

## Whinchats at RSPB Geltsdale in 2018, Cumbria, UK

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Fig. 1: One of three five year old males in RSPB Geltsdale, Cumbria/United Kingdom (Photo: © A. MOAN).

RSPB Geltsdale nature reserve is a large (5500ha) site in the North Pennines, comprising of two upland farms. All the site is above 200m above sea level (asl) and two thirds of the reserve is blanket bog above 400m asl. As well as managing the site for the blanket bog, RSPB Geltsdale has almost 100 species of bird breeding each year. The priority bird species on the reserve are breeding Black Grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*), Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*), Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), Common Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), Redshank (*Tringa totanus*), Short-eared Owl (*Asio otus*), Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*) and Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*). Other breeding bird species include Red Grouse (*Lagopus lagopus*), Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*), Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*), Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*), Willow Warbler (*Phyllosco-*

*pus trochilus*), Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*), Stonechat (*Saxicola rubicola*), Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*), Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) and Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*). Long-term research has been carried out at Geltsdale using standard upland surveys since 1999.

Whinchats breed around the edge of the blanket bog and are mainly associated with bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*). In the six years 2012-2017 the average number of Whinchat territories was 73 (max 82, min 63). In 2011, two RSPB volunteers from Hertfordshire, Amanda Proud and Martin Ketcher together with Stephen Westerberg, site manager at Geltsdale started a British Trust for Ornithology Retrap Adult Survival project. We individually colour-ring adult and pullus Whinchats. Amanda and Martin have returned to Cumbria for eight years carrying on this work at RSPB Geltsdale.

## 2018

The first returning bird was seen on 27<sup>th</sup> April this year, a fairly typical first date. The return of birds was slow and by the first week of June, when most birds should have had nests, only a third of the average number of territories were occupied. However, there was a late influx of birds in mid-June that went on to nest. This brought the number of occupied territories this year to 46, down 37% on last year's total. 24 nests were found, of which 50% successfully fledged young, which is slightly below average. One double brooded pair were noted this year, an unusual event at this upland site. As usual, there was a proportion of territories occupied by single males, 17% this year.



Fig. 2: An adult female Whinchat in wing moult taken on the 16<sup>th</sup> September, the last record of the year (Photo: © A. MOAN).

The return rates for adults was 35%, almost the average for the previous five years (36%). However the return rates for first-year birds (ringed as nestlings) was the lowest in our study at 10%. The average return rate for nestlings in the previous 6 years is 19.5%.

Only 82 nestlings were ringed this year, our lowest ever total, an indication of the poor breeding season here. 24 of these were seen after

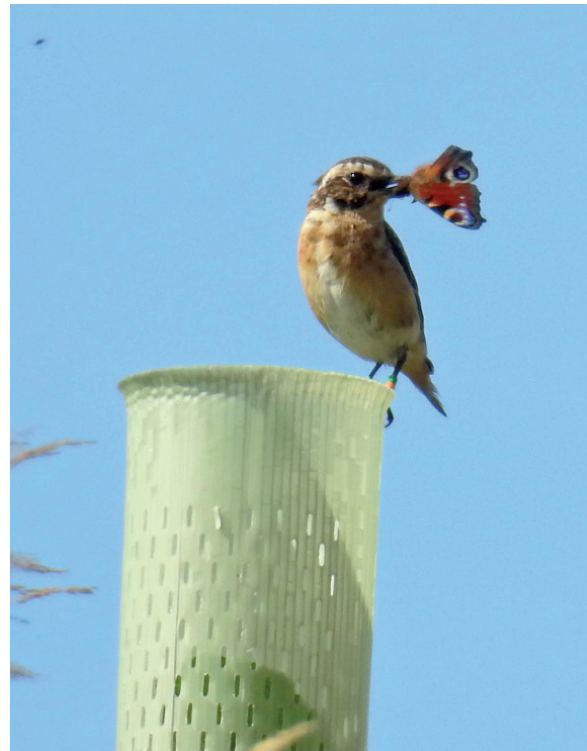


Fig. 3: A male Whinchat with a Peacock Butterfly (*Inachis io*) at RSPB Geltsdale (Photo: © A. MOAN).

fledging, again a very low number and an indication of poor post-fledging success. Last year 68% of the 154 pulli were recorded post fledging.

Five of last year's geolocator birds returned this year, however only three were retrieved. Data for these birds is still being analysed. A geolocator bird from 2016, that we failed to catch in 2017, was caught this year, but the bird had lost the device.

Of note this year, were three five year old birds (Fig. 1), one of which was observed feeding young in the nest of another male. Full details of this are being written up.

A Spanish ringed Whinchat was caught at Geltsdale in 2018, this had been caught and ringed near Barcelona on the 12<sup>th</sup> May 2018 and was found nesting at Geltsdale in July. This may be the first Spanish ringed Whinchat to be caught in the UK, at least 20 UK Whinchats have been recovered in Spain.

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