

Korta rapporter *Short communications*

<https://doi.org/10.34080/os.v11.22851>

Robin *Erithacus rubecula* found in juvenile plumage on spring migration

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On the 25 April 2001 a peculiar Robin *Erithacus rubecula* was trapped at Ottenby Bird Observatory (56°12 N, 16°24 E). The normal plumage of Robins after partial post-juvenile moult is characteristic – the breast and throat has a bright orange-red colour, sides of neck has a varying amount of grey lingering

the red throat and breast to the forehead (Pettersson *et al.* 1990), and there is usually an obvious difference between new and juvenile greater coverts (Svensson 1992). The bird trapped at Ottenby seemed to exhibit an entirely juvenile plumage, except for a few red feathers scattered on the breast (Figure 1). No greater coverts were moulted and the upper mandible was yellowish-grey, not slaty-grey as in adult individuals (third calendar year birds or older; see Karlsson *et al.* 1986). All remiges and retricies were fresh, showing only faint signs of wear.

There are two plausible explanations to the observed plumage. Firstly, the bird could have failed to start the post-juvenile moult after hatching either because of belonging to a late brood or due to poor



physiological state, e.g. deprivation of food resources. Or, secondly, the bird could in fact belong to an extremely early brood from southern or western breeding areas in 2001. This implies, assuming a rearing period from nest building to maturity of 38–46 days (Cramp 1988) and 3–7 days of migration to reach Ottenby, that the brood must have been initiated in early or mid February. In Scandinavia breeding normally starts from the end of April in the south but not before mid- or late May in the north, while breeding in southern Europe typically starts in April (Cramp 1988). In Britain and Ireland breeding starts earlier (March, but normally in April), but nests can be found in all months (Cramp 1988).

Considering the very fresh remiges and retrices in this bird, perhaps the latter scenario is the most likely one. If the bird belonged to a late brood, it should have shown some signs of wear in these feathers. One can only speculate on the origin of such a brood, but it seems likely to have been somewhere with a warm microclimate – perhaps within a city?

This is the first documented case of a Robin in full juvenile plumage at Ottenby during spring migration, even though it is the most frequently trapped species during that period (mean 1182 individuals/spring 1972–1999). We could not find any reports of Robins exhibiting this phenomenon in the reference literature (Ginn & Melville 1983, Cramp 1988, Glutz von Blotzheim 1988, Jenni & Winkler 1994), but it may be an overlooked issue. There are passerine species that normally omit post-juvenile moult before autumn migration, e.g. the Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* where some individuals have been found in juvenile plumage during autumn migration (Cramp 1992). However, these individuals renew feathers during a pre-breeding moult in the wintering quarters and are thus not found in juvenile plumage in spring (Svensson 1992).

This is contribution no. 176 from Ottenby Bird Observatory.

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Sammanfattning

Rödhake Erithacus rubecula påträffad i juvenil dräkt under vårflyttning

Den 25 april 2001 fångades en rödhake i närmast helt juvenil dräkt vid Ottenby fågelstation (56°12 N, 16°24 E). Fågeln hade endast ruggat in några enstaka röda bröstfjädrar. Antingen kan denna individ ha varit i dålig fysisk kondition under hösten, eller komma från en mycket sen kull, och därför inte kunnat påbörja den postjuvenila ruggningen innan höstflyttningen. Alternativt så är den ett resultat av en extremt tidig häckning på sydligare breddgrader under våren 2001. Rödhakens häckning beräknas ta 38–46 dagar i anspråk från bobygge till självständiga ungar, vilket innebär att föräldrarna till ”vår” individ i så fall måste ha påbörjat bobygge i början av februari. Skandinaviska rödhakar häckar från slutet av april, medan sydligare populationer börjar några veckor tidigare. På Brittiska öarna kan vissa par börja häcka i mars, men i undantagsfall kan bobygge förekomma under hela året (Cramp 1988).

Detta är det första dokumenterade värfyndet av en rödhake i juvenil dräkt vid Ottenby, trots att det är den talrikaste ringmärkningsarten under vårsträcket (medelvärde 1182 individer/vår 1972–1999). Vi har heller inte kunnat finna någon rapport om detta fenomen i referenslitteraturen (Ginn & Melville 1983, Cramp 1988, Glutz von Blotzheim 1988, Jenni & Winkler 1994). Träskångaren *Locustella lanceolata* är en art som ibland genomför höstflyttningen i juvenil dräkt (Cramp 1992). Dessa individer genomför dock en komplett vinterruggning innan vårflyttningen (Svensson 1992).

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