

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* at Lionwood, Portway, Worcestershire, 2020

Michael Barstow.

Photographs of the bird in the hand by Dennis Cooper and Jacki Gittins.

Picture of bird in the tree by Noel Murray with his permission.

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Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* at Lionwood, Portway, Worcestershire, 2020. Noel Murray with his permission'

The morning of 28th October started at around 0630hours with setting the mist nets, still darkish but only a light wind and for a change no rain. Conditions were probably near ideal for mist netting. Only a small team today to enable social distancing and other sensible practices for these difficult times. The nets were all set and the first round at 07.00 produced only a first year Robin. The next three hours were relatively quiet with a small catch of the usual suspects, Blue Tits being the dominating species with a selection of Great Tits and another first year Robin which appeared to be a later brood than the first as it had not yet completed post juvenile moult, with the new central tail feathers still not fully grown.

The wind was slowly rising with occasional blizzards of oak and other leaves. There could be problems clearing the nets so we decided to commence take down at around 1100hours. I started at one end of the

sets and Jacki and Dennis went to the other end. I had nearly cleared the first net of leaves when the call came - "you had better get back to the ringing station!" No further explanation. A check of the net to ensure it was safe to leave and off I dashed. Arriving at the station I was handed a bird bag by Jacki and observed a rather excited looking Dennis, must be something good I thought as Dennis rarely gets excited about anything. Too small to be anything like a Sparrowhawk or Green woodpecker so possibly a Firecrest, Yellow-browed Warbler or something like a Crossbill, only one way to find out - open the bag!

Bird in the hand and remembering the ringers ethos - identify, apply ring, age and then the rest of the biometrics - what is it - at first glance - similar shape to a Robin but the wrong colour - on closer examination noted the orange-buff flanks and blue tail feathers - must be a Red-flanked Bluetail! There had been reports of a few turning up

on the east coast in recent days. Never having seen the like before a quick check in *Collins Bird Guide* to confirm initial thoughts, yes it was either an adult female or first year male/female Red-flanked Bluetail. Find the cameras and get the ringers handbooks out for a quick read-up on aging, sexing and moult and calm down a bit.

After applying an A ring (number AAL 2213) and consulting Svensson's *Identification guide to European Passerines* and based on the head colour, shape of the tail feathers and other features we were able to confirm the bird as a first year. We could not see any blue in the lesser coverts or tertials so were unsure as to its sex.



Record photographs of the Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*. Dennis Cooper and Jacki Gittins

We completed the collection of biometrics required as quickly as possible and released the bird to go about its business of surviving the winter. The catch was reported to the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and the BTO County Recorder and others in our group and we carried on taking down the nets. By the time we had packed everything up details of the catch had been reported on Twitter and Facebook and a minor twitch got underway.

The bird was elusive, as is its nature, but a number of birdwatchers found and photographed it over the next few days. Although this

species is no longer on the list of British rarities it was nonetheless a very exciting find. It is a reasonably regular visitor to our east coast, with sightings most years but is extremely rare in land this being the first Red-flanked Bluetail record for Worcestershire and I think for the West Midlands.

Thank you to the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust for allowing us to ring Lion Wood and Ipsley Alders Nature Reserves