

Twite

Following is a press release regarding the ringed Twite:

"Twite traditionally spend the winter on salt marsh on the Lancashire coast, but until now, their origins as breeding birds remained a mystery. It was thought that they would be from the nearest breeding sites in the South Pennines but there was no ringing evidence to back this up. Last winter nearly 200 Twite were colour ringed in Morecambe bay, while more than 200 birds were colour-ringed at various sites in the South Pennines. Pennine birds were found almost immediately, well distributed but up to 20km from the places they were ringed. The Morecambe Bay birds however, disappeared without trace. This was until late June when one was seen with a mate and a brood of chicks on the Isle of Sanda off the Mull of Kintyre. Interestingly this sighting also solved the mystery of where the Sanda Twite go in winter. Despite more than 20 years of ringing Twite on Sanda, there had been no recoveries away from the island. Colour-ringing of Twite is part of a wider conservation project involving a partnership of birdwatchers, BTO bird ringers, RSPB, United Utilities and CJ Wildbird Food. The centrepiece, however, is a three-year English Nature research project into the detailed ecology of Pennine Twite. In addition to colour-ringing adult birds, volunteers have been helping to find Twite nests so that chicks can be colour-ringed too. This is particularly important as it will tell us how long Twite live for, as well as where they go in winter, and where they breed and feed. So far, 143 nestlings have been ringed in the Pennines this year. Help is needed in tracking these birds so all birders are urged to report any sightings of colour-ringed Twite. The colours on the left leg are most important as they tell us when and where the bird was ringed. A colour-ring on the right leg will tell us whether and where it was ringed as a nestling. Any colour ringed Twite can be reported to Andre Raine (andre.raine@uea.ac.uk) or David Sowter (davidsowter@freenet.co.uk), or by phone to Roy Rhodes (01204 664305 Rivington WTW, Bolton Road, Horwich, BL6 7RN) Date, grid reference, numbers and what they seem to be feeding on would all be really useful. We will let you know when and where all sightings were ringed. Previous work on the ecology of Twite has shown that late-cut hay meadows appear to be important feeding grounds. In fact, some colonies appear to be wholly dependent on them as a source of seed for their chicks. Special Twite seed provided by CJ Wildbird food is being used as bait for ringing, but also as a vital fallback for Twite if the hay meadows are cut too early. This is a short term conservation measure which enables Twite to survive while we negotiate funds to secure Twite-friendly management of hay meadows."

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