

## **Ringling Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* Pulli**

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During the breeding seasons of 1994 and 1995, I located 5 Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* nests in the grounds of Monifieth High School ( NO 485324 ). All nests were in rank herbage in an area of Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* scrub between the school's sportfields and the tree lined banks of the Dighty Water. One nest was predated but the others fledged successfully. All nests were located by watching adults back to the nest with food and then approaching the site with great care, to minimise disturbance of the delicate herbage infra-structure. Personal experience has shown that pulli of this warbler species should be ringed at 5 days old as there is rapid development of foot and tarsus and broods will explode from the age of around 7 days old.

One particular nest was located on 31 May 1995 and found to contain a brood of 5 pulli judged to be about one day old as they were tiny, naked and blind. The nest was approximately 0.3m above ground level in a dense clump of dead grass stalks at the base of a young spruce *Abies* spp. tree about 1m in height. The nest site was only 2 - 3 metres from the edge of the school sportsfields. On 5 June the pulli were ringed at about 5 days old with eyes just open and primary feathers less than half grown. Casual observations confirmed that the nest was still active on 7 June. This was the day of the school sports. Next morning at 0830hrs, on my way into school, I noticed that the herbage around the nest site had been badly trampled. I went to check the nest and on touching the dry grass above the nest there was a fluttering of wings and a scolding adult flew out of the small spruce. The nest was empty but in pristine condition. I carefully replaced the dead grass stalks around the nest and retired from the area.

I again passed the nest site that same day at around 1500hrs with a colleague and took the opportunity to reinspect the nest with the intention of showing it to my colleague. However, this time I peered through the dead grass stalks and found myself looking at four well feathered young with distinct white throats, all within the nest cup. We immediately retired from the area of the nest site. On 12 June I visited the nest site and found the nest empty but a considerable amount of feather scale was present and the cup was somewhat flattened. Several days later fledged, ringed juvenile Whitethroats were seen within 50m of the nest and they were being attended by at least one adult.

I submit this short note on my experience with a brood of Whitethroat simply to give an account of my experiences of ringing the pulli of this B.T.O. target species and to raise awareness about the predeliction of these pulli to scramble from the nest at an early age. I have also found that if the adults prove reluctant to visit the nest and exhibit very skulking, secretive behaviour then the pulli are probably very young i.e. less than 6 days old. Where adults readily visit a nest that you are watching back from a discrete distance then the pulli are most probably capable of exploding if disturbed and caution should be exercised. However, as my experiences have shown Whitethroat pulli will return to the nest if disturbance is minimal.