



Number 9 June 2008

RAS – the first ten years

marked the formal start of the BTO's RAS Scheme: ten full seasons have elapsed since then. Of course, many RAS projects were already in operation and are far older than the Scheme itself. The database today contains 1,507 data files, each being for a single project and year. More than 63,000 adult birds have been ringed for RAS projects but, more to the point, there have been over 40,000 retraps, many of which can contribute to estimates of annual survival.

Precisely 200 projects have submitted data. Moreover, these include some that were ultimately unsuccessful and are no longer active, and others that are still 'work in progress'. Species that have been the subject of RAS projects are tabulated overleaf. Of the 55 species that have been studied so far, some, including unfortunately the scheme's logo species, Reed Bunting, have proved especially difficult to work on and are not currently represented by a single active project.

The 2007 season

The 2007 season was exceptionally cool and stormy, after a fine April. The weather proved disastrous for some RAS projects. Hirundines faced difficult feeding conditions for days on end, and for Sand Martin there were additional problems of river levels rising and nesting cliffs collapsing. The weather restricted ringers, too, with far fewer days than usual suitable for mist netting, and some favoured mist net

rides flooded out. We hope that the better start to the 2008 breeding season will have put all RAS ringers back into top gear and that the birds themselves will start to recover from last year's low productivity.



Sand Martin - a difficult season in 2007 for the birds, and their ringers! Photo: John Harding

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Summary of RAS projects (May 2008)

| | Conservation | Total | No of | | N (mean & maximum no years) | |
|----------------------|--------------|---------------|----------|----------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Species | listing | project-years | projects | 'discontinued' | 'active' | |
| Eider | AMBER | 34 | 5 | 2 (5.5: 8) | 3 (7.7: 9) | |
| Red-throated Diver | AMBER | 1 | 1 | 1 (1.0: 1) | 1 (12 0, 12) | |
| Manx Shearwater | AMBER | 19 | 2 | 1 (6.0: 6) | 1 (13.0: 13) | |
| Storm Petrel | AMBER | 23 | 3 | _ | 3 (7.7: 9) | |
| Shag | AMBER | 21 | 2 | _ | 2 (10.5: 14) | |
| Little Ringed Plover | | 8 | 1 | _ | 1 (8.0: 8) | |
| Ringed Plover | AMBER | 8 | 1 | _ | 1 (8.0: 8) | |
| Dunlin | AMBER | 12 | 2 | - | 2 (6.0: 9) | |
| Common Sandpiper | | 38 | 2 | _ | 2 (19.0: 28) | |
| Kittiwake | AMBER | 30 | 3 | - | 3 (10.0: 16) | |
| Arctic Tern | AMBER | 4 | 1 | 1 (4.0: 4) | _ | |
| Guillemot | AMBER | 7 | 1 | _ | 1 (7.0: 7) | |
| Razorbill | AMBER | 9 | 1 | _ | 1 (9.0: 9) | |
| Barn Owl | AMBER | 20 | 3 | 2 (1.5: 2) | 1 (17.0: 17) | |
| Tawny Owl | | 12 | 1 | 1 (12.0: 12) | _ | |
| Nightjar | RED | 2 | 1 | 1 (2.0: 2) | _ | |
| Swift | | 15 | 3 | 2 (4.5: 5) | 1 (6.0: 6) | |
| Woodlark | RED | 2 | 1 | 1 (2.0: 2) | _ | |
| Sand Martin | AMBER | 163 | 29 | 11 (3.4: 9) | 18 (7.0: 17) | |
| Swallow | AMBER | 58 | 10 | 5 (4.2: 6) | 5 (7.4: 10) | |
| House Martin | AMBER | 46 | 6 | 4 (5.5: 8) | 2 (12.0: 14) | |
| Tree Pipit | AMBER | 7 | 1 | _ | 1 (7.0: 7) | |
| Dipper | | 21 | 4 | 1 (2.0: 2) | 3 (6.3: 9) | |
| Dunnock | AMBER | 10 | 1 | _ | 1 (10.0: 10) | |
| Robin | | 33 | 1 | 1 (33.0: 33) | _ | |
| Whinchat | | 10 | 2 | 2 (5.0: 7) | _ | |
| Stonechat | AMBER | 10 | 2 | 1 (2.0: 2) | 1 (8.0: 8) | |
| Wheatear | , WIDEK | 18 | 2 | _ | 2 (9.0: 10) | |
| Blackbird | | 25 | 6 | 4 (3.3: 6) | 2 (6.0: 10) | |
| Song Thrush | RED | 14 | 2 | 1 (6.0: 6) | 1 (8.0: 8) | |
| - | | 2 | 1 | · | 1 (0.0. 6) | |
| Grasshopper Warble | el KLD | | | 1 (2.0: 2) | 2 (0 7, 10) | |
| Sedge Warbler | | 40 | 5 | 2 (7.0: 10) | 3 (8.7: 10) | |
| Reed Warbler | | 53 | 6 | 1 (3.0: 3) | 5 (10.0: 12) | |
| Whitethroat | 444858 | 55 | 7 | 5 (7.4: 12) | 2 (9.0: 10) | |
| Wood Warbler | AMBER | 5 | 1 | - | 1 (5.0: 5) | |
| Willow Warbler | AMBER | 35 | 2 | 1 (21.0: 21) | 1 (14.0: 14) | |
| Goldcrest | AMBER | 6 | 1 | 1 (6.0: 6) | _ | |
| Pied Flycatcher | | 433 | 24 | 3 (13.7: 22) | 21 (18.7: 40) | |
| Bearded Tit | AMBER | 5 | 1 | - | 1 (5.0: 5) | |
| Blue Tit | | 7 | 1 | - | 1 (7.0: 7) | |
| Great Tit | | 19 | 3 | - | 3 (6.3: 10) | |
| Coal Tit | | 4 | 1 | 1 (4.0: 4) | _ | |
| Marsh Tit | RED | 5 | 1 | - | 1 (5.0: 5) | |
| Starling | RED | 6 | 3 | 1 (2.0: 2) | 2 (2.0: 3) | |
| | | | | | | |

| | Conservation | Total | No of | N (mean & maxin | N (mean & maximum no years) | |
|------------------|--------------|---------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Species | listing | project-years | projects | 'discontinued' | 'active' | |
| House Sparrow | RED | 38 | 1 <i>7</i> | 7 (1.7: 3) | 10 (2.6: 5) | |
| Tree Sparrow | RED | 12 | 4 | 3 (3.7: 5) | 1 (1.0: 1) | |
| Chaffinch | | 30 | 3 | _ | 3 (10.0: 10) | |
| Greenfinch | | 4 | 1 | 1 (4.0: 4) | _ | |
| Goldfinch | | 3 | 1 | 1 (3.0: 3) | _ | |
| Siskin | | 32 | 5 | _ | 5 (6.4: 9) | |
| Linnet | RED | 17 | 5 | 5 (3.4: 6) | _ | |
| Common Crossbill | | 3 | 1 | _ | 1 (3.0: 3) | |
| Bullfinch | RED | 4 | 1 | 1 (4.0: 4) | _ | |
| Yellowhammer | RED | 4 | 4 | 3 (1.0: 1) | 1 (1.0: 1) | |
| Reed Bunting | RED | 5 | 1 | 1 (5.0: 5) | _ | |

Notes:

- In total, 200 projects and 1,507 project-years are tabulated. These cover 55 species, of which 12 are Red listed for 2002–07, 22 are Amber, and 21 are Green. In all, 60% of projects and 43% of project-years are for species listed as being of conservation concern.
- All projects for which any data files have been received are included. A further 17 projects have registered but not yet submitted any data. We believe there are many other RAS-style projects, not yet registered, that we would strongly encourage to register with the scheme.
- 'Projectyears' are the totals of year files received and do not include any missing years within the span of a project, nor any data collected but not yet submitted.
- Projects treated here as 'discontinued' are those that have not yet sent any data for 2006 or 2007 (and are assumed, for this tabulation, to have stopped operating). Of 120 projects treated as 'active', ie in 2006 or 2007, a full submission for 2007 has been received from 94 so far so up to 26 of the 'active' projects may not in fact be so.

The table shows the extent to which Pied Flycatcher and Sand Martin have become pre-eminent as RAS species. Almost 29% of the annual data sets are for Pied Flycatcher, while Sand Martin has the most projects registered.

House Sparrow, red listed because of its sharp population declines in rural and especially urban and suburban habitats, is becoming the third most popular RAS species. In most of these projects, ringing is carried out largely in the winter months, with colour-ring resightings providing most of the breeding-season data. For species like these with multiple projects, offers of new RAS projects are particularly welcome! Each new project broadens the scope for regional comparison of survival rates within Britain & Ireland.

Species that have supported several longrunning projects are possibly more suited to RAS than those where projects started so far have quickly failed, but the table should not be taken to indicate a complete list of species that can make good RAS projects. Many projects over the years have lapsed for reasons unconnected with their potential for collecting data, such as ringers moving house, or problems with access. There are also species where RAS has yet to be tried.

We would welcome more projects for any species – whether or not the species is already covered by RAS. Your breeding-season records (captures and resightings) need to include at least around ten individuals that were also recorded in the previous breeding season – although it might take several years for a new project to achieve that level. If you think this may be a realistic outcome from a project you are planning, or if you have already collected data of this kind that are not yet registered with RAS, please let us know!

RAS and IPMR

The release of version 2.2 in August 2006 was a significant step forward for RAS ringers who use IPMR, and made the compilation of a separate annual summary sheet redundant as, of course, does v2.3 released earlier this year. Your IPMR RAS submission (a zip file containing a captures file and a summary file) should contain all the information that previously has been collected via the blue form.

Note that the answers you give to the questions 'nest records submitted', 'tape lures used' and 'artificial bait used' will be applied to all years of your project. Please calculate the 'number of hours' as 'man-hours' (i.e. multiply time in hours by the number of people involved). A measure of effort is very helpful in calculating annual survival rates, particularly where effort changes between years.

An estimate or count of the number of breeding pairs also enhances the RAS study by indicating (a) roughly what proportion of breeding birds within the study area are being recorded each year in the RAS captures and sometimes (b) whether there is any trend or fluctuation in breeding numbers that might influence the capture totals. If your project is on Storm Petrels, the figure will be at best an informed guess, but sometimes it may be possible to make a proper count. In any case, we'd like the best figure you can provide. There is a comment box where you can tell us how accurate (or otherwise) the count may be. IPMR will not allow the count box to be empty but, in the worst case, where you feel you cannot supply a figure, you could enter a zero and use the comment box to explain why you have done this.

The handful of RAS ringers not yet using IPMR v2.2 or above or operating entirely on paper, are asked to fill in the blue summary sheet as usual.

IPMR now provides information to HQ, for the first time, on the dates you have set in your RAS window for the start and end of your study season. Some unexpected values are coming to light! What the start and end dates are intended to do is to restrict the 'captures' data in the RAS submission to those for individuals that are most likely to be breeding in the study area. Survival rates are most accurately estimated when only breeding birds are caught: including birds passing through (transients) lowers the apparent survival rate because birds are not present to be caught throughout the season. Default start and end dates are 1 April and 31 August. RAS does not require any capture/resighting data that do not relate to the breeding season (and that therefore cannot be used for survival estimation).

The only valid reason to change the default dates is to tune them more closely to the period when your study species is breeding and relatively unlikely to be passing through. For an earlynesting species this could mean including some or all of March, if the project is active then. For a migrant species, such as Whitethroat, the start date could perhaps be 1 May, by when many of the breeding adults should be present and many of the passage migrants should have already moved on. To include the whole of August for a migrant species could easily be counterproductive, especially in places where through passage is strong. While the principle is clear, how you interpret our advice here depends very much on your study species, its breeding season, and its movements through and around the study area.

When you choose to catch and ring your RAS birds may sometimes be an entirely different question! Even if you are catching RAS birds in winter, your start and end dates must relate to the breeding season of your bird, and you should aim to maximise capture and resighting data within that breeding period. Refunds are for new birds ringed in the RAS season.

Some ringers have already been advised to readjust their start and end dates, and others may now feel they'd like to do this. It just requires you to change the dates in your RAS window, and then create and send revised submission files for all years of the project.

Please contact any IPMR advisor if you need help with using the program. Eds.

Beyond RAS...

The basic methodology of RAS – marking all individuals in a population to study survival rates and population change over a long period of time – is a hugely powerful one, and is employed by teams working all around the world. Two papers published recently from studies just across the North Sea highlight that conducting a long-term population study can yield much more than just basic information on survival rates or population change.

Ezard, T.H.G., Becker, P.H. & Coulson, T. (2006)

The contributions of age and sex to variation in common tern population growth rate. *Journal of Animal Ecology* **75**, 1379–1386.

Peter Becker and his colleagues have studied the Common Tern colony in the harbour of Wilhelmshaven (NW Germany) for more than 25 years. Thanks to the provision of nesting platforms, it now holds more than 600 birds. Many carry transponders and are recorded automatically,

as individuals, every time they land on a nesting platform - so huge amounts of data can be collected with minimal disturbance to the colony. Because the terns have such a high 'retrap' rate, the researchers were able to look in great detail at the variation in survival between birds of different ages and sexes. They showed that older birds were more productive and that between-year population changes were influenced most by the numbers of one- and two-year-old birds returning to the colony. Importantly, they also showed that the variation across time in a particular productivity or survival rate did not determine how important it was in affecting how the population changed. So, as with other seabirds, just because productivity (eg) can vary enormously between years, this doesn't mean

it is driving population trends – an important point when it comes to preparing conservation management plans.

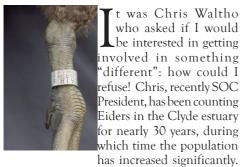
Szép, T., Møller, A.P., Piper, S., Nuttall, R., Szabó, Z.D. & Pap, P.L. (2006) Searching for potential wintering and migration areas of a Danish Barn Swallow population in South Africa by correlating NDVI with survival estimates. *Journal of Ornithology* 147, 245–253.

Anders Møller and his co-workers have been ringing Swallows in an area of farmland in northern Denmark since 1984. The annual survival rate of Swallows is known to relate to conditions in their wintering grounds (see the June 2008 issue of Ringing & Migration for a demonstration of this using RAS data!). Møller and colleagues reasoned that, if they correlated survival in their Danish breeding populations with conditions in different parts of Africa, they should be able to work out where 'their' birds were wintering. They used a simple index of vegetation growth (the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index) derived from remote sensing, and found a strong correlation between Swallow survival and vegetation in the Karoo region of western South Africa. Most recoveries of Danish-ringed Swallows come from central and eastern South Africa, but this is where most ringing takes place, so may not reflect accurately where most birds winter. Studies such as this can provide a useful complement to recovery patterns.

Both papers highlight just how valuable long-term studies of marked individuals can be, in many cases providing information far beyond their original aims. They also highlight the importance of teaming those good at catching birds in the field with those good at crunching the data in the office. RAS is an excellent example of this and I, for one, look forward to many exciting results coming from it in future

Rob Robinson

Clyde Eider RAS



He wanted us to start catching breeding female Eiders at colonies he had been monitoring and new sites just being discovered. I and other Clyde Ringing Group members were very keen, because this would make another excellent RAS as well as documenting Eider movements within the estuary.

Chris suggested two very different sites - or so we thought. The first was Horse Island, an RSPB reserve half a mile off the Avrshire coast at Ardrossan. This 9 ha rocky island is almost flat, rising to just 3 m above sea level, but supporting a 200-year-old beacon tower at its southern tip. In summer the marshy area above the shoreline is well vegetated with tall canary grass and extensive stands of water dropwort. An amazing 500+ pairs of Eiders nest there (1% of the UK total), alongside 2-3,000 pairs of large gulls, 100 pairs of Cormorants, Oystercatchers, Shelduck, Mallard, Greylag Geese and a feral pair of Barnacle Geese. The terns, for which the island was once famous, have long gone. Breeding birds are counted annually, and have been for many years, but there had been no previous ringing.

The second site, a newly establishing colony, is inside HM Naval Base Clyde, at Faslane, where the UK's nuclear submarines are based! This site lies some 50 km further north, on the Gareloch. Eiders started breeding here in flowerbeds in the late 1990s. Although these sites appear vastly different, to the Eider they may actually be quite similar. Both are protected from ground predators

- Horse Island by the sea and Faslane on its landward side by high security fences, razor wire and motion detectors. Horse Island is rarely visited; and although Faslane is full of people they are all working and the Eider become accustomed to the noise and the movement. The two sites offer a similar variety of nest sites: a high-tide line, large boulders, vegetation and also man-made debris.

Organising access permission for Horse Island took two years. We were warmly welcomed into Faslane as part of a public relations drive with the MOD Police – although the advanced security checks and having photos taken for ID passes while surrounded by machine guns did add to the excitement!

Since 2001 we have visited each site once a year to catch females. The visit is timed for just before the first eggs hatch – to maximise the numbers available and to limit the disturbance, both to the Eiders and to other species. This means visits in May, usually the second week. Access to Horse Island is highly weather-dependent, as we have to go by boat. We have experienced the usual weather extremes for Scotland – flat calm seas in blistering heat, as well as gales and driving rain, forcing postponements and limiting catches!



Catching adult females sets a variety of challenges, according to their choice of nest site. Some nest out in the open on a little raised area of gravel or grass. These birds need surrounding by ringers with landing nets, with one person creeping up to catch the bird, the rest hoping to intercept it if it flushes past the sprawled ringer. Others nest deep in vegetation and go unseen until exploding without warning from beneath your feet, leaving you with nothing but an elevated heart rate and the stench of digested shellfish in the air. For birds nesting under gorse, bramble or Portakabins at Faslane, we use a small swan hook - or "snitcher" - which has been very successful.

Where birds nest singly, we catch most of them; but many nest in groups, making it much harder, as once one is caught all the others in the vicinity flush off. Our current capture rate





is 30%. Once caught we record clutch size, then cover the eggs with down or grass to hide them from the gulls. The birds are measured and ringed then released, with many returning to their nests within a few minutes.

After seven years of two Eider RAS projects, we still have more questions than answers! We had expected the birds would be long lived, with little turnover or recruitment, but, despite ringing over 400 females on Horse, out of a peak breeding count of 550, we appear to have ringed only 55% of the birds. It would appear that not all females nest each year, so the real breeding population could be in the region of 800 females. The Faslane site has expanded from 90 to 200 nests, and we have marked 327 birds, but only 40% of birds caught in 2007 were retraps.

We aim to continue both these projects for as long as possible! It is great fun and a good day out for all of us as well as contributing to what is, for this amber-listed species, an important conservation scheme.

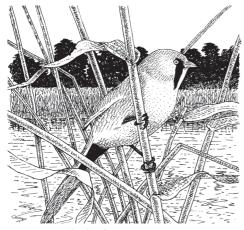
I would like to thank all the other members of the Clyde RG that have made these projects feasible, especially Shona Quinn and John McKellar, Chris Waltho, Scott Paterson, RSPB Scotland (Zul Bhatia at Lochwinnoch in particular), the Naval Base Commander at Faslane, MOD Police (especially John Simpson), and finally Davy Hodge, the Horse Island boatman – in whom we trust our lives!

Iain Livingstone iainlivcrg@googlemail.com



Not every capture is successful! Photos: Clyde Ringing Group

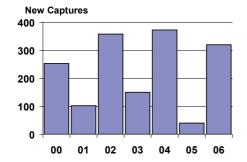
Bearded Tits and Reed Warblers in the Tay Reedbeds



Drawing: I G Shepherd

Since 2000, Tay Ringing Group have been Conducting a RAS project on Bearded Tits in the internationally important Tay Reedbeds. Despite it being the species' most northerly regular outpost, this site typically holds around a fifth of the UK population.

It was to our growing alarm that our early visits of 2005 produced few adult captures. The previous three years of the study had seen a general increase in the number of birds caught, culminating in 448 caught in the main study period during 2004. By the end of the 2005 RAS season it was clear that these drastically reduced numbers of adults had unsurprisingly also produced a much lower crop of juveniles, and in total we



ringed only 40 Beardies that year (with only 44 handlings), almost a tenfold decline from the previous season.

Clearly, it was important to know what lay behind this drastic change. RSPB, who had stepped in to continue the management of the reedbed after the collapse of the Tay Reed Company, have invested very significant resources in protecting the site and funded a number of research projects into food supply. The results have yet to be reported fully, but there are some indications that the winter seed availability may have dropped at a time when Bearded Tit populations were at a peak. This conjunction of events may also have been behind the rash of Scottish reports in 2005 of Bearded Tits away from their Tay stronghold.

The ratio between harvested and unharvested reed has always been thought to have an impact on the survival and productivity of a number of reedbed species, such as Bearded Tits. The collapse of the commercial reed company due to a series of years of poor reed quality and increased international competition had been presaged by a decline in the area harvested. Our RAS will play an important part in trying to unravel the links between habitat management and the fortunes of these reed-dwelling birds.

Thankfully, 2006 saw a return to previous high Bearded Tit numbers. Early indications were good and their promise was fulfilled with a total of 320 new birds ringed. Only nine birds from previous years were recaptured during 2006, however, suggesting that the increase was driven largely by juvenile recruitment. There were 111 captures outside the RAS period during two autumn visits, when Bearded Tits were moving in large flocks containing significant numbers of unringed birds. These could either have been third broods produced after the close of the RAS season (at this time of year it is not possible to



age Bearded Tits so it is difficult to verify this) or alternatively birds moving into the ringing sites from unsampled parts of the extensive Tay Reedbeds.

Even discounting the autumn captures, there was a clear increase in birds caught during the standard RAS period, indicating a substantial improvement in the population. It may be that such increases are part of a natural cyclical pattern, but alternatively they may reflect the increased area of reed brought into management by RSPB intervention during 2006.

By-catch from the Bearded Tit RAS study has provided proof of breeding Reed Warblers on the Tay, with a female with an active brood patch caught in June 2006 that had been ringed as a juvenile the previous year. In all 20 were caught that year, a Tay RG record – the majority being recently fledged juveniles.

Data from this study are fed to local ringing reports, SNH, and RSPB, and shared with local landowners. Tay Ringing Group have been exceptionally fortunate in the support we have had from the local landowners, and in the past SNH have provided financial support. We have now been awarded a substantial grant through the Perth & Kinross Quality of Life Trust/SITA Trust/landfill tax fund for our work in monitoring the reedbeds with particular reference to reedbed management.

Les Hatton

Since the catches have been so variable so far, it's not clear whether this RAS project will succeed directly in monitoring annual adult survival rates, but its value is undoubted in helping to optimise the management of this internationally important site. Eds.

Photos: Tay Ringing Group. In the aerial view below, one of the net rides can be seen in the centre of the picture.



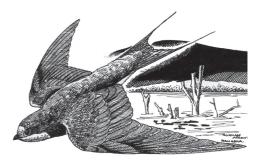
Stable doors, mate fidelity and baking roofs

Little did I realise, back in 1998, how much interest my Swallow RAS study would provide. A request for at least five years' data seemed quite daunting at the time, but 2007 has been the tenth year! Before 1998 I had taken part in a small amount of Swallow ringing, both adults and pulli, so the seed was sown to do more with this well-loved rural species. Their extensive migration and captivating family life held many opportunities for new discoveries, and each year has revealed one or more new facets of their lives that were previously unknown to me.

Patiently waiting with a door-sized net, when the birds are feeding young, has enabled me to catch around fifty adults most vears, enough to satisfy RAS's minimum requirement. One fact soon became quite obvious - Swallows can see the net! Thank goodness though, they just 'ram raid' it on most occasions: but if they 'trampoline'. between the shelf strings, a second attempt is usually avoided. To try and stop this happening, I collapse the net inwards as the bird flies in. Another important lesson I learned quite quickly was that, if there are multiple access points, it is best to determine the birds' regular flight path first. It was no good shutting the stable door and expecting them to use a window opposite. In a pair of stables where two pairs nested, it eventually dawned on me that the birds were trying to fly through some garden netting placed over the triangle between the stables, and I was stood inside the wrong doorway! I now realise that normally a large horse stood in the doorway, avoiding summer flies. This may seem like a large obstacle to a Swallow, and so why not go in through the other completely free half door!

The study area of around 25 sq km, set after a hasty guess in 1998 to get the required number of adults, has proved too large – now that more sites have come to light. Many

buildings within the study area are unsuitable for catching adults, being too large internally, having too many boltholes, or just being impracticable with the time involved. Thus the annual return of birds uncaught is quite high. Against this is the fidelity of individuals to sites, allowing retrapping of ringed birds at places where regular catching can take place.



Drawing: Norman Arlott

Looking at the recaptures over those years shows a constant 33–37% return rate of adult birds, almost invariably to the same site as the year before. In contrast very few of the couple of hundred pulli ringed annually are ever seen again; those that do turn up in the study area are usually males. As in many other migratory species, it's the females that disperse more widely, possibly to avoid inbreeding. So far, no pairing has occurred between related ringed birds, in the whole nine years.

Interestingly, pairs do occasionally go through a second season together. In 2006, one pair even did it for a third time, at the same site. This seemed so remarkable that I examined previous Swallow data, only to find that in a German study one long-lived male of eleven years had twice paired with a regular partner, for periods of four years each!

A particular emergency that arose one year concerned a nest with young, built on top of a roof-rack runner bar that was wanted sharply for holidays. "Will I have to buy a new set" was the owner's question. Removing the young, and ringing them of course, and then gently removing the said bar solved the problem. The wonderful glue Swallows use in the mud-grass mixture ensured it stayed on the beam. Just to make it more secure, the top of the cup was secured by a bit of shoelace with two good drawing pins, before the young were replaced. The same idea has been used for many years now with another nest that became unstable, with the increasing weight of the young.

Swallows do not always nest inside a structure. In 2006, I discovered a nest under the eaves of a small half-timbered barn, around 2.5 m high on the outside wall. Another, more worrying observation that summer was the number of nests failing due to the high temperatures. Most such failures have been in felt-roofed stables, where numerous birds now have to nest due to the loss of older, more traditional farm buildings. It is quite

sad to find dead young that have left the nest prematurely due to the roasting heat, only to die feet below on a concrete floor. Where possible some young are saved from death by placing them in a plastic carton a short distance under the searing roof. Is this breaking the law?

Garth Lowe

In response to Garth's question, we believe that it is most unlikely that any prosecution could result from actions of this kind, undertaken to promote the welfare of the birds concerned, provided they have been sanctioned by the landowner. Eds.

Many thanks to lain, Les and Garth for sharing their experiences of RAS ringing! Please let the editors know if you can offer a similar article for the next issue of RAS News.



RAS contacts

The following RAS ringers have offered their services as a point of contact for their own areas of study. For other species and all other enquiries, please contact BTO HQ. Don't forget the RAS on-line forum for making contacts and asking or giving advice.

Common Sandpiper, Dipper

Tom Dougall, 38 Leamington Terrace, Edinburgh, EH10 4JL

Email: gilltomer@hotmail.com

Swallow

Garth Lowe, Sunnymead, Old Storridge, Alfrick, Worcestershire, WR6 5HT

Tel: 01886 833362 Email: pam.lowe@tesco.net

Sand Martin

Phil Ireland, 27 Hainfield Drive, Solihull, West Midlands, B91 2PL

Tel: 0121 704 1168

Email: PLI@blueyonder.co.uk

Wheatear, Stonechat

Dave Fulton, 6 Hazelwells Road, Hollywood Park, Highley, Shropshire, WV16 6DJ Email: Davebirder@aol.com

Pied Flycatcher

Graham Austin, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford,

Norfolk, IP24 2PU Tel: 01842 750050

Email: graham.austin@bto.org

Marsh Tit

Jim Fowler, 64 Steel Street, Askam-in-Furness,

Cumbria, LA16 7BP Mobile: 07900 495177 Email: maalie@talktalk.net

Ireland

Declan Manley, Manley's Nurseries, Monasteroris, Edenderry, Co Offaly

Tel: (+353) (0)469 731569 Mobile: 0876 744 946

Email: manleysnurseries@iolfree.ie



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BTO
The Nunnery
Thetford
Norfolk
IP24 2PU
Tel: 01842 750050

lel: 01842 /50050 Fax: 01842 750030

Email:

ras@bto.org

Editors:

John Marchant & Rob Robinson

Desk-top publishing:

Jane Waters

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