

Birds at Borough Fen 1965

W. A. COOK

The winter passed with no change from the established pattern of many finches and thrushes in the Decoy when snow covered the fields, forsaking the cover of the wood as the weather eased. A leaf-strewn glade near the House pipe was used as a feeding area, where tail corn, weed seeds and old apples were scattered liberally.

The last record of winter Turdidae was a party of 22 Fieldfares on 14th April. These had overlapped by eight days the first warbler, a Chiff-chaff on 6th, followed by Willow Warblers on 13th and Cuckoo together with a late first Swallow on 30th. The big rush came on 3rd May with Turtle Dove, Nightingale, Sedge Warbler, Blackcap and Whitethroat. Reed Warblers appeared on 8th May with Spotted Flycatchers rounding off the immigration on 14th.

One bird recorded for the first time at the Decoy was a Peregrine which stooped over the pond on 17th May.

Sand Martins were seen feeding over the pond in greater numbers than before, the largest flock being 150 on 27th August. Much of the emigration was missed due to other commitments but a late Reed Warbler was seen on 12th October.

Ringling 1965

1,429 birds were ringed in 1965 (Table I), including 502 pulli, making a grand total of 6,804 since small-bird ringling started in 1960. One new species was ringed, this being a Magpie in November. Two Kestrels ringed in December are a sign of the re-emergence of this species, and it is hoped they will stay and breed hereabouts. Fewer warblers were ringed than in 1964 as no mist nets were set in either August or September, the two best months for catching them.

Ten recoveries reported during the year (Table II) and the recaptures of emigrants (Table III) included none of remarkable interest.

Nesting 1965

312 nests were recorded at Borough Fen Decoy on standard B.T.O. cards (Table IV). This brings the total recorded since 1961 to 820 cards. It would appear that nest records indicate population changes more accurately than trapping with mist nets, providing the time spent and the area covered are constant each year. There is still a bias in that many of the nest sites are traditional both in actual position and type of habitat.

Over one period in May 70 nests were being observed at the same time, a complete circuit taking about four hours. As it is desirable to visit each nest twice a week and it was not practicable to set aside two four-hour periods each week, the following system was evolved. Each nest position is described and given a number, all details being entered into a notebook to be transferred to cards later. Current cards are kept in two boxes and after each visit are transferred from A to B until A is empty, being replaced B to A on the next visit. This ensures that each nest is visited only once in a four-day period and none are missed. If pulli are due to be ringed on a non-visit day the card is placed in a special clip. Despite these precautions a number of Linnet and Greenfinch young were dangerously large and fledged unringed.

The honour for the first recorded nest in 1965 must be shared between a Song Thrush (nest built 17th March, first egg 24th) and a Moorhen at the traditional No. 1 nest site with six eggs on 3rd April.

Song Thrushes were very much in evidence and 21 nests had been discovered by 12th April, against nine by this date in 1964. These figures indicate a remarkable recovery from the 1963 season when only nine nests of this species were recorded for the whole year. Allowing for predation and replacement nests plus those found with young after 12th April, the breeding population was estimated at not less than 24 pairs.

Twelve new nestboxes were placed in the Decoy during the winter, all of which were inhabited by Tree Sparrows. 11 clutches of eggs were taken from these boxes over one weekend, no shells were left or spilled yolk. Could a Magpie have discovered that this type of box contained food, and searched out each one? The boxes were scattered haphazardly throughout the wood. Or was it some small rodent tempted by easy pickings? The proportions of nests remaining unattacked by predators in the past three seasons have been 51 per cent in 1963, 64 per cent in 1964 and 52 per cent in 1965.

Two new breeding species for 1965 were Nightingale and Garden Warbler. Both had been suspected breeders in previous years. The young of Garden Warblers were seen in 1961 and 1964 but were quite strong on the wing and could have flown in. Although Nightingales sang in the wood

Table I. Number of birds other than ducks ringed at Borough Fen Decoy, 1965.

<i>Species</i>	<i>Jan.</i>	<i>Feb.</i>	<i>Mar.</i>	<i>Apr.</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>June</i>	<i>July</i>	<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Sept.</i>	<i>Oct.</i>	<i>Nov.</i>	<i>Dec.</i>	<i>Total</i>
Heron								3					3
Kestrel												2	2
Water Rail											2		2
Moorhen	3	5	4					2	3	2	5		24
Wood Pigeon			1				5	12	1	2	2		23
Turtle Dove						4	11	3					18
Cuckoo						2	1						3
Swallow					2	1		1					4
Magpie											1		1
Great Tit		1				8	2			5			16
Blue Tit		1	2		1		2		6	6	2		20
Marsh Tit										1			1
Willow Tit							2	1	1	1		1	6
Long-tailed Tit										2	5		7
Tree-creeper									1				1
Wren				1		1	1						3
Fieldfare	2	1	6								2		11
Redwing			7							4	1		12
Song Thrush	1	6	3	40	67	29	6	1	12	5	7		177
Blackbird	9	8	21	22	61	17		2	3	25	54		222
Robin	1	1	3		14	2	3	2	3	1	3		33
Reed Warbler					2	1				1			4
Sedge Warbler					5	6	4						15
Blackcap					1	6	7	3					17
Garden Warbler						4							4
Whitethroat					2	7	10						19
Lesser Whitethroat					1								1
Willow Warbler								1					1
Nightingale					2								2
Spotted Flycatcher					1	6	4						11
Duncock	2	6	5	1	19	6	4			3	4		50
Starling	1	2	21			2							26
Greenfinch	62	144	31			29	13	13	2	6	1		301
Goldfinch					1	35	10	4		1			51
Linnet			1	2	8	69	47	1			2		130
Bullfinch	2		4		1	10	7		2	1	5		32
Chaffinch		3	24	1			2		3	2	9		44
Brambling			2										2
Yellowhammer			4			1	1						6
Reed Bunting			1								2		3
Tree Sparrow	2	6	5	11	9	23	16			9	40		121
Totals	85	184	145	78	197	269	158	49	37	77	147	3	1429

Table II. Recoveries, over 5 miles distant, of birds other than ducks ringed at Borough Fen and reported in 1965.

3080677	Wood Pigeon	FG	24.1.63	Fyfield, Ongar, Essex.	15.1.65	65m.SSE
3068318	Wood Pigeon	Juv	13.8.60	Deeping St. Nicholas, Lincs.	1.7.65	6m.NNE
CA41407	Blackbird	1st w.	23.12.63	Nr. Alesund (Møre og Romsdal) Norway.	1.1.65	62.28N 6.11E
CA41485	Blackbird	1st w.	26.2.64	Nordborg, Als (Jylland) Denmark.	30.4.65	55.03N 9.45E
CB35460	Blackbird	1st w.	4.3.65	Upplands-Väsby, Stockholm, Sweden.	6.4.65	51.39N 17.55E
40807S	Greenfinch	FG	31.12.61	Ailsworth, Northants. Controlled	3.3.65	6m.SW
CB35029	"	FG	25.1.65	"	"	6.3.65
CB35213	"	Ad	6.2.65	"	"	2.3.65
CB35248	"	1st w.	9.2.65	"	"	12.2.65
CB35316	"	1st w.	14.2.65	"	"	7.3.65
47841S	"	1st w.	26.2.62	Luton, Beds.	"	29.12.64 52m.S

prior to 1963 there has been no previous indication of their breeding.

21 nests were examined for parasites by M. J. Worms. The nests were examined for mites and fly larvae as soon as the young had flown, then kept in a warm room

for a few weeks until the fleas emerged. It is hoped to continue this research in 1966 using nests that have had eggs incubated in them for over seven days and not just successful nests as in 1965.

Table III. Migrants previously ringed at Borough Fen and re-trapped in 1965.

<i>Ring No.</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Date ringed</i>	<i>Age when ringed</i>	<i>Date re-trapped</i>
AB44178	Whitethroat	10.5.61	Ad. M.	10.6.65
AK87188	Whitethroat	28.6.63	Juv.	8.7.65, Male
AK87041	Spotted Flycatcher	23.5.63	Ad.	15.7.65

Table IV. Success of nests found at Borough Fen Decoy 1965.

<i>Species</i>	<i>No. of nests found</i>	<i>Deserted</i>	<i>Eggs lost</i>	<i>Young died</i>	<i>Some reared</i>	<i>Complete success</i>
Mallard	3	2 (1 sat 40 days)			1	
Moorhen	4		1			3
Wood Pigeon	19	3	5 + 1 not visited after laying	2	1	7
Turtle Dove	13	2			2	9
Cuckoo (in Reed Warblers' nests)	3					3
Swallow	2		2			
Great Tit	1				1	
Wren	1				1	
Song Thrush	63	5	15	8	13	22
Blackbird	42	2	12	6	9	13
Nightingale	1		1			
Robin	3				3	
Reed Warbler	3		1	1	+ 1 not followed up	
Sedge Warbler	2					2
Blackcap	4	1	2		1	
Garden Warbler	1				1	
Spotted Flycatcher	3	1			1	1
Duncock	12	1	2	2	6	1
Greenfinch	22		9	3	3	7
Goldfinch	11			3		8
Linnet	72	3	23	17	15	14
Bullfinch	4		1	1		2
Tree Sparrow	23	1	13 from boxes	3	4	2
Totals	312	21	87	46	61	97