winter visitor. The number ringed is not a true indication of the quantity present.
- REED-BUNTING *Emberiza schoeniclus*. (7 : 0). Probably breed but I have not found a nest, or seen any very juvenile birds. Irregular winter flocks roost in the reed bed.
- TREE-SPARROW *Passer montanus*. (307 : 0). Very common: estimate 30 breeding pairs. One nest box had five clutches of eggs, from which four broods were reared.