

## Bird ringing at Milltown

The catching and marking (ringing) of wild birds in Ireland is undertaken by qualified people who hold the appropriate licences issued by the National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS). Ringing is used as a tool by conservationists and others as a means of studying survival, productivity and movements of birds (demography). There are roughly 100 bird ringers on the island of Ireland and a further 2000 or so in the UK who both contribute to the same scheme run by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) in Thetford, Norfolk. In the west of Ireland bird ringers are very few and far between so every opportunity is taken to show ringing to a wide audience as possible with schoolchildren an obvious cohort to demonstrate it to.

With this in mind, in 2025 we held two days ringing for the two National schools in the area, Milltown NS and Belmont NS, at the park by the start of the River Clare walkway in the town. In order to catch the birds, three fine mist nets were placed around the edge of the area between the trees and bushes to intercept any birds travelling around the area. The mist nets are made from very fine netting and is a proven and efficient way of catching birds for ringing, and of course, does not hurt the birds upon capture.

With the help of Sara Sheridan, NPWS ranger from Ballycroy Nephin, national park, Mayo, over the two mornings we caught a total of 18 birds of 10 species enabling us to show a nice variety of birds as regards sedentary (local), migratory species and size. The list of birds caught and numbers was: **Robin 1, Chaffinch 6, Blue Tit 1, Swallow 1, Wren 1, Spotted Flycatcher 1, Great Tit 1, Blackcap 1, Dunnock 1, Jackdaw 1.**

Two birds of conservation concern were ringed: Spotted Flycatcher, a bird that spends the winter in West Africa and has declined by some 90% over the last 60 years and the seemingly 'common' Swallow which itself has declined in numbers by some 25% since 1995. Of the others, the Blackcap (a type of warbler) is a species doing very well with numbers increasing by a massive 360% in the last 60 years. The rest represented fairly familiar species that appear to come from stable populations. After each bird was ringed and some basic data recorded (sex, wing length, weight etc.) the children got to partially hold and release them with the ringers - no shortage of volunteers for this part of the demonstration! With luck, it is hoped that this 'hands on' introduction to bird ringing might ignite an interest in wildlife for the local children and maybe guide some to a life committed to conservation as they grow older.



Male Chaffinch



Adult Jackdaw

Chris Benson