

Lesser Whitethroat holding territory in mixed woodland

On 29 May 2017 Liz Parsons alerted me to a singing Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* in woodland by Saltcoats, Ayrshire. It was singing quite vociferously (at 28 full song phrases per five minutes) and seemed fairly settled. I was perplexed by the choice of habitat here, as Lesser Whitethroats in Scotland normally hold territory in various form of scrub (Forrester *et al.* 2007, Byars 2021) This male, however, was holding a small territory (estimated at 0.2 ha) in mixed woodland, consisting mostly of Alder *Alnus glutinosa*, with smaller amounts of Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* and a dense bramble *Rubus* agg. understorey. The male was never observed venturing into adjacent thorn scrub only 30 m away, preferring to remain within the tree canopy. The bird was still present the following day, singing and actively feeding within the dense upper canopy of tightly packed Alder and Sycamore trees around 8–10 m. The Lesser Whitethroat resembled a *Phylloscopus* warbler in behaviour when feeding high in the dense foliage. By 31 May the bird had obviously moved on and was not relocated again, despite searching the site throughout June, in case the bird had successfully paired and bred. In 38 years field work on this species, I have never seen Lesser Whitethroats hold territory in Scottish mixed woodland before although Lesser Whitethroats do breed in oak woodland in England (Cramp & Simmons 1992). In

Ayrshire, Lesser Whitethroats tend to arrive on territory between late April and the first week in May (pers. obs.). With such a late arrival date and considering the atypical habitat type, I concluded that this male was possibly an off-course Scandinavian migrant. In Finland, Lesser Whitethroats are known to breed in habitats consisting of low scrub mixed with taller trees such as alders, pines and birch *Betula* spp. (Haila & Hanski 1987).

References

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An estimate of the breeding Goshawk population in Fife

Smout (1986) described the Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* as a rare visitor to Fife. She quoted no records from the 1960s but thereafter she mentioned one near Cupar August/September 1975, a male shot at St Andrews in December 1977 and a female at Balcomie 4 October 1981. 1982 was a good year with singles at Morton Lochs on 1 May, Falkland on 25 August and Gateside on 1 November. There were two in

1983: a male at Fife Ness on 1 May and a female at Cameron Reservoir on 30 October. In 1984 there was one at Loch Ore Meadows on 15 January and two at unknown sites in August. If we go further back there are very few records. Harvie-Brown (1906) mentioned only two: one killed at Kemback in 1842 and an adult female obtained at Elie 1877. It is interesting to note that the old records come from the same areas