

# Bearded Tit

## Cuilcear Staiseach



Bearded tits were first recorded in Scotland in 1972 but were recorded very occasionally only as scarce vagrants until a family party was seen in the Tay Reedbeds in 1991. The following year breeding was confirmed when a certain Derek Robertson -author and illustrator of this book- caught several birds in the same area as part of an ongoing, licenced bird-ringing project. Feather growth confirmed that the youngsters had just left the nest and must have fledged there.

The Tay reedbeds cover 4km square (and are the largest continuous reedbeds in Europe) and now hold over 250 breeding pairs with numbers exceeding 800 birds in the autumn. They feed on insects in the summer but change their diet to reed seeds in the winter. Cold weather of heavy snow followed by frost can lead to high mortality. In the winter of 1946/47, it is thought that the entire population of Europe was reduced to 100 pairs. The reedbeds of the Tay, however, are tidal so the incoming water uncovers seeds for the birds to feed on. Cold weather doesn't ever seem to have caused a serious effect on the population there although the numbers can drop due to irruption years (when large numbers of birds disperse), failure of the reed-seed crop or suspension of the reed cutting (which produces the habitat they favour). The population fluctuates a great deal but up to a third of the British population is now resident on the Tay.

*The Bearded Tit, or Bearded Reedling as it is often known, is the only species belonging to the genus "Panurus" (from Greek, meaning "exceedingly" and "tail"). It is most closely related to the lark family.*

Their future seems bright as long as the core area can be maintained. Reed cutting has a key influence on the suitability of the habitat for this species. As the birds are only utilising a small part of the Tay reedbeds for breeding, there is a lot of scope for extending management that could bolster their numbers much further.