

How long do blackbirds live?

Do they live longer in gardens or rural habitats?

To find out, since 2007 Dave Leech has caught and placed coloured rings on over 470 adult blackbirds in his parents' garden in Eccles Road, Holt.

Hobos (HOLT Blackbird Observers) record which birds they see and when.

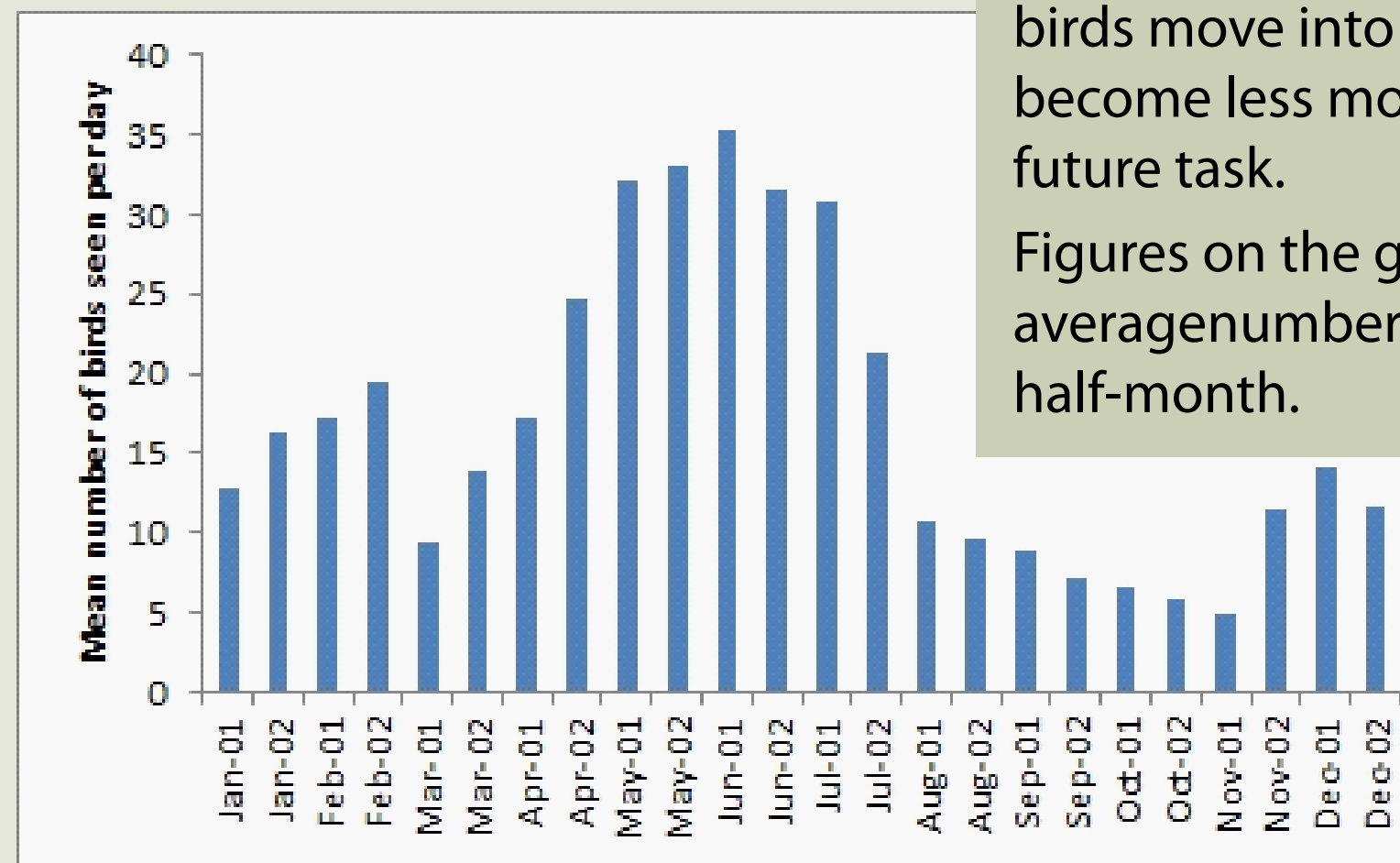


On one day in June 2014, Barbara recorded 85 different colour-marked blackbird in her garden!



Barbara Leech spends a couple of hours a day looking out for the birds in her garden and has logged more than 35,000 sightings!

This score has been bolstered by other observers in Holt, including Gill Burden, John and Carole Wagstaff, Peter and Sue Morrison, Tim and Irene Loseby, Maggie Wilcox and Luke Nash. As a result over 55,000 records can be fed in to the statistical programmes used to compute survival.



In late summer, numbers drop dramatically as birds move into the countryside to moult or become less mobile. Discovering which is a future task.

Figures on the graph on the left are average numbers of blackbirds seen for each half-month.



Sites from which colour-ringed blackbirds have been recorded. Most sightings have been from the yellow-marked gardens.



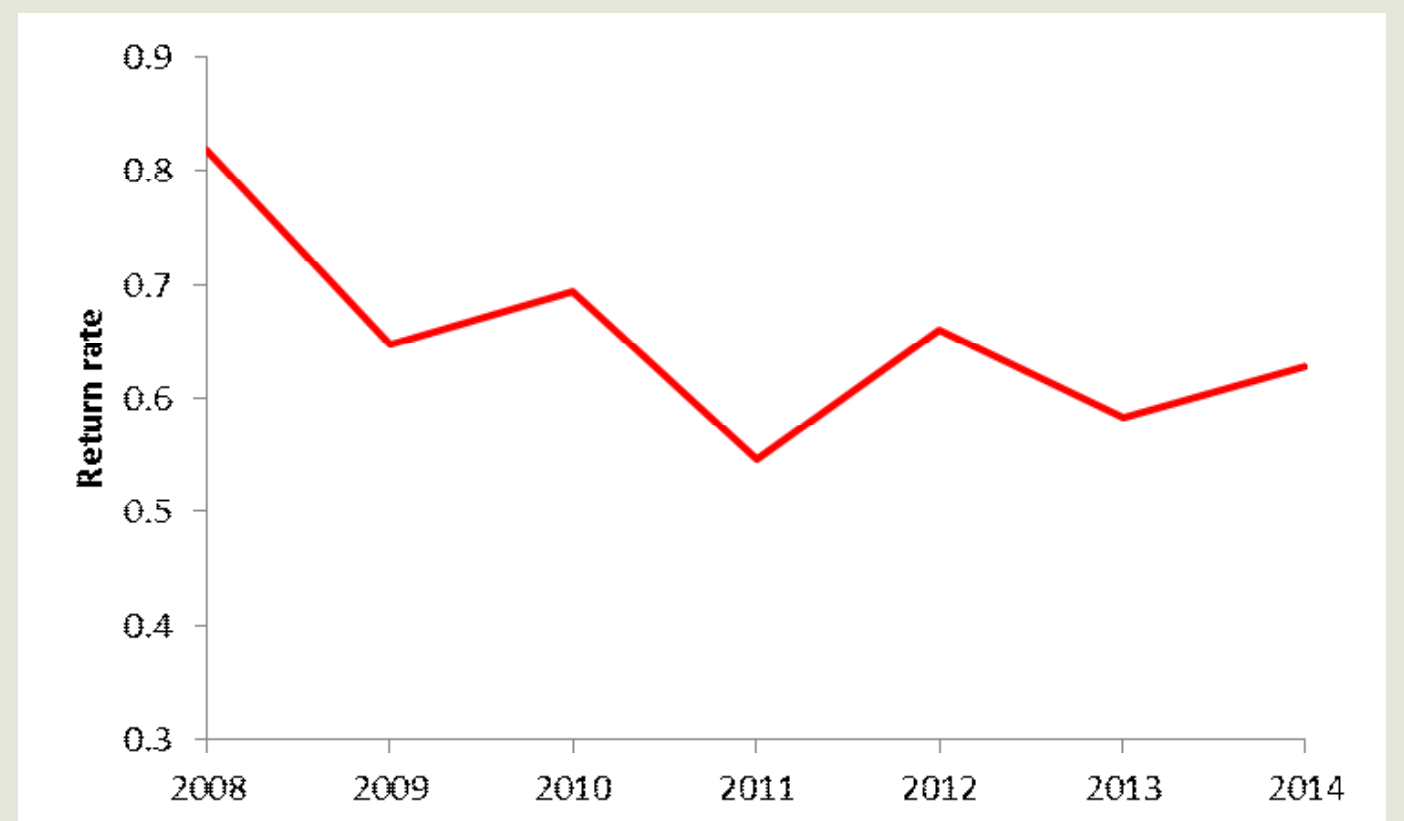
In 2015, prototype GPS tags were fitted to a few birds. These log the exact position of the bird every six hours until the battery runs out. The data can be downloaded when the bird is caught again. This map shows that YRMO (yellow/red/metal/orange) spent most of its time within a small area to the east of the ringing site.

BBC Springwatch

In 2014 Dave Leech's blackbird research was featured on BBC Springwatch. The crew spent nearly two days in Holt filming and interviewing contributors to the project.



Presenter Martin Hughes-Games, talking to Dave Leech (above) and Barbara Leech on the left.



Preliminary analysis (above) suggests that about 60% of birds survive each year after their first year, a figure very close to estimates in more natural habitats.

It is possible that the benefit of increased food availability balances higher predation by cats, and more collisions with road vehicles.

To find out more, or offer to observe, contact Dave Leech at dave.leech@bto.org