

Ringing recovery of Yellow-browed Warbler in Andalucía confirms overwintering in consecutive winters

On 2nd January 2017, ST found a Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* in the village of El Pelayo (near Tarifa), in Andalucía, Spain. The bird was subsequently present in an area of Cork Oaks *Quercus suber* for around six weeks and was presumed to have overwintered. Later that year, two Yellow-browed Warblers were found in the area, one on 30th October 2017, at the same site as the first, and the second on 1st November 2017, no more than 500 m from the first. One of these overwintered and, on 28th January 2018, was trapped and ringed by JMGP. It had a fat score of 0 (on a scale of 0–3) and a muscle score of 2 (scale 0–8; Redfern & Clark 2001), levels which suggest a wintering bird rather than an active migrant. Then, on 4th November 2018, ST found a ringed Yellow-browed Warbler in El Pelayo; on closer examination of the photos, the ring number was confirmed to be that of the ringed bird from the previous winter (plate 386).

This observation is the first ringing recovery of Yellow-browed Warbler that confirms winter site fidelity in Europe and supports the hypothesis that this species is developing a new migration strategy and is now wintering regularly in the Western Palearctic (Gilroy & Lees 2003; de Juana 2008; Alfrey 2017a,b). This hypothesis could, at least in part, explain the massive increase

of individuals in Britain in autumn (see White & Kehoe 2018, and earlier Scarce Migrant reports), which in turn could be related to new breeding grounds and/or population increase in the boreal forests of Siberia. It is now widely believed that these birds arriving in Europe are mainly juveniles on exploratory migration.

Until recently, the Yellow-browed Warbler was a rare visitor in the Iberian Peninsula with only 95 accepted records between 1985 and 2011 for mainland Spain, mainly in late autumn/early winter (de Juana & Garcia 2015). However, more recently sightings have increased markedly and the species is now reported regularly from favoured sites in Andalucía. The upsurge in records cannot be accounted for by changes in the numbers of potential observers and the pattern does appear to match the overall increase in numbers recorded in northwest Europe. Differences in mean arrival date with latitude in western Europe suggest that just a small proportion of birds arriving in Scandinavia and the UK move on through the Iberian Peninsula. It is also possible that birds appearing in potential wintering areas in Iberia and North Africa could arrive on a wide front across mainland Europe.

Sightings of Yellow-browed Warblers across Europe in the winter of 2018/19 were in a broad arch from Britain and Ireland across Iberia and into Macaronesia (fig. 1), clearly indicating a wintering metapopulation, which included over 50 birds wintering in southwest England alone in early 2019. Further ringing recoveries to confirm the establishment of a returning wintering population in Europe are still lacking and, as yet, satellite tracking of small passerines is still limited by the size and expense of the tags. Although good numbers of Yellow-browed Warblers are ringed each autumn in northwest Europe (over 4,000 in the UK to the end of 2018; BTO), the ring-recovery rates of small passerines are extremely low; Robinson *et al.* (2011) showed that



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the ringing recovery rate for Willow Warbler *P. trochilus* is only 0.001% with an annual survival of 31%.

Acknowledgments

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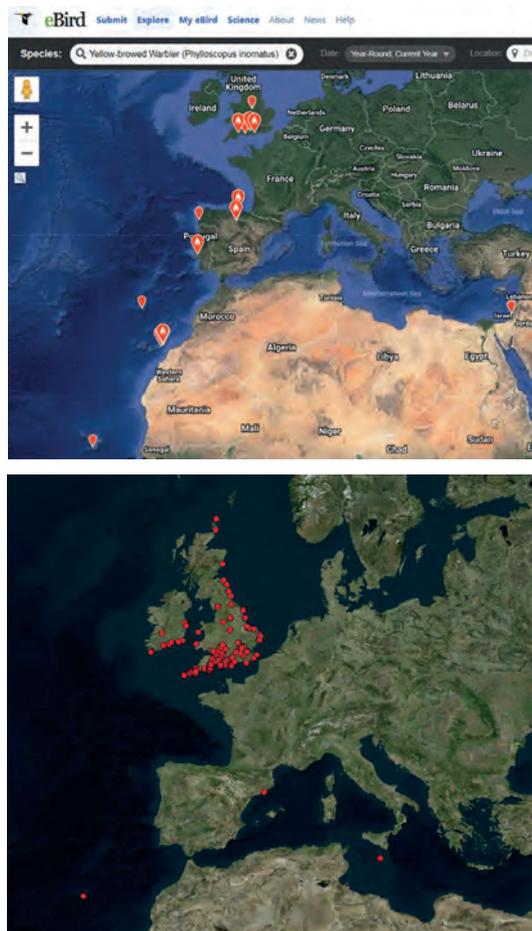


Fig. 1. Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* distribution across Europe in winter 2018/19: data from eBird (top) and BirdTrack (bottom).

Long-tailed Tits stealing nest material from Eurasian Treecreeper

On 26th March in Salcey Forest, Northamptonshire, I came across a Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* building a nest. The site was about 3 m up in an old Oak *Quercus robur* and behind loose bark, as is usual for this species. I watched for some time as it came in with short grass stems or small slivers of bark. These visits were about four minutes apart and on one occasion when it was absent, a Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* landed next to the nest site, poked its head behind the bark and pulled out some wool from the nest. It was joined by a second Long-tailed Tit, which started removing wool from the opposite side of the nest. The two birds spent some time

tugging out the wool and then left. The Treecreeper subsequently returned with more stems and continued to build.

Unfortunately, I had to leave the site so don't know if the tits returned (although the Treecreepers went on to nest successfully). One interesting point about this is that the wool was not visible from outside the nest. The only signs were a few twigs, so presumably the tits knew it was there from observing the Treecreeper – or from previous experience. Either way it shows some pre-planning on their part. I can find no other instance of this activity after a quick search and wondered if it has been witnessed previously.

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