

Ring Ouzel Monitoring at Stanage-North Lees 2022

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

This report details the results of Ring Ouzel nest monitoring and protection carried out in 2022 on the Stanage-North Lees estate.

This work is part of a project covering the wider area of the Eastern Edges (predominantly the continuation of Stanage and Bamford edges to the north, and Eastern Moors Partnership land to the south).

1.2 The Ring Ouzel

The Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus* is a migrant summer visitor to the UK, returning to upland areas from North Africa each spring. Ring Ouzels are typically associated with rocky moorland habitat, such as that found on the gritstone edges of the Peak District.

On the Peak District's eastern edges, the Ring Ouzel population is characterised by its close association with areas popular for recreation uses such as rock climbing and walking, and areas of high visitor numbers more generally.

The Ring Ouzel is of significant conservation concern in the UK due to severe breeding population declines, and moderate breeding range decline, over the last 25 years.

1.3 Nest Monitoring and Protection

Each year I lead a team of volunteers who help to locate and monitor Ring Ouzel nests along the Eastern Edges. Nests which are considered at risk of disturbance are identified and, where necessary, signs are erected – either to temporarily restrict access to climbing routes, or divert people away from the nest area. The work is carried out in conjunction with Peak District National Park Authority staff at Stanage-North Lees and Eastern Moors Partnership staff.

This builds on the work of Bill Gordon, the former Stanage-North Lees estate warden, who began signing nests in the early 2000s, and developed a collaboration with the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) to protect nests. BMC volunteers continue to play a key role in the nest monitoring, along with members of Sheffield Bird Study Group and other local "ouzelers".

2 Nest Monitoring

Nest finding and monitoring work was carried out by myself, Mark Anderson (PDNPA) and volunteer nest monitors.

The start of the monitoring season was notably quiet across Stanage and the wider eastern edges, with birds present, including some pairs, but little singing or territorial behaviour noted.

At Stanage, nest building activity was not recorded until 2nd May, when a pair began building a nest at Popular End – the pair had been present for a number of weeks but despite numerous watches no nesting activity was observed until this date.

The first complete nest was also recorded the following day, at Cowperstone, containing 2 eggs.

No further breeding activity was recorded along the edge between Popular End and Causeway for the remainder of the breeding season, though occasional sightings of birds were noted.

Both the pairs at Popular End and Cowperstone successfully fledged young, with the Cowperstone pair going on to successfully raise a second brood nearby.

A third pair was possibly present in the Overstones area, and a pair was recorded early in the season at Car Head Rocks, but again despite numerous watches no breeding evidence was seen.

Territory outcomes are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Ring Ouzel territories & outcomes – Stanage-North Lees

| Territory | Breeding | Outcome |
|------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| Cowperstone | Confirmed | 1: Fledged 4. 2: Fledged 3. |
| Popular End | Confirmed | Fledged 3. |
| Overstones | Probable | Activity through season. |
| Carhead Rocks | Possible | Pair seen once early season. |
| Count's Buttress | Possible | Occasional sightings. |
| Plantation | Possible | Pair seen once early season. |

Productivity figures are given in Table 2 below, alongside figures from previous years.

Table 2. Nest success analysis – Stanage-North Lees

| Year | Pairs | Nests | Clutches hatched | Broods fledged | Fledged young | Fledged young per successful nest | Fledged young per pair | Nests fledging young | Hatched nests fledging young |
|------|-------|-------|------------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| 2022 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 3.33 | 5 | 100 % | 100 % |
| 2021 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 15+ | 3+ | 5+ | 100 % | 100 % |
| 2020 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 6+ | 3+ | 1.50 | 50 % | 67 % |
| 2019 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 11 | 3.67 | 2.20 | 43 % | 100 % |

The number of pairs recorded continues to decline year-on-year, though a third pair are considered likely to have been present in the Overstones area. Nest success for those few pairs continues to be good, with all three nests successfully fledging.

3 Signing and Disturbance

Only one of the nests needed signs, however this was located on one of the busiest climbing buttresses at Popular End. We found the pair at the very start of nest-building, so signs were put up immediately and the climbing restriction was publicised via UKClimbing and social media. To add to the difficulty for this pair, nest building began on the first May bank holiday weekend, and the chicks were due to fledge on the second bank holiday weekend.

Despite this extra pressure in terms of visitor numbers, the signs appeared well observed, with climbers reporting watching the birds from nearby. An additional watch by monitoring volunteers was carried out on a particularly cold but potentially busy weekend when the chicks were just hatched, and again the restriction was noted to be working as planned.

The nest fledged successfully at the end of May. No reports of disturbance at either of the other nests were noted.

4 Colour Ringing

4.1 Background

A proposal was submitted to and accepted by, the BTO and Natural England, with the backing of three landowners across the Eastern Edges (EMP, PDNPA and the Moscar Estate), to individually colour-ring Ring Ouzel chicks in the nest. This will enable us to establish how many of the ringed birds return to breed in subsequent years, providing data on juvenile survival/return rates, and enable us to track how birds use the area during the breeding season once colour-ringed adults are present within the population.

4.2 Ringing

Ringing was carried out by licenced ringers from Sorby Breck Ringing Group.

All three broods at Stanage-North Lees were ringed, 10 chicks in total, all of which subsequently fledged successfully.

A further 44 chicks were ringed at other sites, of which 41 successfully fledged, giving a total of 51 colour-ringed chicks for the Eastern Edges area as a whole.

4.3 Re-sightings

Table 3 shows (as of 31st July 2022) sightings of birds ringed in Stanage-North Lees nests.

Table 3. Sightings of colour-ringed juvenile Ring Ouzels

| Ring combo | Date seen | Location seen | Location ringed | Days since ringed | Distance travelled |
|------------|-----------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| BRG | 6/6/22 | Stanage (Apparent North) | Stanage (Cowperstone) | 11 | 400 m |
| BRG | 30/6/22 | Higger Tor | Stanage (Cowperstone) | 35 | 1.2 km |
| BRR | 9/7/22 | Burbage South | Stanage (Cowperstone) | 44 | 2.5 km |

Further sightings may be recorded during the autumn as birds gather before migration, and then it is a wait until 2023 to see which birds return and where.

5 Summary

A quiet start to the season with little singing or territorial activity was noted across the wider Eastern Edges (and indeed in other parts of the country via discussion within the Ring Ouzel Study group). Numbers of pairs appeared low in other areas at first, though more were gradually found through the season. Overall, the number of confirmed breeding pairs across the area as a whole was similar to the last three years.

Numbers of pairs at Stanage-North Lees remains low and the lack of pairs this year across a significant proportion of the edge (Causeway to Plantation) is notable – with no obvious immediate cause.

Kim Leyland
July 31st 2022