

Blackcaps wintering in Malvern. Where do they go in summer?

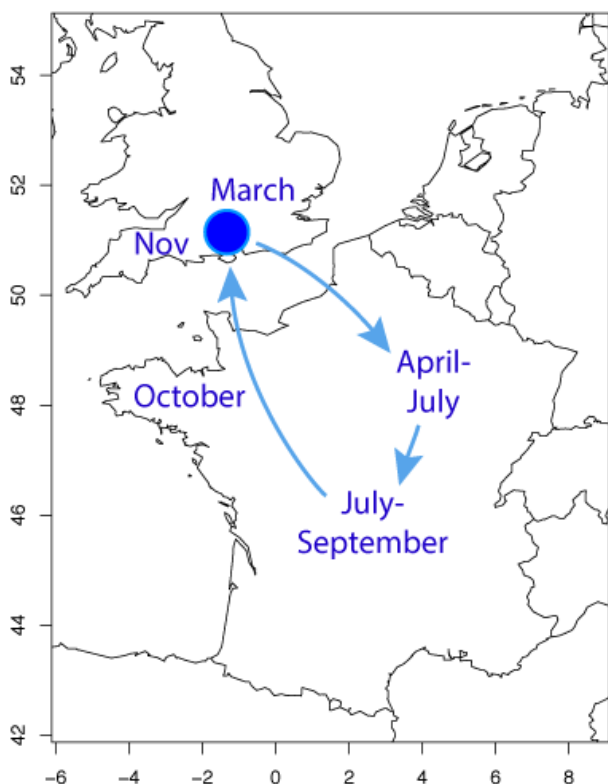
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Blackcaps have been wintering in the UK for many years. Numbers have increased greatly in recent decades and these birds show a strong affinity for gardens especially where food is provided. The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) co-ordinated colour ringing studies in the 1980's to try to understand where these birds spend the rest of the year. At this time one of the colour ringed Blackcap ringed by Ray Bishop in his Malvern garden returned for there for three subsequent winters. Sparse ringing recoveries suggested that some may actually migrate NW from continental Europe to the UK for the winter (Langslow 1979), but the full story may be more complex.

In October 2017 the BTO published an article on *Wintering Blackcaps in the UK*. In it the authors Benjamin Van Doren (studying for his PhD) and Greg Conway of the BTO asked for help from ringers with access to garden feeding sites regularly used by Blackcaps and where they could be caught together with good opportunities for re-sighting or re-catching wintering birds.

A group of ringers in the Malvern area took this on board and found a number of suitable sites with the help of the Malvern Bird Group, an online forum that reports bird sightings within 2.5km of the Malvern Hills.

A subsequent BTO online article (21st December 2017, BTO Bird Ringing Demog Blog <http://btoringing.blogspot.com/2017/12/return-of-winter-blackcaps-geolocator.html>) reported an early success from attaching geolocators to birds caught for ringing in the previous winter. One individual re-caught with a geolocator had wintered in the UK, summered in France, and then followed a circular migration en route back to the UK (01).



01. Diagrammatic summer route map of a Blackcap carrying a geolocator. BTO.

Encouraged by this result, 13 Blackcaps were caught and colour ringed in the Malvern area in winter 2017/18. Six also had geolocators attached in the hope that some of these birds would return the following winter.

2018/19 winter was extremely mild and Blackcaps were much less interested in using garden feeders regularly. However, eventually, one of the colour ringed birds without a geolocator returned to the original garden in Upper Welland and appeared there intermittently until late winter.

Another of the Malvern colour ringed birds which did carry a geolocator never made it back to Malvern but turned up 20 miles south in a Gloucester garden. The BTO Regional Representative heard about it and the bird was caught at the second attempt and the geolocator retrieved (02, 03).

Provisional analysis of the downloaded information suggested that this bird had summered in a very different location from that shown in 01! To be published later as part of Benjamin's PhD.

If you see a colour ringed Blackcap or would like to be involved with the project, please email stuart.brown37@btopenworld.com



02. Malvern Blackcap with geolocator caught in Gloucester. Gordon Kirk.



03. Malvern Blackcap with geolocator caught in Gloucester. Gordon Kirk

Acknowledgement

Many thanks to Gordon Kirk for allowing use of his pictures.

References

Langslow, D.R. 1979. Movements of Blackcaps ringed in Britain and Ireland. *Bird Study* 26:239–252.

Benjamin Van Doren and Greg Conway 2017. Wintering Blackcaps in the UK. *BTO LIFECYCLE magazine* 6:8-9.

Images

01. Diagrammatic summer route map of blackcap carrying a geolocator. BTO.

02. Malvern Blackcap with geolocator caught in Gloucester. Gordon Kirk.

03. Malvern Blackcap with geolocator caught in Gloucester. Gordon Kirk