

MØLEN ORNITOLOGISKE STASJON

Mølen, Norway

19th-27th September 2008

In September 2007, two of my friends John Day and Brian Bates were invited to carry out some bird ringing at the ornithological station situated at Mølen in southern Norway. This was organised by an ex-pat ringer Andy Clarke who has been resident in Norway for many years. John and Brian had been to the station a couple of times in the 1990s and they asked me if I would like to join them. The four of us had an excellent week and managed to trap and ring a total of 396 birds and witness some truly memorable diurnal migration of various species. In 2008 we returned and we spent another, although very different, week at the station.

John and I left Tyneside at 05:15 hrs on 19th September and drove to Prestwick Airport arriving there at about 09:50 hrs. We quickly met up with Brian and after checking in (Brian wearing about 50 layers of clothes with pockets stuffed to circumvent the baggage weight limits!) our Ryanair flight to Torp, Oslo left on time at 12:15 hrs and landed in light rain at 14:45 hrs local time. After a short wait Andy arrived in his Land Rover to transport us and all our bags to the ringing station, a drive of about 45 minutes to the south.

After dumping our bags in the splendid wooden cabin that is the ringing station, John and I went for a wander down to the point and the fjord before dark while Brian and Andy disappeared to a supermarket to sort out provisions! After darkness fell and we had eaten, we tried playing a tape of Tengmalm's Owl call. To my amazement we netted one just before midnight! After ringing and processing the bird it was released safely into the night.

Mølen is a site within the *Gea Norvegica* Geopark containing several Bronze Age burial settings and lies at the end of a huge pebble and boulder spit which turns inwards towards the fjord. The spit is gradually being encroached by juniper and other scrub some of which is extremely dense. Part of the area is farmland and there are many 'holiday/weekend' type cabins across the area. Migrating passerines seem to be funnelled generally southwards down the narrowing spit of land in the autumn and eventually cross over to a small island at the mouth of the fjord and then onward to the coastline opposite.



It really is an ideal area for catching and ringing these migrants but (where have I heard this before) we were told 'it's not as good as it used to be!' Looking at older photographs of the area there certainly was a lot less of the spit covered with scrub vegetation. Having said that, it was great to just stand outside the cabin and watch loads of small migrants passing over for a good part of the day in the right conditions.

Each day followed more or less a similar pattern and we never moved very far from the surrounding area. We didn't need to really. We were usually up well before dawn (in some cases I suspect that Brian was up before he went to bed to put a tape of Pygmy Owl call on!). After unfurling the five mist nets we were operating, the first birds were usually caught immediately after dawn broke. If the passage was looking good we continued to trap and ring birds through most of the day but if it went quiet then we usually had a wander down to the fjord and look around the other habitats in the area. The weather was mild compared to our visit in 2007 and I wasn't prepared for biting mosquitoes! Winds were generally light although the last couple of days that changed. It proved difficult to keep track of everything that flew over whilst we were ringing and in any case the Norwegian birders tend to stand further down the spit and they really are very skilled at identifying and counting the small migrants. Knowing the flight calls and jizz is a big part of the game. I just kept a record of what I saw and heard but that was only the tip of the iceberg.



The Ringing Station

One of the Norwegian ringers, who is also a teacher, brought several groups of his students to see bird ringing in progress and we were able to keep him supplied with new birds for them to see. Another brought three of his work colleagues (none of whom were birders) to see what he did in his leisure time! After longish days in the field, if the night looked promising (cold and clear) we played owl calls and had some success catching them!. There wasn't a lot of sleep being had!



The point, farmland & small island offshore



The small beach at low tide

In all we managed to trap and ring 460 birds of 28 species with highlights including a total of 11 owls (three Pygmy and eight Tengmalm's) and a Nutcracker. It was interesting and instructive to handle several species that I think of as 'common' here but were, of course, of a different race like Treecreeper and Nuthatch. An excellent autumn week away!

Our return journey was un-eventful with a mid afternoon flight back to Prestwick. We arrived in heavy rain(!) and something happening in the airport where every passenger was scrutinised by hefty security and passed by some interestingly be-suited characters who were obviously looking for someone!

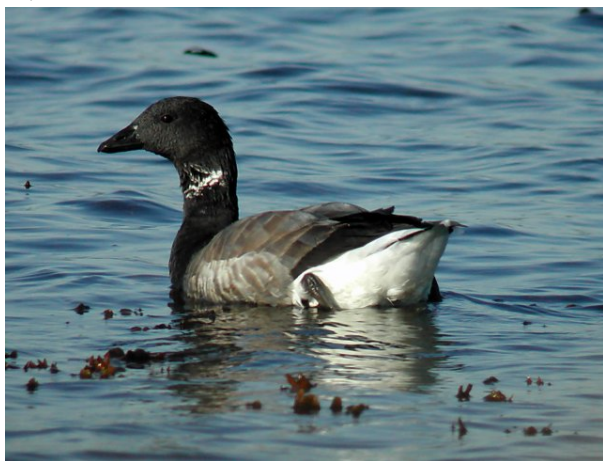
CLASSIFIED LIST

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Two were seen on 24th and a single on 26th.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Up to 26 were seen on 20th and 26th. Several skeins of presumed grey geese were noted arriving from N. but were so high and on occasions far away they were not positively identified - some were possibly Pink-feet.



Brent Goose

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

A single was with the Greylags on 20th.

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*

Two dark-bellied birds were present between 20th-24th feeding just along the shore.

Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Up to four were present with other duck off the point on several days.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Up to 30 were just off the point on five days.

Eider *Somateria mollissima*

Large numbers present daily offshore and in the mouth of the fjord with up to 450 counted.

Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*

Present on at least three days with a maximum count of 59 on 26th

Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

Two were seen on 19th-22nd.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

Up to 15 were present in the small bay and off the point on several days.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Odd birds seen and heard.



Velvet Scoter

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

An adult still in summer plumage was in the fjord on 22nd. A diver sp. (probably this species) flew out to sea on 21st.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

A juvenile was present on 24th-26th at least.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Seen daily with up to 45 present.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

On 20th a party of four were migrating high to E. followed later by a single bird. On 26th a further five were noted.

Goshawk *Accipiter gentiles*

A single was seen on 22nd.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Noted almost daily passing down the spit, usually singly, with a peak of six on 23rd. On 26th a total of 16 migrated NE along the ridge of low hills opposite the area presumably to avoid any kind of long water crossing to wherever they were heading.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Five seen distantly to the N. on 20th were almost certainly this species. On 23rd six were in the same general area moving E. at 16:10hrs and another at 16:15 hrs. On 26th a total of 18 were noted migrating along the same line as Sparrowhawks mentioned above. A single flew S. on 27th.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

A very dark *Aquila* eagle seen at long range to the N. on 23rd was probably this species.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Three were seen on 19th and a single on 20th.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

Singles were noted on 20th and 23rd.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*

On 23rd a very pale-headed juvenile soared over the ringing station. With relatively thin moustachial stripes and a pale crown this was presumably a 'northern' type bird. On 26th a single flew E. at 10:20 hrs and another NW at 13:15 hrs.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Up to four present in the small bay near the point.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Two-three seen with other waders on 22nd and 24th.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Seen on only four days with a maximum of 20 on 22nd.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Up to four were regularly seen in the small bay below the farm on several days.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Two on 26th were the only ones.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Small numbers seen on four days.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Quite large numbers present around the island area on several days.. Up to 300 counted loafing around.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Seen almost daily.



Bar-tailed Godwit

Guillemot *Uria aalge*

One on 26th was the only sighting.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Three noted on 20th and a single on 26th.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Quite a number flying into and out of the area each day, possibly local feeders but also some obvious migrating parties seen. Maximum count about 330 on 21st.

Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium passerinum*

Singles birds were attracted to tape calls on 21st, 23rd and 24th and trapped and ringed. All were caught in the early morning between 06:15-07:15 hrs.



Tengmalm's Owl *Aegolius funereus*

Birds were attracted to tape calls with singles caught on 19th and 20th, two on 22nd and a total of four on 23rd including three together which may have been a migrating family party. All were caught in the late evening between 20:45-23:45 hrs.



Swift *Apus apus*

Five moved through with Swallows on 20th.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

One was seen and heard calling on 22nd.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

One-two seen moving on six days but none were trapped this time.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus maritus*

Singles were seen and heard on 20th, 21st and 25th but it is not known how many birds were involved.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Small numbers were noted on five days with a maximum count of 16 on 22nd.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

One was seen with swallows on 20th.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seen almost daily in small numbers with peaks of 29 on 21st and about 30 on 23rd.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

At the tail-end (no pun intended!) of the autumn passage there were ten on 20th, nine on 21st and one on 22nd. Large numbers had been trapped and ringed at the station earlier in the autumn in a co-operative effort with other ringing stations to gather data on the species migration, etc.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Seen daily with a peak count of 44 on 20th.

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*

Up to six were present on the small beach at the point on three days.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Single migrants were seen on five days with two on 20th and three on 22nd.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba*

Small numbers seen almost daily at the small beach on the point but also moving over.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

One-three seen or heard on six days.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Six were present on 21st, three on 23rd and several on 26th. A total of 22 trapped and ringed during the week.

Robin *Erithicus rubecula*

Small numbers moved through on several days. A total of 23 trapped and ringed during the week.

Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

At least one was present between 20th-22nd

Ring Ouzel *Turdus merula*

One was present with other thrushes on 26th.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Small numbers were passing through almost daily with a larger movement of about 200 on 26th. A total of 109 trapped and ringed during the week.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

15 were seen on 21st, seven on 24th, 65 on 26th and 25 on 27th.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

As with other thrushes small numbers passing through on most days and a peak of 40 on 26th. A total of 17 trapped and ringed during the week.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

Small numbers seen or heard on most days with about 120 in the influx on 26th.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Three were noted on 22nd.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Small numbers seen daily with a peak of 15 on 25th. A total of 45 trapped and ringed during the week.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

One was present on 20th and two on 22nd.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

At least two were present between 20th-22nd.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Up to eight seen daily. A total of 27 trapped and ringed during the week.



Chiffchaff

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Small numbers moving through on most days with a peak of only 25 on 20th. A total of 43 trapped and ringed during the week.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegthalos caudatus*

Two were in the car-park on 23rd, the only ones seen.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Seen daily with a peak of 20 on 20th.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Seen daily with a peak of ten on 20th.

Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus*

An obvious movement occurring during our stay and birds were seen and heard daily. Peak count was about 15 on 20th. A total of 20 were trapped and ringed during the week.



Crested Tit



Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

One-two were present on four days

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Seen daily in small numbers with a peak of seven on 22nd. Two trapped and ringed confirmed their race as *S. e. europaea*.



Nuthatch



the distinctive outer tail feather pattern

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Two were trapped and ringed on 21st and showed to be *C. f. familiaris* on plumage details.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

Although only ever seen singly, up to three different birds were noted between 20th-26th

Magpie *Pica pica*

Local birds seen daily.



Treecreeper

Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

Light movement noted during the week with small numbers most days and a peak of five on 20th. One trapped and ringed was a Thick-billed (western) bird on measurements.



Nutcracker - that bill can do some damage to human fingers!



Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

A party of six looked as if they may have been migrating over the point on 24th.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

Noted daily sometimes in quite large numbers (140+ on 20th) presumably most are local birds.

Raven *Corvus corax*

Two flew over on 21st and a loose party of eight flew E. on 23rd

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Small numbers were seen moving on five days.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Not really looked for but about ten were near the ringing station on 22nd.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Good numbers on the edge of the farmland area and also in bushes near the small beaches. Probably well over 100 in the area on occasions if not more.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Steady passage noted on several days.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

As with Chaffinch above. A peak count of 166 over on 22nd. A total of 37 trapped and ringed during the week.



Tree Sparrow



Brambling

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Good numbers in the general area with larger groups feeding with Tree Sparrows and others near the point.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Noted on five days with a maximum count of six.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

Seen daily migrating over with other finches.

Linnet *Acanthis cannabina*

Four were seen on 24th and a total of 25 on 26th.

Redpoll sp *Carduelis flammea* sp

A total of about 70 redpolls passed over on 20th and all sounded similar. One trapped and ringed was identified as a Lesser Redpoll *C. cabaret* while another seemed to show plumage characteristics between Lesser and Mealy (Common) *C. flammea*. Very confusing. Apparently for several years now the Lessers spreading from the S. have interbred with Mealties and it is not unusual to catch birds in this plumage. Two were seen on 21st and 26th and again not specifically identified.

Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

One flew over on 22nd followed by two on 25th and seven on 26th.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

An interesting passage species with one on 20th, five on 21st, eight on 22nd and a total of about 28 on 26th.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

Seen daily but difficult to tell whether birds were just feeding locally or actually moving through. Peak count was 52 on 25th. A total of ten trapped and ringed during the week.



Redpoll but which species?

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Numbers appeared to build up during the course of the week particularly around the edges of the farmland near the small beach. A total of 26 trapped and ringed during the week.



Hooded Crows