

Unusual Warblers at Stanford in 2008

Icterine Warbler, Northern Willow Warbler and Siberian Chiffchaff

With the poor weather of 2008 influencing our ringing activities with several sessions cancelled it was not surprising that we achieved our lowest annual total since year 2000 with only 1,540 new birds ringed. However, despite this, we had three surprising warblers with a new species for Stanford Reservoir as well as two new subspecies.

The account of the new species, an Icterine Warbler on 14th June, is fully documented in the “Articles” section of this web site. Whilst we realised that there would not have been many previous county records of this species we were somewhat surprised to discover that it was only the second record for Northamptonshire – the first being in 1947 and the first ever record of the species for Leicestershire.

Our second interesting bird of the year was one of three Willow Warblers ringed on 23rd August. It was identified as being a “Northern Willow Warbler” and is the first confirmed record in Northamptonshire. In Western Europe, the common form of Willow Warbler is *Phylloscopus trochilus* and it winters exclusively in Africa. The subspecies Northern Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus acredula*) goes a long way east and is both rare and regular in UK. In comparison with *trochilus* it looks larger, bulkier and greyer all over. It winters commonly in Africa, right down to southern Africa, but it also winters in India. As well as photographs of our bird we have included two taken at Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory in Kent the day before. These excellent photographs by Ian Hodgson show the comparison of the subspecies with the nominate race.



Northern Willow Warbler - Stanford Reservoir 23rd August 2008 - Photos by John Cranfield



Willow Warblers

An individual of the race *P.t.acredula* on the left at Sandwich Bay, Kent 22nd August 2008 - a day before the Stanford bird



P.t.acredula on the right

Photographs by courtesy of Ian Hodgson

Finally on 6th December, the third good warbler of the year was ringed – a “Siberian Chiffchaff” *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* which is a subspecies of the Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*. A couple of feathers dropped during the ringing process were sent to Greg Conway at the BTO who is studying over-wintering Chiffchaffs. DNA analysis of the samples was undertaken and the original identification was confirmed. The Siberian Chiffchaff breeds in eastern Siberia and winters in the lower Himalayas. It is a dull subspecies, grey or brownish above and whitish below, with little yellow in the plumage, and a longer buff-white supercilium.



Siberian Chiffchaff

Stanford Reservoir
6th December 2008

Photograph by Adam Homer