Dawlish Warren ring reading report: 2015

Lee Collins

Introduction

This is the third consecutive year in which a ringed recovery report has been compiled for Dawlish Warren Recording Area. Its aim as in previous years is to document the volume and variety of ringed birds observed over a calendar year. This ongoing endeavour is another facet to help emphasise the importance of the Recording Area. It's also hoped that it will encourage a broader interest to an aspect of birding that to many are outside their regular activities.

To those who read this and don't know me I am not a warden onsite, have no formal training, nor am I a ringer, just an avid birder whose passion for birding Dawlish Warren NNR has no bounds. Anyone interested in birding can do what I do, seriously it's not rocket science. I am no different to any other birder, perhaps only my mindset in seeking out such birds sets me apart.

My efforts have also attracted great interest from the BTO, so much so they asked I write a small article for their Demog blog, here's the link- http://btoringing.blogspot.co.uk/2015/05/exemplary-patch-working.html

I do wish to put into context that although I spend all my birding time at Dawlish Warren NNR, all of my efforts aren't purely focused on finding ringed birds. The tide dictates this to a large degree, as does the fact I also consider myself an ardent patch worker, thus have to combine such undertakings within my more mainstream

birding exploits. Finding a balance between doing this, along with birding that included finding Great Grey Shrike (a new species for site), at least one Pectoral Sandpiper and a Caspian Gull during 2015, undertaking several thousand counts annually which are submitted to the BTO and Devon Birds and the odd bit of photography.

The picture below is of two rings that adorn my binoculars, both are from Great Black-backed Gulls. These two rings are the only ones from my 722 pre-2015 reads which account for dead birds. The left ring is called a darvic ring (ring used at Portland Harbour) while on the right a metal BTO ring. As you'll see darvic rings are much easier to read in the field, while the metal rings take a lot more effort. Most metal rings have seven digits embossed on them, with British administered ones starting with two letters followed by five numbers. But as you'll see from the picture only three or perhaps four digits are viewable from a single angle, frustrating if watching a motionless roosting Oystercatcher in front the hide. To secure a full read you'll require a ringed bird to be close enough, somewhat mobile and in many cases require some degree of patience.

Finding a ringed bird is obviously possible any time of the year, making this a twelve month a year pursuit, although during the spring and autumn I along with my fellow patch workers bird the patch as hard as possible. The lure of finding a scarce or rare migrant still the ultimate reward for all those hundreds of hours I spend onsite.

It seemed logical from the onset of 2015 to challenge myself in making another concerted effort in pursuing a decent year of ringed recoveries. The targets I set myself and the challenges they present provide me with additional motivation, to such an extent it's almost become my 'Modus Operandi'.

Getting over 100 different ringed individuals over a calendar year may seem a tall order to many, but after my experiences over the last two years its taught me that with enough onsite attendance it should prove fairly straightforward. This would be my minimum baseline.

Additional targets also worth pursuing involved hoping to find and read rings on more than the 21 different species as noted in 2014, this I know will be a very big challenge. Plus, with a now sizeable collection of recoveries to my name, endeavour to find my 500th individual onsite, as of the end of 2014 it stood at 333. This maybe asking a bit too much and I could lessen it to 400 or 450, although 500 does appeal and with another strong year this maybe possible, although 2016 seems the logical outcome for this goal.

Another target concerns overall reads. I've details on 1009 recoveries onsite, although am aware through correspondence with Roger Swinfen that I'm sadly missing data on 445 retraps through Cannon netting between 1976- 2004, which in due course I hope to acquire for the Recording Group's database. Of the 1009 held in my database I account for 722 of them, 384 of these being made during 2014. So with another productive year ahead it should see me reach another milestone of making my 1,000th read onsite.

A few choice finds also remain a key objective. I'd definitely like to add too my single Roseate Tern read from 2013. I'd also like to add to the two Common Tern and single Little Tern recoveries from 2014, both noteworthy finds, the former the first County recovery in 25 years and latter a County first. I've also experienced a bumper few years reading Sandwich Terns and I'm hopeful 2015 will continue in a similar vein.

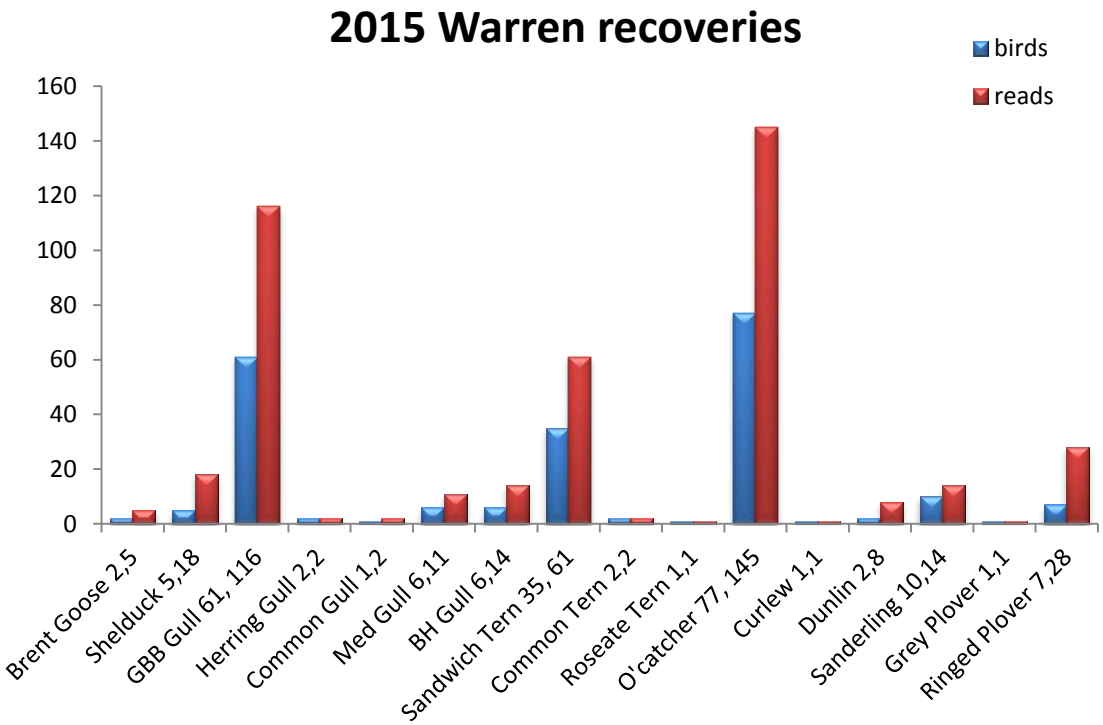
An even greater prize would be an Arctic Tern. I've never from memory seen a bird harbouring a ring for this species onsite, so this remains a long-shot indeed. Finding them onsite based on the frequency of my visits isn't a problem. I'd expect to encounter them several times each year, although the vast majority of observations account for feeding birds offshore or passage birds on a seawatch. They're so infrequently observed from the hide, that finding any like this are noteworthy. Therefore finding one that's ringed and also close enough to read it would be a tremendous coupe, as I don't believe there has ever been a recovery in the County for this species.

To finish off my thoughts on the forthcoming year some new additions would be very welcome. I've read rings on 27 species onsite, although have yet to find a ringed Redshank or Whimbrel, these deemed my commonest site omissions. So as you'll see I still have several targets to aim for over 2015.

I'd visit the site on 241 occasions, logging over 1,129 hours coverage and present over 195 high tides. In the context of such efforts it's this latter figure which would have the most significant impact on my recovery work, as it's during these such occasions in which practically all my reads were acquired..

I'd record ringed recoveries on 124 different dates, accounting for 16 different species, making a total of **429** identifiable reads, involving **219** different individuals (*this including three Dutch birds I still await details on*), of which 72.1% (158) were new reads for site. Comparisons with my 2014 efforts are as follows- 230 visits (up 11), 384 reads (up 45), 188 individuals (up 31), 21 species (down 5).

It's worth highlighting that between mid-November through to early December I was birding in Ethiopia, hence three weeks of non-birding onsite. An excellent time was had, yet this absence would show I lost almost 6% of my annual birding availability. By using data from the same period during 2014 it would indicate I'd potentially be 18 recoveries down. In fact just one ringed bird, a Great Black-backed Gull was recorded in my absence.



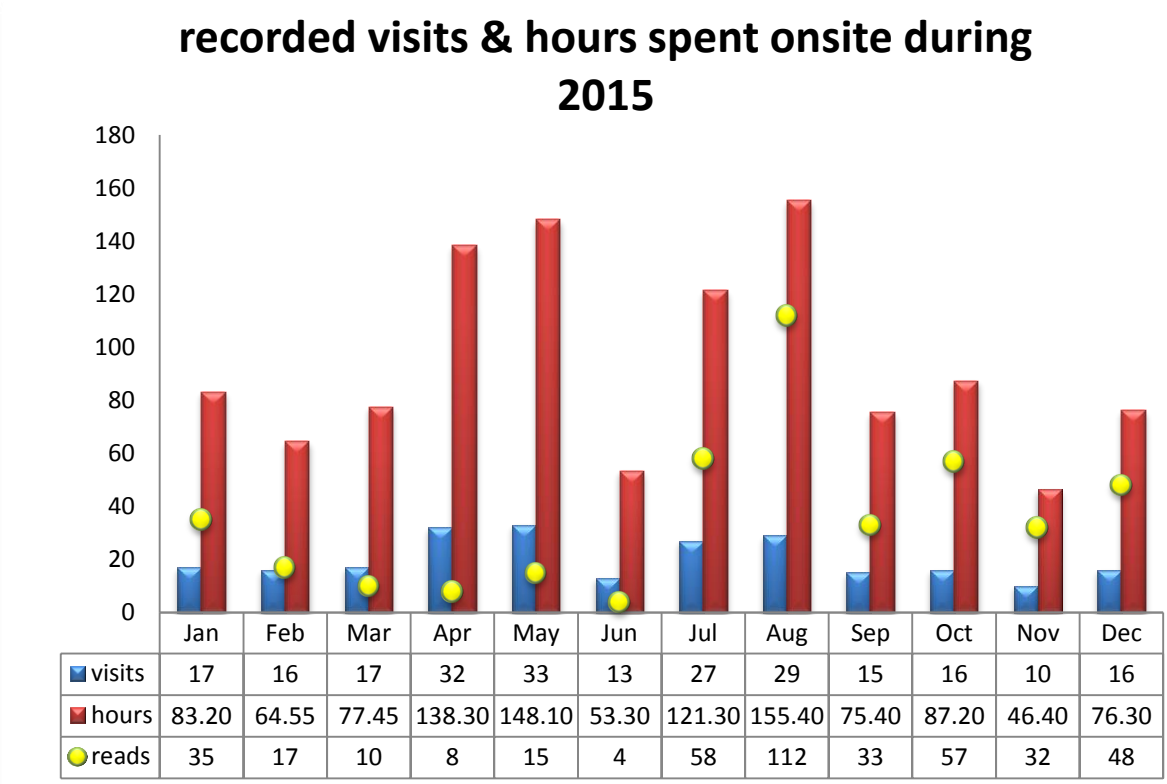
A detailed breakdown of the **214** individuals shows **93** were darvic reads involving ten different species, **13** colour-ring reads (Sanderlings, Ringed Plovers and a Curlew) three bearing coded flags (all Ringed Plovers) and **110** metal ring reads, Oystercatchers accounting for **76** of these.

Highlights are numerous, my second ever Roseate Tern read certainly stands out, as does my second ever Grey Plover read, both being metal ring reads. Finding my first ever darvic ringed Dunlin was also memorable, as was recording six different colour-ringed Ringed Plovers. Two particular species had a bountiful year in regards the sheer number of ringed recoveries and these certainly involved some of my greatest concerted efforts. Finding several colour-ringed Sanderlings, most notably during May and Sandwich Terns during July and August. In terms of reads both being recorded at levels never witnessed onsite before and therefore maybe hard to replicate in future years.

Another interesting means of assessing my recovery work during 2015 is to look at the where my finds were originally ringed. It shows I've found birds from 12 different countries (excluding the United Kingdom), here's a map to illustrate from where-

There is also the knowledge I have gained and the fact I now look much harder at our commoner species onsite. I don't profess to be an expert in this field of birding, although speak passionately and freely on what I've learnt to others in the hope it will encourage them to at least look for and report their own.

This year I've meticulously recorded not just the number of visits, but also the hours spent birding onsite. This has not been done solely for ringed recoveries, more for my own purposes, although such data can be used and is incorporated into a useful graph as shown below.



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
visits	17	16	17	32	33	13	27	29	15	16	10	16
hours	83.20	64.55	77.45	138.30	148.10	53.30	121.30	155.40	75.40	87.20	46.40	76.30
reads	35	17	10	8	15	4	58	112	33	57	32	48

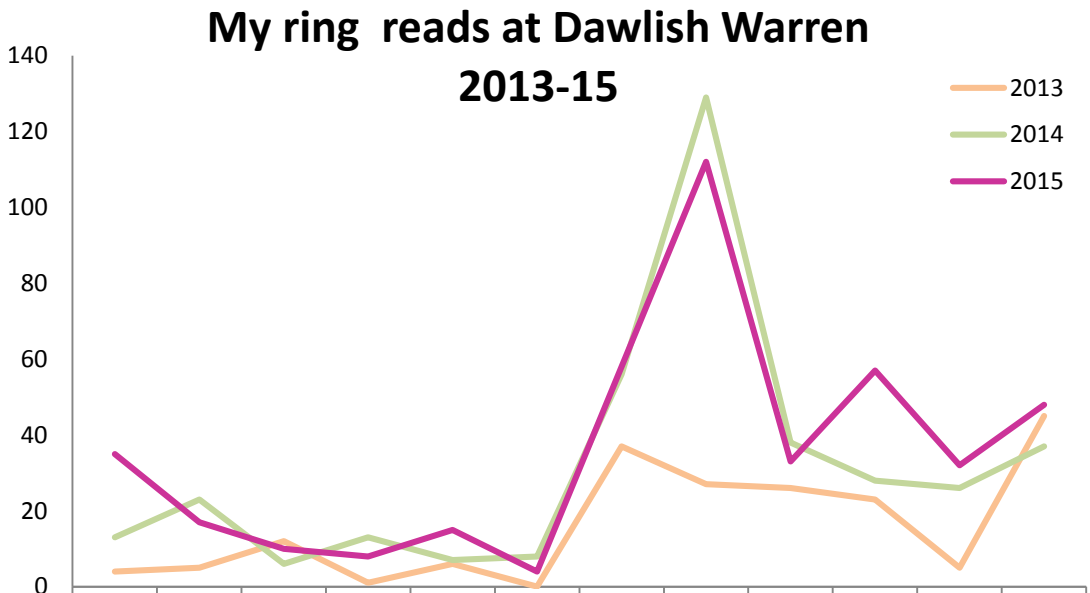
A great deal can be gleaned from the table that incorporates both visitations and hours spent onsite each month. My thought process for doing this allows me to evaluate by statistical analysis some degree of ratio between reads to visits or reads to hours spent onsite per month. The table below has taken the relevant information and gives me a better understanding of what months are more productive in terms of reads to visits or reads to hours onsite.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Reads: visits ratio	2.06 reads per visit	1.06	0.59	0.25	0.45	0.31	2.15	3.86	2.2	3.56	3.2	3.0
Reads: hours ratio	1 per 2hr:22 mins	3:49	7:46	17:18	9:52	13:22	2:05	1:23	2:17	1:31	1:27	1:35

Statistics are of course useful but do not always paint the whole picture. Other variables not highlighted or indeed measureable must be borne in mind. For every hour I'm onsite I am not always in a position or actually looking for ringed birds, tidal bias i.e high tides, or perhaps better to state larger high tides as opposed to neap high tides invariably dictate any such involvement, as does time spent onsite doing non-ring reading activities such as general birding, seawatching or to a lesser degree the odd bit of photography.

The chart below is used to illustrate a breakdown that focuses purely on reads as opposed to individual birds. I've included the last three years and it's interesting to see that each year generally correlates closely month by month. This timeframe is perhaps comparable year on year if based purely on my dedicated approach to finding such birds. Although additional factors must be borne in mind when analysing this, factors such as:

- the amount of birds ringed with identifiable rings in the field increases year on year
- dependant on the number of visits made, or amount of hours onsite. Year upon year my onsite attendance continues to increase.
- the acquisition of my new Swarovski ATX scope in December 2013. This has had an noticeable impact in my ability to read a ring, especially metal rings
- Its also safe to state that my desire to seek out and read a ring on any given bird continues to grow year on year.
- Three week absence in November 2013
- Three week absence between mid- November through to early December 2015



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2013	4	5	12	1	6	0	37	27	26	23	5	45
2014	13	23	6	13	7	8	56	129	38	28	26	37
2015	35	17	10	8	15	4	58	112	33	57	32	48

It's of no coincidence that reads fluctuate month by month, season by season. Spring sees a drop off from the first winter, as does the autumn from the excitement, thrill and glut of recoveries during the late summer, building once again over the second winter period. These dips over the spring and autumn are generally accountable in the main due to my focus on more mainstream birding pursuits.

So, now I'd like to concentrate on documenting the findings on a species by species basis.

Oystercatcher

I like to push myself in many aspects of birding, a prime example of this is clearly demonstrated in my initial efforts as recently as 2012 in trying to read and comprehend metal rings. Little did I realise at the time this tentative step would rapidly blossom into what has now become a borderline obsession.

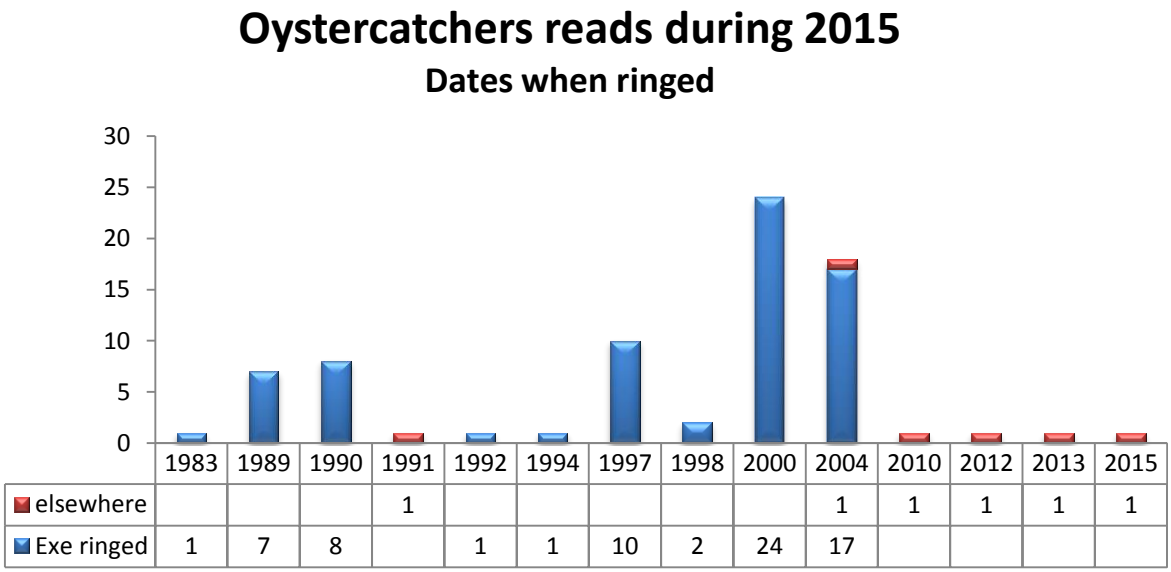
Since attempting and securing that first read I've now become heavily involved in studying Oystercatchers. This recovery was the first onsite in four years, after two were submitted to the BTO in 2008. The subsequent reads I've made over the last few years have really given me and everyone involved with the Warren a much better

understanding of this species, especially their longevity and fuelled my desire to observe and learn even more about them. So much so it's seen a significant impact on their recovery rate onsite, as I've now acquired 273 positive scope reads between September 2012 and year end 2015.

At the start of 2015 the number of ringed individuals I'd personally identified stood at 69 and so it seemed a logical challenge to work for my 100th this year. This wasn't be as easy as some may think, as just two individuals have been darvic ringed birds, all the rest have been acquired through carefully reading metal BTO rings. It was further hampered by the fact that the recent behavioural pattern has seen the roosting flock frequently favouring Finger Point over the conventional island roost in front the hide, thus making such reads impossible.

Over the twelve month period throughout 2015 my endeavours would reach proportions in which both reads and identifiable individuals would eclipse Great Black-backed Gull to sit proudly as the most recorded ringed species of this year. The feat further enhanced when bearing in mind all bar one were achieved as reads of metal BTO rings, not darvics as seen with the gulls.

I would make **145** recordable reads *(although I have additional partial ring reads/ wasp combo's outstanding that may bear fruition) cf. 89 in 2014*. These would account for 33.8% of all my reads onsite this year. It would actually involve **77** different individuals, 47 (or 61%) of which were new birds I'd not recorded before. The volume of individuals noted during 2015 again making a sizeable percentage of my overall ringed birds recorded onsite, equating to 35.1%. It would also see me reach my objective of finding my 100th different individual and have now recorded 116 onsite in a little over three years.

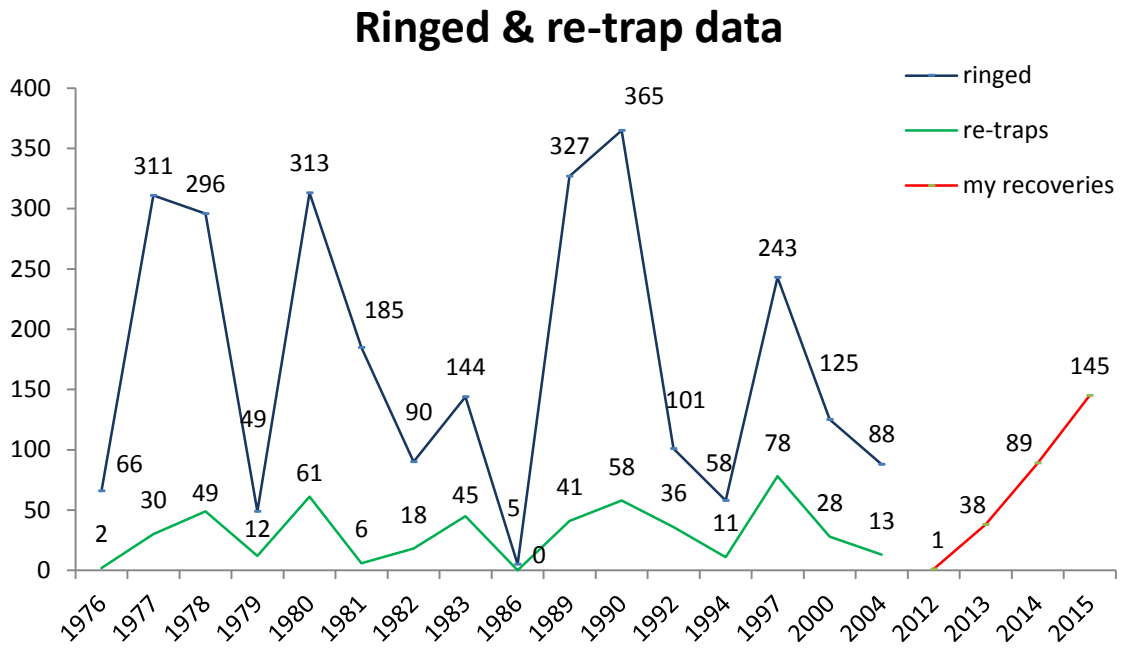


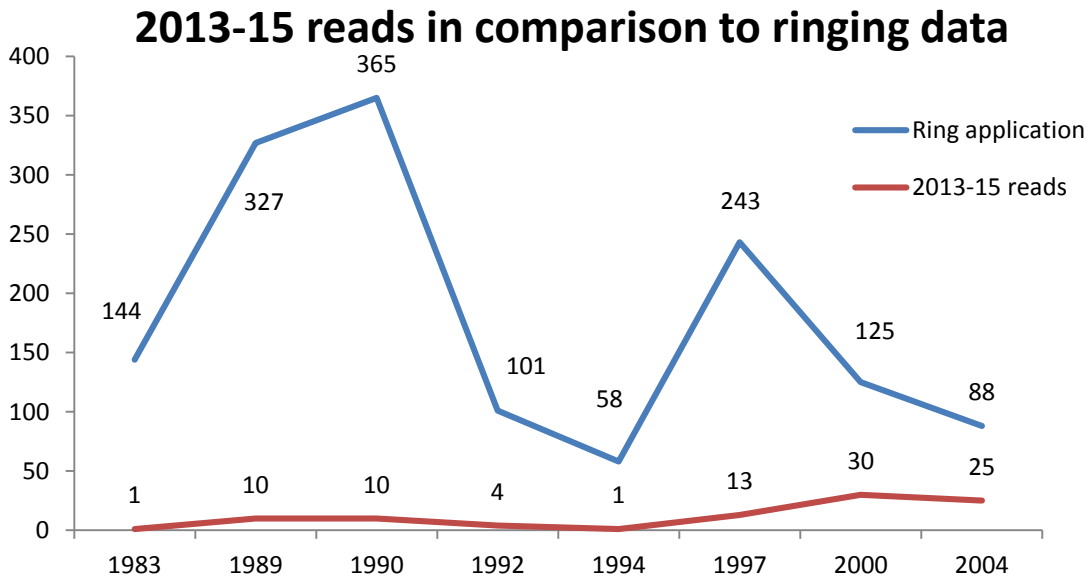
	1983	1989	1990	1991	1992	1994	1997	1998	2000	2004	2010	2012	2013	2015
elsewhere				1						1	1	1	1	1
Exe ringed	1	7	8		1	1	10	2	24	17				

It's apparent from the graph above that 92.2% of all my recoveries are in fact birds that have been ringed onsite. To some this may not seem of interest and many may question the futility in doing so. The results may seem dour when taken in context against species with a longer migratory pattern, or indeed a species deemed more 'interesting', yet there is a strong case in countering this to suggest such involvement for this now Amber listed species is arguably my most important in relation to recovery work onsite.

By taking a broader outlook it certainly does have its merits. The most obvious is the fact that all were ringed at least eleven years ago and in this context it shows that this species has a strong wintering site fidelity, with birds returning each year in late summer too over-winter onsite. This information isn't ground-breaking. It's long been known through such ringing programmes that this species has a strong bias towards both wintering and breeding site fidelity. It's also interesting, to me at least, to note the species longevity.

Based on information kindly supplied to the Recording Group by Roger Swinfen it informed us that between 1976 and 2004 the Devon and Cornwall Wader Group ringed **2766** Oystercatchers at Dawlish Warren, although wader ringing had in fact been undertaken here since 1960. The graph below is used to inform us of the numbers of birds ringed per annum (dark blue), re-traps (green), these being birds recaptured during cannon netting. I have also incorporated my reads (not individuals) during the last few years in red. This clearly showing an increased involvement year upon year on my part. I see my ongoing work as a vital extension of the groundwork laid by the Devon & Cornwall Wader Group.





The table above takes a look at the reads I've made during 2013-15, focusing purely on Dawlish Warren ringed individuals and plotted them against the totals ringed during the respective years of application. My aim to try to give some impression of the ratio between recent reads plotted against the total ringed per annum, this conveying some idea of their longevity. It must be borne in mind I have not read every ringed bird onsite and

so to that means the data will ultimately be flawed. But this information certainly does have its merits. I've only recorded one bird from the 144 ringed in 1983, a recovery rate of just 0.69% suggesting few are now left alive. Whereas birds ringed more recently during 2000 and 2004 have of course a higher recovery percentage with 24% and 28.4% respectively.

I'm unable to fathom out why there is such a poor recovery rate from birds ringed in 1997. I've just 13 reads from the 243 originally ringed, equating to a recovery rate of only 5.35%, this a huge percentage drop from birds ringed three years later in 2000 recorded at 24%. Such statistics could lead us to conclude that most but not all that live past 15- 18 years old dramatically weaken and die? Or perhaps the reason for the species recent decline stem from this period? Both are easy conclusions to draw but are too simplistic an approach and certainly flawed. After all, it must be noted that practically none caught during cannon netting were immatures, so although I'm assessing a birds age from the date of capture to subsequent read date the fact is we don't have knowledge when each was hatched, hence know their true age. Many may have already been 20 years old when initially caught in the nets? Ringing pullus at breeding sites is a far better means of accurately assessing an individual's true life span, something we're sadly unable to accomplish onsite. Despite this the reads I've gained are invaluable, as it does allow organisations such as the BTO to statistically evaluate onsite longevity, especially based on the volume of reads I've undertaken and submitted

Oystercatcher, 20th August 2015, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

Many were also applied with 'wasp' rings, these being coloured plastic rings (yellow, orange and latterly green and white) having a three banding system. Each wasp ring isn't unfortunately unique unlike the more modern coded darvic rings , therefore identifying an individual on a wasp ring alone isn't sufficient in confirming a particular birds identity, although will confirm it was originally ringed on the Exe. These rings are an important tool in my ongoing work, as on many occasions a partial metal ring read combined with an accurate account of the wasp ring has in many cases led to a successful outcome with the invaluable help from Roger Swinfen. Above is a picture of one bearing such a ring. If you look you'll be able to see it's a faded white ring with a thick band, over a thin band over a thin band.

To this day during any high tide gathering several dozen birds will be clearly present bearing a wasp ring. Of the 116 different individuals I have read onsite in the last few years 97 (or 83.6%) were Exe ringed birds, of which 50 were supporting a wasp ring. I am convinced dozens more still remain onsite having so far eluded close scrutiny and this is one of the key reasons why I continue to actively participate in attempting such reads.

Despite this impressive haul, my own personal recovery rate still equates to just 3.5% ringed onsite since 1976, although to counter this it must be borne in mind mortality must be factored in, especially in the case of our earliest ringed birds. If we take a more measured overview, using data from 1989 (rather than 1976) through to 2004, which bar my one 1983 read encompasses all my recoveries, then the recovery rate increases to 7.42%.

I very much hope that my desire, passion and to some extent my eyesight will allow me continue such ventures for many years to come, as I believe if such monitoring continues over the next five to ten years, undertaken either by myself or perhaps by other willing participants it will prove fascinating and lead to some seriously knowledgeable and valuable data in the context of longevity.

Of all such reads made onsite during 2015 one bird stands out, although at the time of making the read I wasn't aware of the ramifications. Having secured the read and already knowing it was Exe ringed I awaited a reply from the BTO assuming it would be another ringed during 2004 to add to the database. The reply from the BTO seemed clearly awry when they informed me it was ringed in 1983 at Dawlish Warren and so I contacted them back to point out what I thought to be a clerical error. Their reply after making a check was in fact 100% correct, as they informed me the bird was ringed on 29 August 1983, although recaptured in 2004 when a white wasp and new ring was administered to replace the old one. This makes the bird in question over 31 years old, making this the oldest recovery onsite and one of the oldest recorded Oystercatcher recoveries in the UK.

Oystercatchers are known to be a long lived species, the ringing of them and subsequent recovery reads an obvious example of the benefits of undertaking such ringing programmes. I'd like to think my efforts aren't in vain and help evaluate the species overall status on the Exe and elsewhere. Recoveries like the one above are noteworthy but by no means unique as I'd also record another 15 individuals that were at least 25 years old during 2015.

Replies from the BTO at present frustratingly don't include supplying information on prior observations, although it's safe to surmise based on the lack of people attempting to read metal rings that many of my Oystercatcher reads over the last few years have been first time recoveries despite birds being ringed over a decade ago.

The picture below is of another individual bird of interest to me but in a very different context. Readers may look at the picture and perhaps question what makes it stand out? It has an identifiable metal ring, one of dozens upon dozens present., although this is the only one I've noted with the ring placement on its tibia (above the knee joint) as opposed to the tarsus as administered by most ringers.

Oystercatcher, 17th April 2015, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

In the 2014 report I did discuss this individual, as I was surprised that as a second calendar year bird it stayed loyal throughout the whole of the year. It is Dutch ringed, my first overseas ringed individual (of the 116 individuals I've now recorded onsite, this is only one of two, the other also being Dutch). Noting its presence in January 2015 wasn't in anyway unexpected as it again overwintered, although the bird now in its third calendar baffled me when I noted it in April and May 2015, a time when all of the dozens of adult ringed birds had long departed to breeding grounds. An additional observation, my eighteenth was noted in August and surprisingly it then went un-noticed for the remainder of the year

I very much hope that by publishing my work on this species it may well encourage others that visit to at least try to attempt such reads. There are dozens of ringed birds present over every high tide, yet it's a species that gets little attention and certainly nobody engages in attempting to read their leg rings. It's not easy but likewise not impossible, so why not give it a try next time you visit? If anybody is successful in making a full read it's important to submit their read to the BTO although I would very much appreciate also receiving details to add to our database.

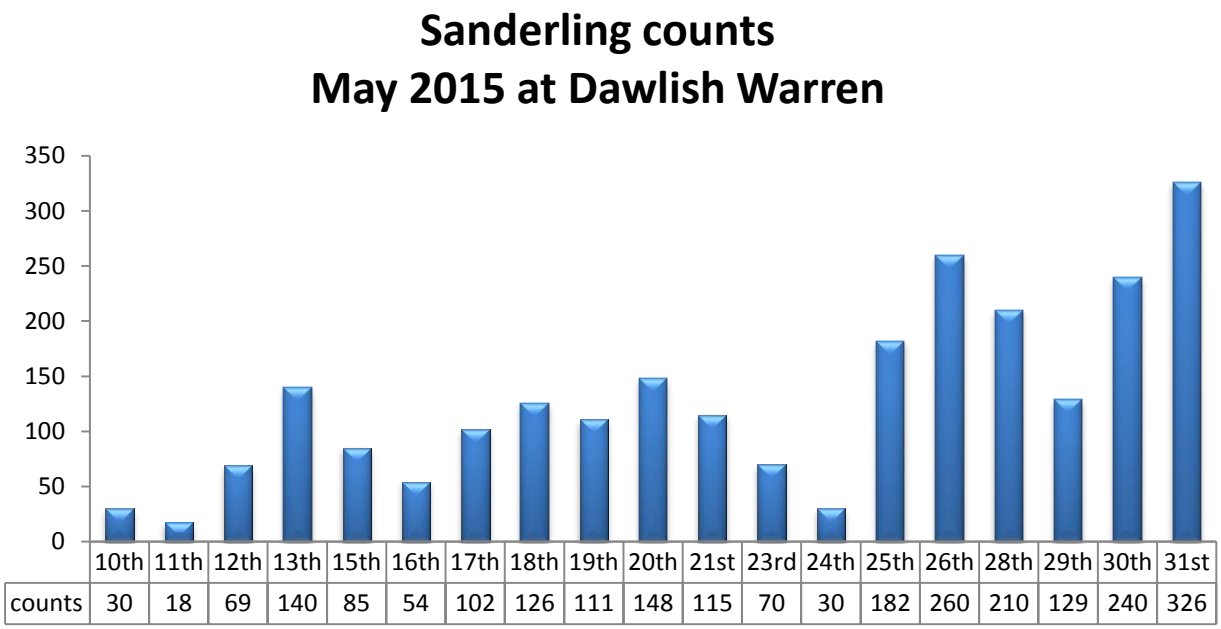
Sanderling

In total the Recording Group has now successfully recorded 29 different individuals onsite since our first two in 2009. The month of May is the key month for locating such birds with 14 now found, whilst July sees returning birds figure with eight, with smaller numbers seen in early June and throughout August. An interesting statistic informs us that just one of the 29 seen onsite was recorded as a juvenile, although a better more accurate account should read just one from the eleven birds noted during late summer.

2015 was certainly a very productive year for finding colour-ringed 'Sanderbling', the site noting an incredible tally of eleven birds, myself seeing ten of them. Putting this into some sort of context 2013 was our previous best, noting five. Here's an overview of the year.

Sanderling (British ringed), 31st August, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

The month of May 2015 was an outstanding time for Sanderlings onsite. Counts were made on an almost daily basis and although numbers would fluctuate day by day, the counts recorded far exceeded numbers seen from May's of recent years. We'd note four May counts of two hundred plus, something not witnessed during this millennium and peaked with 326+ on the 31st, a site record count!



	10th	11th	12th	13th	15th	16th	17th	18th	19th	20th	21st	23rd	24th	25th	26th	28th	29th	30th	31st
counts	30	18	69	140	85	54	102	126	111	148	115	70	30	182	260	210	129	240	326

I'd make in total 33 visits this month, on many dates visiting morning and evening to cover both high tides. Such high coverage, combined with other patchworkers onsite ensured an almost daily count was undertaken. With such an abundance of birds passing through site it was perhaps of no surprise that by diligently scanning through them we'd be rewarded with finding some colour ringed birds, although noting eight far exceeded

my expectations. These were broken down as two Icelandic (green flagged) and six from Mauritania (white flagged).

Of the eight noted during May 2015, five were fully colour ringed, having four colour rings and an additional flag. Of the other three individuals, one had a missing flag, another missing a colour ring and one was missing two rings. Missing rings it appears is a problem and sadly not that uncommon. Reporting such a bird will in many instances lead to an unsuccessful outcome in identifying it to a specific individual.

Although in the case of these three birds I'd overcome this, making great efforts to get a read or partial read of the metal ring number, which is administered to the tibia (above the knee joint). This is by no means an easy task, especially on such a mobile species, but likewise one that is not impossible and the only way of ensuring a 100% positive outcome in such instances.

Our first bird was found on the 9th May, staying just a single day and was in fact our earliest ever spring sighting, beating one found in 2014 by one day (10th). It was ringed at Gardskagi, SW Iceland during the spring of 2010, ours the first confirmed resighting of it. It had a missing green flag and this was probably the reason why it had gone unrecorded for so long.

Sandering (Mauritanian ringed) , 30th May, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

Numbers would start to build from the 12th, with the 13th seeing our first three figure count. Numbers fluctuated daily from then on, but remained high and continued to build. On the 25th, I'd count at least 182 birds and was delighted to find two more colour ringed birds. Both were fully ringed and both Mauritanian, ringed at Iwik village, one in 2010, the other in 2011. Neither bird was noted the following day.

The fourth was found on the 30th, it was missing a colour ring yet identified as an individual ringed during November 2013 at Iwik village, Mauritania and also recorded during the spring of 2014 in Holland. This bird was also noted on 31st and 2nd June, its stay of four days making it our longest recorded stayer for site.

The 31st was crazy, crazy day, a count of birds present suggested we'd at least 326 individuals, a site record count. Within them I found and identified five different colour ringed birds. Four being new birds, three of which were Mauritanian with an additional Icelandic bird.

With so many Mauritanian birds (six) found in quick succession it really gave a strong indication that the birds present during the latter part of May had probably wintered in West Africa.

On my visit on the 2nd June I'd note two birds within a still big gathering of c.160, both birds seen a few days prior. On my next visit on the 4th June after a period of high pressure it was perhaps of no surprise that numbers had fallen significantly, noting just 26 birds, none of which were ringed.

I find it amazing that during late May, Sanderlings are still several thousand kilometres away from their breeding grounds in Greenland yet several of our breeding passerines have already fledged their first broods.

Birds reappeared from mid-July, numbers varied day by day although generally a few dozen were seen most days. Within them two colour-ringed birds were found onsite in late July, both bearing blue flags. These were both ringed in Ostgronland, East Greenland during 2013 and I was fortunate to see one of them. During the 23 months between ring application and our discovery neither bird had registered a recorded observation.

Sanderling (Greenland ringed), 26th July, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

Our only August observation was found by a visiting birder, Brian Davies on the 31st, this being our latest ever recorded ringed bird. On meeting him at John's Watch he knew of my interest in ringed birds and informed me about a colour ringed Sanderling he'd seen. Any plans I'd had to look offshore and work the incoming tide we curtailed as I didn't want to miss seeing the bird in question. Initial scans of the beach from here showed Sanderling were present, but frustratingly not one with colour rings and an anxious 15 minute period ensued before it was finally picked up as a small flock landed close to where we were standing. It was fully ringed, with a blue flag and so basing my assumptions on it being also a Greenland ringed bird as per the two seen in July I confidently relayed this information onto Brian. Getting home I was therefore somewhat surprised to find the bird was in fact British ringed, our first such bird and ringed in September 2013 at Hayling Island, Hampshire, its last recorded sighting made in Shetland in May 2015.

I find it astounding that such well-marked birds can go unobserved or unrecorded, especially in Europe. I can understand how, with a lack of birders present at their wintering grounds in west Africa or indeed on breeding

grounds in Greenland, but why so in western Europe with so many people watching birds? The answer lies in the fact that a large part of the birding community just don't actively look for colour ringed birds.

Finally, much of this data comes from Jeroen Reneerkens who has initiated a new website, it's an online recording system that features instant information retrieval on any bird you may find, the address is- ***http://animaltrack.org/*** If anybody is fortunate to find a colour ringed Sanderling this will enabke you to instantly discover its origins and movements.

Dunlin

This is an abundant wintering species at Dawlish Warren, counts during recent winters generally range between 1000/2000 birds but with larger counts in the past.

Our database on ring recoveries however shows we've just fourteen pre-2015 individuals, the vast majority dating back to the 60's and 70's, with a single report in 1988 and feel certain all these are attributable to retraps during cannon netting sessions. In Devon recoveries are very lean, published records in the Devon Birds annual reports over the last decade list just one in 2012 found dead in Exeter.

With over a thousand birds roosting onsite during the early winter period l observed at least one metal ringed bird on most visits, although reading a metal ring on a Dunlin remains a very big challenge. I can't accurately quantify as a percentage how many are metal ringed, I've never gone out my way to research this, but it's a fraction of 1%. The size of the ring is obviously very small and further hampered by the species frequent habit of almost perpetual motion whilst feeding. This behaviour makes any such undertaking to read a metal ring virtually impossible. Any attempt will require a very close view and a whole lot of good fortune.

I was delighted to record my first Dunlin recovery in 2013, when I found a colour-ringed bird from Spain. 2014 was a barren year, although a partial six digit read (it had seven digits on the ring) on a Swedish bird frustratingly wasn't sufficient enough to secure a positive individual read.

Whilst in the process of making a Grey Plover count on the 6th March I was stopped in my tracks when I found a Dunlin harbouring a white darvic ring. These are without doubt an easier proposition in gaining a read over the convensional metal rings, but all the same the darvic ring was very small. The bird was I'd guess over 40 metres away, resting motionless in the Bight within a small wader gathering. On x30 magnification I could make out it had a white coded ring, but discern little else. But by raising the magnification significantly I was delighted to discover I could secure a read with utter confidence even at such a distance.

It was Polish ringed, from a site just east of Gdansk called Swibno, on the River Vistula on the 21st July 2014, this being 1563 kms away. I assume it was caught as a migratory bird, having probably bred further north either in Russia or Fenno-Scandia. My observation was its first recorded recovery.

Dunlin (record shot), 21st March 2015, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

We'd still got large numbers of Dunlin present onsite during March but I'd initially assumed it a passage migrant, the time of the year certainly would fit into this theory.

This was one of two darvic-ringed Dunlins I was too record on the 6th. Unfortunately I was unable to secure a read on the second. Finding a single bird amongst 1000+ isn't an easy task, especially during the high tide roost when they often congregate in a tight flock, with only a small minority having their legs in view. It's practically impossible to locate during these times, and have never observed it in such circumstances. It's only after the high tide starts to wane and they become more active that a more thorough scan has produced such findings.

Buoyed by this noteworthy discovery I paid careful attention to the c.1400 Dunlins present several days preceding this and to my delight refound and read the darvic ring on the Swibno bird on the 8th and 9th. Visits after this met without success, the neap tides hampering me as the wader gatherings weren't close enough to pursue such exploits. On the 16th I'd note a white ringed bird but was too far away to ascertain with certainty if this was the same bird. A week later and with more favourable tides visits on the 20th, 21st and 22nd showed it remained present.

It had now been present or at least been viewed over a 17 day period and now I had to question the fact was it a migrant having stayed so long? I began to re-evaluate my thoughts and conclude it had probably over-wintered on the Exe but gone undetected. I'd spoken to Keith Birchall sometime in late 2014 and he'd informed me he'd had such a bird with a white darvic ring higher up the Exe. Although he couldn't secure a read I can therefore only theorise it was probably the same bird.

My second successful recovery of 2015 was during mid May whilst sat in the hide. A small party of Dunlins and Ringed Plovers fed just yards from the hide and presented an ideal opportunity to acquire some decent images. I suddenly became aware of one very close individual with a metal ring, so immediately put down my camera and refocused my efforts to gaining a read. Little by little I acquired each of the seven digits, until I was

sure I'd confidently secured the read. It had a British ring and news that followed informed me it was ringed as a juvenile at Scurdie Ness, Angus, Scotland on 30 July 2013, whilst mist netting for Storm Petrel.

Another darvic ringed bird was present on the 31st October, it also had a white ring with three digits although frustratingly remained to distant to gain a successful read. It's assumed this bird was also Polish ringed.

Ringed Plover

An excellent year in which I'd record **seven** ringed individuals. The first bird being a metal ringed bird that overwintered. This Danish ringed bird being noted again in February 2015, although probably remained present on 6th March when a metal ringed bird was seen at distance.

Ringed Plover, 2nd August, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

The month of August is a key time for observing this species. Numbers build rapidly during the mid/ latter part of the month, to such an extent that every year we record counts that exceed the Nationally Important figure of 340 and occasionally pass the Internationally Important figure of 500. Whilst witnessing this build up its common policy onsite that we undertake counts. Their habit of remaining motionless or feeding within the thick swathes of Glasswort can make accurate counts at times frustratingly difficult, the latter also obscurring the tell-tale signs of any ringed individuals.

During the morning visit on the 2nd August in which we'd enjoyed prolonged views of a first summer Roseate Tern from the hide, some movement caught my eye of a wader very close in front of us. A Dunlin and Ringed Plover had dropped in unseen and it was immediately apparent the Plover was colour ringed. Attentions quickly shifted to the bird and a full read made without a problem, although a black ring on the left tibia (above the knee) wasn't always visible and could be easily missed.

It was extremely confiding, giving us great views and allowed the photographically inclined ample time to grab some images, as depicted above.

The bird remained onsite for almost seven weeks, recorded by myself on 16 visits and last seen on the 19th September. Its duration of stay in complete contrast to all our previous August recoveries, with most recorded on just a single date. News that followed informed me it was ringed as a chick at Beltringharder Koog, Germany on the 23rd May 2015, this a new scheme not far from the Danish border and our sighting constituted one of their first overseas recoveries.

This one individual bird makes a useful case study. Why, because it epitomises and highlights that although the bird remained present for 49 days it went completely un-noticed by countless birders. The majority specifically visiting with the intention of covering the high tides to look through the gathering of small waders, hoping to see a Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint or perhaps something rarer! It's true I did not personally record it on every visit I made and so it could go unnoticed. But it did indicate to me that colour-ringed birds such as this are clearly overlooked or if seen not submitted to the BTO.

Ringed Plover (NZS), 10th August, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

On the 8th August a cursory scan of the Bight to make a Plover count yielded another find. A quick flash of something red as a bird scurried past my field of view confirmed I'd another 'Blinged' Plover. Once I was able to gain a reasonable view through my scope it became apparent the bird also had a coded (NZS) yellow flag on its right tibia. I'd recorded a similar bird in October 2014, so immediately knew the scheme, it being Norwegian from the small island of Makkevika, where it was ringed as a first calendar year bird on the 6th September 2014.

Just a day later on the 9th a count of 117 were present, within them both the German bird, now present for its seventh day and the previous days Norwegian bird along with a new colour-ringed individual. It was found by Ivan Lakin and led me a merry dance, taking me over an hour to relocate it. It had four colour rings, one on each tibia and tarsus and this I knew from finding two like this in 2013 indicated an Icelandic ringed bird.

This bird was initially ringed back in 2012 at Syoridular Valley, Bolungarvik, which is in northwest Iceland and recaptured again on the 9th June 2015 at the same site, when the colour rings were applied. Our observation just 92 days later being its first recorded recovery.

My fourth August individual was noted on the 30th, found amongst just a few dozen present. It had four colour rings, with one on each tibia and tarsus, indicative of those used on an Icelandic project. Its origins were in fact from the same area as the bird found on the 9th, ringed close to Bolungarvik, NW Iceland, although this bird had a colourful history. It was ringed on the 3rd June 2014 at its nest and identified in hand as a male. In March 2015 it was discovered in NW France, before interestingly reappearing back at Bolungarvik late June 2015 when found at its nest that contained four eggs. It remained here until at least the 6th August, recorded on three occasions and on departing it's breeding grounds was noted at Oronsay, Inner Hebrides on the 23 August 2015, this just 7 days before turning up on the Warren. News that would follow a month later informed me it was seen on 28th September at Sarzeau, Morbihan in France.

Ringed Plover (PZV), 17th October, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

My sixth bird was found on the 17th October and discovered on the receding tide. It was a first winter bird harbouring another coded yellow flag (PZV), which through dogged persistence saw me finally secure a positive read. Details that followed unsurprisingly informed me it was ringed at Makkavika, Norway on 6th September 2015, our second this year from this scheme and third overall, with one also noted in October 2014. With just a 41 day period between capture and my discovery it had certainly covered some ground. A straight-line distance between each site is recorded at 1440 kms, although its route of travel either saw it travel along the western seaboard of Norway, nipping across the North Sea to Denmark, west through Germany and the low Countries, before crossing the Channel or the more challenging seacrossing west across the North Sea and then passing down the east coast of the UK and then along the Channel coastline.

Ringed Plover (PZV), 31st October, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

A distant view of what I assumed was the same bird was made on the 30th and this confirmed the following day when it gave obliging views at close quarters. Its stay of at least 15 days saw me re-evaluate my thoughts on this bird as I began to theorise its last movement must have been substantial, perhaps even direct from Makkevika, although I'm obviously unable to substantiate this. My reason for coming to this conclusion was based purely on the long duration of its stay, feeling its now here re-fueling and building up used fat reserves before attempting its next journey onwards. Although another factor could be moult, or maybe a combination of both.

I confess I am unsure as to the moult strategy for this species and resorted to referencing the BWP. It implied juveniles undergo partial 'body' moult, although reference towards flight feather regeneration wasn't clearly defined in my 1983 edition. The views I had on the 17th, the day I discovered it didn't see me scrutinise feather detail and the pictures taken do not allow retrospective analysis. Although on looking closely at the pictures taken on the 31st it seems to show the outermost primary are not its longest, which I assume suggests its undergoing some form of wing moult. Closer scrutiny of the coverts to my untrained eye look ragged and hint towards first generation feathering.

The second picture was from the 31st, its posture is more hunched, giving it a more rotund appearance although I would confidently surmise it's also gained weight in the intervening 15 days between each picture. Interesting when studying both images to compare the breastband as it appears much greater on the latter.

A visit on a wind blown 8th November saw Dave Jewell and myself find a bird harbouring a yellow coded flag amongst the 16 birds present on an incoming tide. Getting a good read was not easy, the strong southerly wind had the bird facing south most of the time obscurring the coded flag. Thoughts crossed my mind that this was probably PZV that was noted nine days ago on the 31st October, but I had to be sure.

I soon became excited when I realised it was in fact a different bird despite not gaining a full read. Over the next ten minutes I'd avidly watch it until I was absolutely sure I'd acquired a positive read (UJU). Once achieved I reached for my camera and attempted to digiscope it despite the poor light and strong winds. The resulting image (see below) was the best I could achieve.

Ringed Plover (UJU), 8th November, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

News from Kjell Mork Soot, the administrator for the ringing project at Makkevika was forthcoming less than 24 hours later and once again eye-opening. He'd personally ringed it just 20 days prior on the 19th October. He'd informed me that he believed it to be of the race *tundrae*, this primarily based on the slightly darker upper-wing colouration and small size. This was exciting news both in the context of its assumed race and also the short time span between capture and the subsequent read.

Onsite we do see several small, dark-looking birds every autumn, generally first calendar year birds that appear strong candidates for this race, in fact much darker looking than Kjell's ringed individual. With four ringed recoveries from Scandinavia in the last few years this only supports the fact we are witnessing birds that have bred in Scandinavia and/ or possibly Russia.

With three birds found onsite this autumn from Makkevika I was curious to investigate this subject in closer detail and so would liaise with Kjell. He was very helpful, informing me they don't breed locally yet they have a great deal of success capturing them using mist nets. Ringing has been actually been undertaken at Makkevika since 1972 and during 2015 they'd captured and applied rings to 206 Ringed Plover. As of the 8th November 2015 just fifteen of these (7.28% of birds ringed) had recorded a subsequent recovery. Two of these being mine, the only other UK recovery from Titchwell, Norfolk in August. The remaining ones were from Norway (1), Denmark (3), Germany (3), Holland (2), France (1), and Spain (2).

Despite this relatively small core set of recovery results it did show Scandinavian captured birds as expected generally migrate through the continent, UK observations less likely although unsettled weather systems probably accounting for such discoveries.

Here's a map to visually impress upon readers where all seven birds onsite during 2015 were ringed.

What is interesting to note is the broad and varied distribution from each ringing scheme. Obviously the Icelandic recoveries are from their breeding area's due north and its these birds which I'd expect to see passing through our site. Whereas we've also birds that have also bred in Fenno Scandia (or Russia?) and also breeders from more southerly area's around the area of Denmark/ Germany. Its these birds I find more baffling to interpretate, as I'd expect their natural migratory pattern to involve skirting the southern Channel coastline, passing through the low countries and France rather than using the UK , although through recoveries such as mine helps inform us this isn't always the case.

The BTO website suggests there have been eight pre-2015 recoveries in Devon (five from Denmark, plus from Netherlands, Norway and Germany) although this information is incomplete. Four of these are pre-2015 Warren recoveries although in fact we have eight on our database. So to find and read seven personally during 2015 is an achievement that I am justifiably proud of.

Grey Plover

With just two recoveries in Devon, both from Dawlish Warren, it's certainly a species with a poor history regards recoveries despite an abundant wintering population. The first was a Cannon netted individual from 1963, that lingered, noted in July 64 and remained into 1965.

The second took another 50 years to find and was a colour-ringed individual found by myself in April 2014. It was ringed at its wintering grounds in Spain 2012 and documented in my 2014 ring recovery report.

The 6th March 2015 was a very noteworthy day indeed in my pursuit of reading ringed birds. It would include finding a metal ringed Grey Plover, that was initially observed roosting on the island in front the hide. I was surprised to find I could quite easily read the two digits viewable on the ring, even though the distance was probably over 25 metres away. They have a tendency to remain pretty much motionless during these periods therefore I didn't expect this to go any further as I'd need the other remaining five digits to secure a full read.

When the tide started to recede and the waders began to disperse I refound the bird as it fed within a mixed wader flock just off to the left of the island. With renewed impetus I once again focused all my efforts on just

this single bird, knowing opportunities like this must be taken or at the least attempted. Its customary feeding pattern of slow yet deliberate movements interjected by bouts of standing still certainly helped and within a short period of time all seven digits were read with confidence.

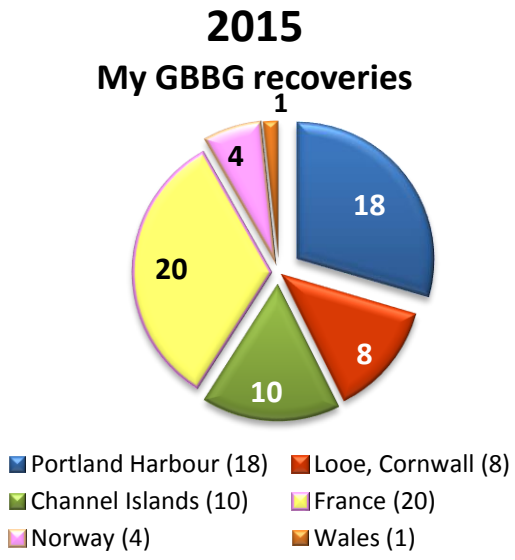
News via Stavanger Musuem, Norway was forthcoming just a few days later, its origins from Makkevika, some 1440 kms away. This location already familiar to me from a recent Ringed Plover recovery six months prior in October 2014. They informed me the Grey Plover was ringed on the 17th September 2006 as a first calendar year bird in a mist net, making this now a tenth calendar year bird.

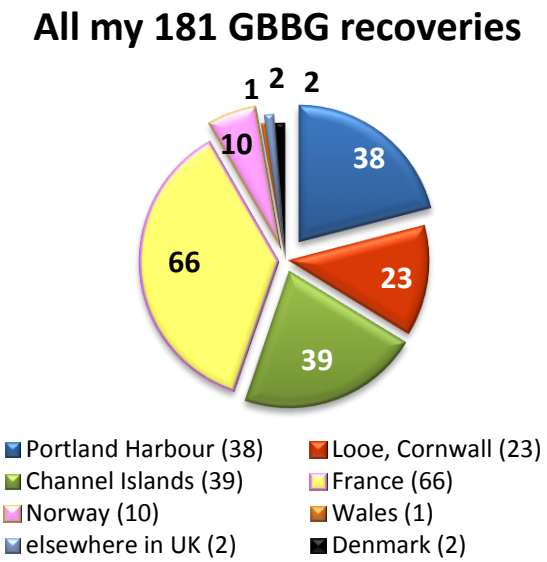
I was delighted to have secured the read , although this was further enhanced when the BTO informed me my record was the first Bristish recovery from Norway for this species.

I believe that the very same bird was present the following winter, as on the 21st December I gained a partial read that appeared based on the few digits noted to match this same bird.

Great Black-backed Gull

This remains the Warren's most commonly recorded species in terms of different ringed individuals, with 188 now found, myself accounting for 181 of these (405 reads). Much like Oystercatchers, it's a species that receives little attention from virtually all visiting birders, but I hope that by highlighting my efforts in recording such ringed birds and the volume seen it will encourage others to look more closely at them. In any given gathering of c.100 birds I'd expect to find between one to three darvic ringed birds.



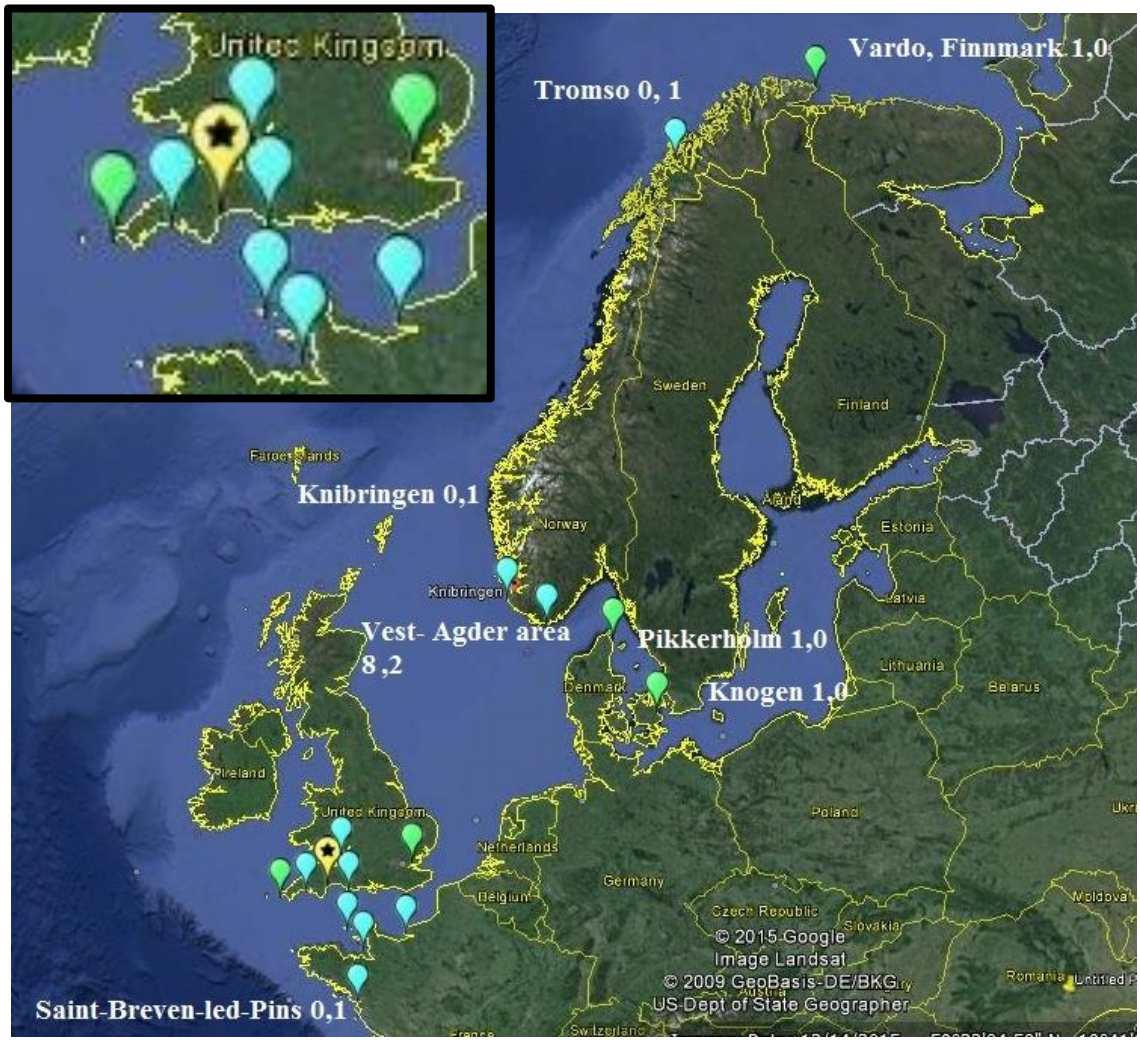


In 2015 I'd make 116 reads, this down considerably on 2014's figure of 139, a combination of my three week absence during late November and mild conditions leading up to this certainly two factors behind this. In total I'd record 61 different individuals, all being darvic ringed. The bulk of all my reads this year were from pre-existing ringing schemes at Portland Harbour (18), Looe Island, Cornwall (8), the Channel Islands (10) and

Northern France (Le Havre (10) and Chausey Island, Normandy (9)), although two new welcome additions were singles from Denney Island, Wales and another scheme from Northern France, at Saint-Breven-les-Pins.

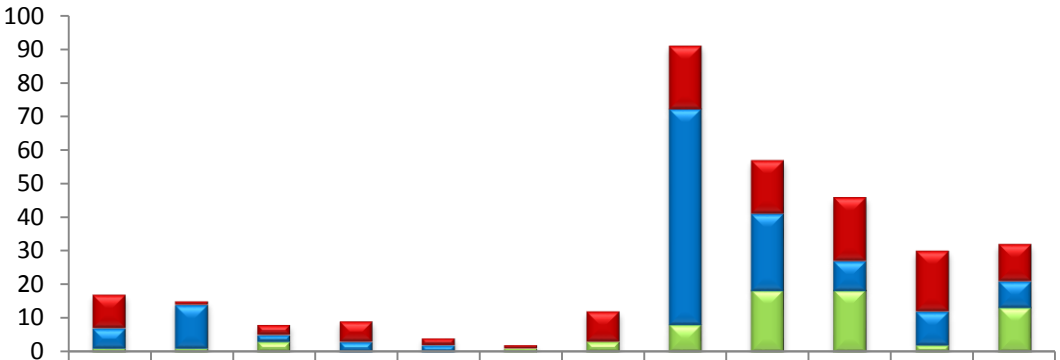
Of the 61 noted this year 47 (77%) were new birds not recorded onsite before, seventeen of these were ringed in 2015, that equating to almost 29%. Thirteen of these were as pullus, their origins being from- Portland Harbour (7, of which they ringed 45), Looe (2, they ringed 80), the Channel Islands (1), Denny Island, Wales (1) and Northern France (2).

Below is a map in which I've plotted all my Great Black-backed Gull recoveries. The vast majority account for localised birds, by which I determine as British and French birds, although I've also several Scandinavian birds (13) of which two have arrived from the Arctic Circle. Blue tabs are used to indicate 2015 recoveries, whilst green for pre-2015. A few site names have been included on the map and the two number indicate pre-2015 recoveries followed by 2015's.



As you'll see from the graph below there is a general pattern emerging over a calendar year. The first seven months are somewhat lean, although this begins to change during August, when we start to see more birds onsite with the onset of post breeding dispersal. Our biggest counts, which appear during periods of unsettled weather do occasionally exceed 200-plus. These larger counts most frequently recorded during September and October and to a lesser degree in late August and early November, with our largest recent count made on 3rd October 2010, when 755 counted.

Great Black-backed Gull
reads during 2013-15



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2015	10	1	3	6	2	1	9	19	16	19	18	11
2014	6	13	2	3	2			64	23	9	10	8
2013	1	1	3			1	3	8	18	18	2	13

Onsite fidelity is uncommon for this species and is clearly borne out when looking at and reviewing the core data I hold on the 187 living ringed birds observed onsite as it shows 123 or 66.5% have only been noted on a single date.

Great Black-backed Gull, L:AJ6, 6th August 2015, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

Bearing this in mind just a few buck this trend, although very few do actually get recorded consistently over multiple years. The most commonly recorded bird during 2015 was again L:AJ6, this a Cornish bird ringed as a pullus in 2010. It was noted on 24 different dates between January and November of this year, making it by far our most commonly recorded individual onsite with 68 sightings since the first back in September 2012.

Little can be gleaned by way of longevity, our oldest bird noted during 2015 was ringed in 2005, with additional singles from 2008, 2009 and three from 2010.

The species rather nomadic behaviour based on my local observations during the non-breeding seasons maybe an indication that many either don't survive into adulthood. Just 11 out of the 61 I'd record this year (18%) had reached adulthood as pullus ringed or could point to territorial adults generally not straying far from known breeding colonies?

To counter this last point our Norwegian ringed birds travel the greatest distance, these birds being ringed over 1000kms away. Four such well-travelled birds were noted onsite during this calendar year. One such bird (JP558) was our most interesting, it being a bird ringed as a pullus back in 2012. It has now been recorded on thirteen occasions over the last four consecutive winters(seven times in 2015), but what I found interesting was this bird now in its fourth calendar year was reported in May and June of 2015 back in close proximity to its birth place at Mandal, Vest-Agder. Within 64 days of it last being seen in Norway it was once again present back at the Warren, noted in early August and remaining local as also noted every month until the end of the year.

Another individual that demonstrates this very same behavioural trait is (by coincidence?) a second Norwegian bird (JA700) that was discussed in my 2014 report. It too has also exibited obvious wintering loyalties, having been noted on twenty-three occasions over four consecutive winters, although only noted in January of this year and not recorded over the second winter period.

In my previous two reports I've primarily focused on numbers seen per annum and there origins. Site origins remain very much the same and each site continued their ringing programmes over 2015, a large percentage being of pullus ringed much the same as in previous years. Below is a table of three such scheme's that account for a high percentage of my recoveries in which I've listed the amount of birds they've ringed per annum, many thanks to Paul, Terry and Bruce for their cooperation.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Channel Islands- Paul Veron	63	55	64	51	78	77	46	434
Portland Harbour- Terry Coombs				62	29	35	45	171
Looe, Cornwall- Bruce Taggart		49	91	24	72	73	80	389

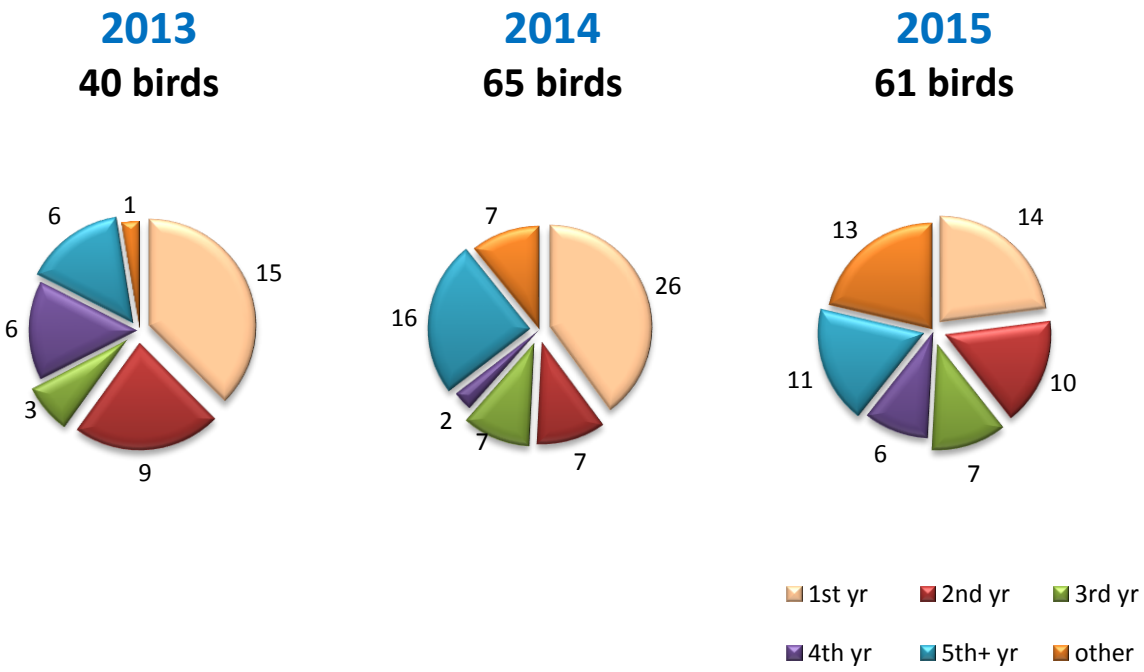
In this report I wanted to delve a little deeper, my aim to evaluate in more detail a breakdown of the birds we see onsite in regards their ages. I've drawn up several pie charts based on observations made over the last three years with an emphasis on their ages. My reasons for doing this are generally out of curiosity and to perhaps try gain a better understanding of a species for which we get lots of recoveries.

I was initially drawn to using the 'calendar year' for ageing, i.e. a bird ringed as a pullus in June, would be classified as a first calendar year til 31 December, the following year as a second calender year and so on, but this didn't sit well, primarily as a bird seen in late December but lingering into the new year would both be of the same age, as in a first winter etc. Therefore, I decided as over 90% of the birds we find are ringed as pullus, felt it more appropriate to state first year birds being birds seen between June (when most applied with rings) and the following June. Historically we've very few summer recoveries, with just two May records, none in June and only six in July, each being either second or third calendar year birds.

As stated, the vast majority of ringed birds recorded onsite have been ringed as pulli, but not all. Some are administered with rings through the process of cannon netting, most notably on the Channel Islands. Of the

handful that fit this criteria, I have shown these as 'other'. It's also worth highlighting that although some individuals are noted on more than a single date, these are generally over a period of a few days or weeks. Birds lingering longer than this aren't numerous, as very few individual birds are noted returning over successive autumns/ winters.

Ageing of ringed birds found onsite- 2013/15



Prior to drawing up the charts I'd have surmised a generous percentage of our recoveries relate to first year birds and the charts above, specifically 2013-14 support this, although during 2015 the breakdown is much more of an even spread. What have I learnt from this exercise? I'm not sure, 2015's piechart surprised me with the breakdown, I can't specifically use the unusually mild conditions as the last few winters have all been similarly mild, although such favourable conditions could be used to indicate a higher survival rate of birds ringed in the last few years.

The copy of the excellent Migration Atlas, published by the BTO in 2002, some 13 years ago caused some eye opening moments. This book is perhaps the single most important one I use these days, the data contained is just mindblowing. That said thirteen years is a long time in ringing and recovery work, the advent of darvic rings, more ringers, hence more ringed birds now gives us a far greater picture on the movements of this species. The book states that just 2.1% of their 2717 recorded recoveries pre-2002 relate to resightings, the bulk 97.1% accountable as dead birds and 0.8% as retraps. I don't have access to current National recovery rates, but my own ratio of recovery work shows that 99.4% are field reads, proof if proof is needed that such a simple system has had a huge impact on recovery rates.

The map they've used on recoveries from the Southwest of Britain indicates pre-2002 just one Scandinavian recovery, this not in Devon and no recoveries from the Channel Islands or the Normandy area of France, both key area's where I've had dozens of recoveries over the last few years. These schemes are relatively new, certainly post 2002 and engage in using the current darvic system that helps the BTO, ringers and people like myself in recovery work.

Common Gull

Although not an uncommon species, finding a ringed bird still remains a very big scalp. To date we've only two individuals recorded onsite, both being darvic ringed, with both noted in the last few years and documented in my last two reports.

I was delighted to find this bird on 3rd July 2015-

Common Gull, 3rd July, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

Its darvic ring ID is EAFH and it was ringed as a pullus at Moerdijk, Holland in 2008. Its nine year life history remains somewhat sparse, as although noted three times in early July 2013 in Holland, where I assume it bred the only other reports have been via myself in July 2011 and 2013.

The timing of all these sightings (all during July) alludes to post breeding dispersal observations. I am unsure just how site loyal this species is with regards breeding territory. I assume this paricular individual probably breeds somewhere in Holland, my theory on it nesting at or near its natal colony, if correct this some 570 kms away from the Warren. Although I've speculated on where it may well breed, what is without refute is that my multi-year July sightings aren't by chance but clearly indicate some deliberate post-breeding dispersal pattern. Was it also present in 2012 & 2014, but went unnoticed? Could it possibly have visited here yearly since 2008? These are questions we will never know, but it's hoped that in future years I'll be able to add additional observations, that will solidify this theory of passage site fidelity.

I found it again eight days later on the 11th, although in the intervening period something must have happened to it as it was carrying its left leg and appeared somewhat lethargic. This could signal its demise? Matt Knott at Exmouth would record it several days later, although he couldn't recall noticing a damaged leg. I hope it survives, as finding any ringed Common Gull onsite is rare and if seen in 2016 would be very welcome.

Black-headed Gull

We've 18 pre-2015 records, of which nine individuals were seen by myself during 2014.

After the rather arduous month of June, July for me brings a wealth of opportunities, that includes paying particular attention to the small gulls we see onsite. Evening high tides especially can be very productive when several hundred can amass on the beach. Due to my job I am limited to the number of visits I can make during the evenings, so am restricted to weekends in this context.

Black-headed Gull (X1E9, German ringed), 5th July & 29 August, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

Looking back on 2015 I feel somewhat disappointed by my results, unable to replicate the nine found in 2014. Although it certainly wasn't in vain or without its rewards, as I'd find and read rings on six different individuals, that would include two darvic ringed birds that were also noted in 2014 and another recorded during 2013.

On the 5th I was fortunate to find within c.200 birds two with darvic rings, both from the same scheme. They were both from Germany, in fact both from the same breeding colony at Riether Werder, some 1252 kms away, where I'm informed over 5,000 pairs breed. Black X1E9 was ringed just 34 days before, whilst black XL10 was a more interesting discovery, as I'd seen the very same bird in late July 2014. Birds such as this, with multi year observations clearly show a post dispersal routine, that includes a stopover around the lower Exe. It would have been useful to have added more details on the birds past, by way of additional offsite observations, but it would appear it hasn't been reported anywhere else during the intervening 12 months since our last sighting. Black X1E9 would linger with further sightings made several times in August and last seen during the evening of 26th September.

Additional birds would include two British ringed birds, one a darvic ringed bird from Lea Farm Gravel pits, near Wokingham. This was ringed as a pullus in 2013 and again shows some site fidelity after observed onsite three times during 2013. The other bird was a metal ringed bird individual, it ringed as an adult in 2012 at Pitsea, Essex.

I was successful in gaining two further metal ring reads, these birds would originate from Brondy, Denmark, this bird noted twice during July and August, the 22 day period a clear indication the bird lingered some time and likewise a bird from Holland that was noted in August and September, its stay of at least 57 days.

Mediterranean Gull

This species habits closely follow a similar trait to that of the commoner Black-headed Gull. Observations are noted throughout the year, although generally in small numbers of between one and five and in most instances of distant views as they roost in the saltmarsh.

Our key period, during the late summer sees number swell significantly with the onset of post breeding dispersal . In much the same context as Black-headed Gulls, 2015 was productive albeit far less prolific than 2014, recording six positive reads, all made between 19th June and 19th July, with the exception of one in September.

Five were darvic ringed, the other a metal ring read. The species overall behavioural traits and ring application origins following a similar pattern to that noted in previous years. An equal split of three from both France and Belgium only reaffirming data already known.

On breaking down the ages of birds recorded, juvenile observations continue to account for a large percentage of finds. Three were noted, one being Belgian the remaining two not just French, but from the same breeding colony at Jablines, Seine-et-Marne. Both were ringed on the same date and observed at Dawlish Warren on the same date too! Could they have been from the same brood and/ or travelled together? It's entirely feasible as on numerous occasions during this time of year small parties have been frequently noted coming in off the sea, often characterised by adults accompanied by juveniles. The remaining three birds were a first summer (French) and two adults (both Belgian).

I touched on behavioural traits, as during 2015 much like previous years our observations clearly show that these birds don't linger onsite, they just drop in momentarily before moving on, a stay of just a few moments or maybe a few hours, rarely noted the previous day and invariably never recorded again. Although to buck this trend bird White 32P1, an adult that's now at least eight years old reappeared again. It's been recorded almost annually onsite since 2009 and was noted on six occasions this year, five between 5th and 18th July, as

well as at Exmouth. It went unrecorded during August so I was somewhat surprised when found onsite during the evening of the 11th September, the only time it's been recorded during this month.

Herring Gull

Ring reads can present themselves at any given opportunity and just to demonstrate this and highlight anybody can undertake ring readings in just such a situation happened in May 2015.

On arriving at the seawall one sunny Sunday afternoon, a family enjoying their chips had attracted a small gathering of Herring Gulls, no doubt drawn by the people throwing food onto the floor to feed them. Within the small group was a metal ringed adult, that was completely unfazed by my close attendance. The read of the seven digits was as easy a read I've ever managed on a metal ring. It was ringed as a pullus in July 2006, just 6 kms away at Powderham.

We had just one more ringed bird recorded, that was found on the 13th December on an exposed sandbar offshore. It was a first winter bird bearing a blue darvic ring, that was ringed as a pullus on Flat Holm Island in the Bristol Channel.

Sandwich Tern

This species is seen in good numbers during the late summer at the Warren. Post breeding dispersal sees birds arrive from early July, with numbers building steadily over the following weeks. Our earliest birds tend to favour roosting in the saltmarsh with Black-headed Gulls, although from mid-July through to late August a shift in their roost behaviour during high tides sees gatherings amass directly in front the hide. This affords some crippling views and also allows me to engage in seeking out and reading ringed individuals. Interestingly this September birds remained present, occasionally in good numbers, although they frustratingly stopped gathering in front the hide, choosing to use moored craft upriver over high tides or exposed mudflats over smaller tides.

Sandwich Tern (NFV, Dutch ringed), 12th July, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

The Warren database holds details of 35 pre-2015 ring recoveries, the first nine being pre-2000, with the earliest in 1976. After a 15 year absence three were recorded in 2012, each bird darvic ringed and it was finding these that fuelled my desire to pay greater attention to finding more.

The last few years have witnessed a big increase in reads, having nine individuals in 2013 and fifteen in 2014. A large majority of these were darvic ringed birds, although not all, as from 2014 I have had some success in obtaining metal rings reads as well.

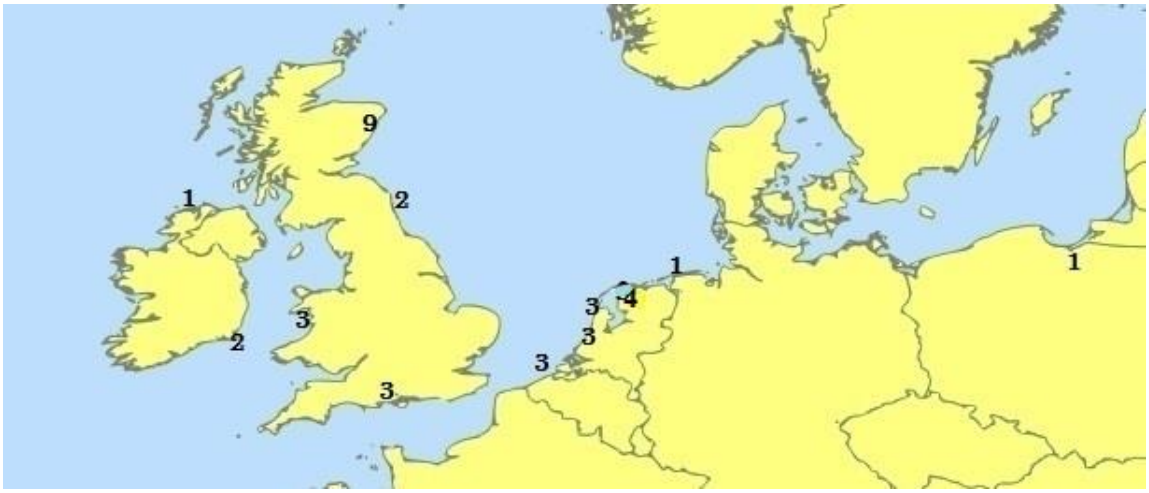
2015 was an extremely fruitful and interesting year, in which I paid a lot of attention to seeking out ringed individuals during the months of July and August. This paid dividends with some of the resulting information being truly eye-opening.

I started well, gaining my first positive read on a metal ringed bird on the 3rd July, this some ten days earlier than the previous earliest read. My first darvic ringed bird was found on the 12th, an adult bearing a white Dutch darvic ring. The day further rewarded with two more metal ringed individuals. So with four reads all made before the previous earliest on record, the omens surely pointed to a productive seven week period ahead.

Reads continued to amass at an incredible rate, my efforts rewarded far beyond my own high expectations. Over the entirety of the late summer I would make 61 positive reads (27 during July and 34 during August) concerning **35** individuals. These broken down as 15 darvic and 20 metal ringed individuals. The sheer volume of reads compiled is something I am sure was probably not emulated anywhere else in the UK during 2015, away from breeding colonies.

The resulting finds helped me not just evaluate where they come from, but also in some cases where they've been; assess their duration of stay (mostly via darvic reads); their longevity (metal reads) and most importantly I have also found this year conclusive evidence that prove some individual birds do return consecutive years despite breeding several hundred kilometres away.

Delving a little deeper on my observations during 2015 it shows that they are broken down as 30 adults and five juveniles (four from Holland and one from Germany). The origins of each ring application are broken down as- English= five (three from Pylewell Lake, Hants, two from Inner Farne), Scottish= nine (all from Ythan Esturay/ Forvie NNR), Welsh= three, Irish= three, Dutch= ten, Belgian= three, Polish= one and German= one.



Darvics- These rings are a much easier proposition in which to make a read compared to the conventional metal rings. It would appear that most ringers who monitor and ring this species now use this method, the darvic administered to one leg, with a metal ring on the other, these generally applied to nestlings at breeding

colonies. I am unsure when darvic rings were first applied to this species, although my records indicate we've recorded one that was administered in Scotland in 2010.

I have found through communication with project coordinators that in a large majority of my finds account for first time recoveries. This to be expected on finding a juvenile but surprising when finding an adult, as all of my records during late summers show that the birds are now in their third-plus calendar year.

It must be borne in mind that this species spend their second calendar year in Africa. With such limited birding coverage from western and southern Africa it's understandable that there are few recovery reports during their second calendar year. In fact wintering observations as a whole are scarce, of the 39 adults I have recorded onsite during 2012/15 just four have a wintering observation, on each occasion from Namibia.

In 2015, of the fifteen darvic birds found onsite this year four were administered this calendar year, all being juveniles from Holland (three from Texel, one from Zuid-Holland). The remaining eleven were all administered in 2013, with the exception of one from 2011. Their origins being: eight from Ythan Estuary/ Sands of Forvie NNR, Scotland; one from Inner Farne, England; one from the Dyfi Estuary, Wales and one from Holland.

It was an amazing haul, comfortably beating the eight seen during 2014. Something I found surprisingly on the 2015 finds was the fact that only one of the eleven adults noted (9%) had been recorded elsewhere during the summer of 2015, a Scottish ringed individual from 2013 seen late May on the Ythan Estuary, Scotland.

Sandwich Tern, juvenile (T87 Dutch ringed), 22nd July, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

Our most observed bird during 2015 was a juvenile, supporting a yellow darvic ring (T87). It was found on the 21st July and seen on a further ten occasions, being last recorded on 14th August, and observed at Salcombe, south Devon in early September. The duration of its stay, twenty five days reflects with data recorded over the last few years on other juveniles, with one bird in 2013 noted over a six week period. An interesting side note about multi-observations regards a strong split between juveniles and adults, something noted over the last few years. With darvic ringed juveniles we see a high percentage of individuals noted over a period of days, or even weeks yet multi observations of adults are infrequent. Of the eleven individuals noted during July/ August 2015, just two of these were seen twice and on each occasion only noted the following day, their stay just two days.

An adult (red UZA) found onsite was an interesting bird. It was our first darvic ringed bird from Inner Farne, Northumberland, ringed as a nestling on 17th July 2013. I found it on 8th August and was informed it was observed in Normandy just a week prior on the 1st. These observations the only two on record, having gone unobserved during the summer on 2015. I wasn't surprised at the fact it had ventured north during the last week as we'd plenty of cross channel finds of birds further east from Holland and Belgium. But to my astonishment news via twitter informed us that this bird was then seen on the 27th August back in Northumberland at Coquet Island. At a time when numbers had started to drop onsite, birds having moved on through I was astounded that in the intervening nineteen day period rather than heading south, as many, if not all birders would assume, it had headed first east, back along the channel before heading several hundred kilometres north, stopping in close proximately to its natal colony. Its records like this that appear to defy logic that fascinate me

Metal reads- One obvious reason for trying to read these rings is that most of these birds will be older, longer lived individuals, the rings generally but not always applied pre-darvic. I haven't methodically calculated as a percentage just how many ringed birds are generally present whilst scanning a high tide gathering, but would estimate somewhere on average of between 5% to 8%. Thus say on a gathering of 200 birds, which is a reflective daily count noted during late July I'd expect to see at least 10 ringed birds present. Taking this into account and the fact the turnover of birds noted from July through to September the true number of ringed birds present if known would be of great interest.

I have only started doing this since the autumn of 2014, my current Swarovski ATX telescope now gives me sufficient magnification to endeavour in such ventures. These kind of reads generally aren't easy to acquire, it requires the subject matter to be in close proximity (*the hide at Dawlish Warren affords such opportunities*), a willingness to seek out, then engage or at least attempt to read the ring and to some extent a fair degree of patience. Although in gaining reads on 20 different metal ringed individuals this year it did show I had overwhelming success. These reads accounting for over 57% of the birds recorded this year.

It was by making positive reads on just a fraction of those seen that gave me some new and enlightening information, irrefutable proof that confirmed five out of the eight I recorded in 2014 were also seen onsite in 2015, an astounding return rate of over 62%. Their years of ringing and origins as follows- in 2003 & 2004 (Belgium), 2005 (Pylewell Lake, Hants) and 2008 & 2009 (Holland). This is fascinating and valuable information, the percentage rate astonishing when you bear in mind I am only making positive reads on a small fraction of ringed birds present.

We've little evidence of this from darvic applied birds during the 2012-15 period, I can only surmise that these birds being just a few years old may yet have developed a structured migratory pattern, whereas the metal ringed birds being much older individuals may have a more set migratory routine. Continued observations over the next few years should certainly prove interesting and invaluable.

Two of the metal ringed birds also had special significance to me, one noted on 5th August was Polish ringed, from Ujscie Wisly, Swibno on the 21 July 2013. Not only was it my first from Poland but the BTO stated it would appear it may well be the first Polish ringed Sandwich Tern recovery for the UK! The other a juvenile ringed on 26 June 2015 from Baltrum- Ostdorf, Germany would constitute my first from this country, although not the sites first as there were two from the 70's. In addition to this my two oldest birds were found this year, one found in July was ringed as a pullus in Zeebrugge, Belgium in 1996 making it now 19 years old. Whilst in August this was eclipsed when I found a Dutch ringed bird, it was ringed at Griend in 1994 as a pullus meaning its now 21 years old.

Common Tern

Having secured two positive reads during 2014, these being both my own and the Warren's first recoveries and the first in Devon since 1989, I was keen to hopefully find at least another in 2015.

Seeing this species onsite isn't in any way problematic, either during spring or the autumn, although a vast majority of observations involve sightings of birds feeding offshore. During the autumn birds do drop in front the hide, although are greatly outnumbered by Sandwich Terns and generally remain too distant too even attempt a read of any metal rings.

On the 24th July I was given my first opportunity to observe a Common Tern at close range that harboured a metal ring. The rings are small on this species, although this doesn't deter me, infact I thrive on the challenge. I focused all my attention on the bird, that was at times was a mere 15 metres away. Much like its larger cousins, Common Terns frequently move about accompanied by bouts of standing still which I have found particularly helpful as it allows me to see the entirety of the ring. After maybe 10 minutes of total devotion to watching it little by little each digit was carefully noted in my notebook, until I became sure I had a full and positive read. A week or so later an e-mail from the BTO advised me it was ringed at Rockabill in Ireland as a nestling on 22nd July 2013.

On the 7th August I attempted my first read of a juvenile, gaining a positive read of the first six digits, although unable to read the last and final number before it flew off. This was more than a little frustrating although I knew this would still have some merit as I'd enough of a read to at least find out where it was ringed. News that followed informed me it was administered on the 9th July to one of the nestlings at Abbotsbury Swannery in Dorset.

Late August saw an amazing influx of birds onsite. Big counts made by Ivan Lakin and Kevin Rylands during these evenings spanned several days as birds entered the estuary, assumedly to roost, peaking on the 27th with a count that exceeded 2400, a new county record. A small percentage of these dropped in front of the hide and therefore I did try to gain some reads although was always hampered by the fading light, thus proving a forlorn and frustrating time for me. But on the morning of the 29th an adult was close enough to attempt a read, as it posed beautifully on the island. Straight away it was clear to me it wasn't British ringed based on the ring number, although I was unsure from where its origins lay. Reading the seven digits like I said earlier is difficult enough, reading the embossed details above this which details the country of origin is even smaller and so I couldn't accurately ascertain its origins. On reviewing the BTO recovery website to investigate its origins the number fitted precisely within the Dutch scheme. I was delighted by this news, although somewhat tempered by the fact as it's now January 2016 and I still (along with two Sandwich Terns) await news back on this particular birds history.

Although we've such few recoveries to formulate a better understanding on where our birds originate it's interesting to analysis that of the four birds now read at Dawlish Warren two of these have originated from the area around Dublin Bay, Ireland.

Roseate Tern

This enigmatic and endangered species remains my favourite bird onsite, there is just something about this species I find totally alluring. In Devon it's a scarce and sought after species, with Dawlish Warren accounting for the majority of sightings each year.

Birds are noted onsite both during the spring and the autumn, although during the spring they are only recorded feeding offshore. It isn't until mid-July through to mid- August that we're fortunate to observe these beautiful birds at close quarters from the hide, generally as singles but just occasionally in two's or three's.

Over the last decade I've had ample opportunities to photograph many, gaining some amazing images but it wasn't until 2013 that I made my first attempt at trying to read the metal rings administered on them. This is by no means an easy pursuit, testified by the fact there had never been a Devon recovery of a living bird. And so I was delighted that in 2013 my efforts were rewarded, successfully gaining a good read of a bird that had originated from Coquet Island, Northumberland.

Although 2014 was a successful year at their breeding colonies, this wasn't reflected in a good autumn onsite, as very few individuals were noted and none came close enough to attempt a read. It would appear from reading various online websites that 2015 was another good breeding year. The success at breeding colonies at Coquet Island, Northumberland and Rockabill in Ireland continues to flourish, with a staggering record count of 1388 pairs breed at the latter site, This testament of nature reserves that have a clear planning stategy, are well managed, keep human disturbance at a minimum and have trained staffed that are clearly motivated.

On the 17th July I'd spent my time over the high tide in the hide, my primary focus being taken to watching and attempting to read rings on the gathering mass of Sandwich Terns. Mid July is a key period for tern observations and as yet I'd not connected with any Roseate Terns, and so I was delighted whilst panning the flock to observe my first that had dropped in unobserved. It was a stunning, pristine individual and also close enough to attempt a read. It was double metal ringed as is the norm with this species, the second metal ring is known as a Rosy special. It has only four digits on the ring, making it an easier read than a standard BTO ring, something developed to assist in identifying individuals at their breeding colonies.

Opportunities like this are priceless and not to be missed, so zooming the magnification up to x70 I sat there, mustering every ounce of concentration I had to ensure a read. During such times you encounter a mixture of emotions, initially thrilled at finding the bird, followed by genuine anxiety, this fuelled by my desire to gain the read, as such opportunities aren't often forthcoming, until the undoubted relief and joy at finally securing the read. Once happy I'd achieved this, out came the camera and the resulting image was taken.

Roseate Tern, 17th July, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

News that followed informed me the bird was ringed at Rockabill on 22nd July 2013, our first confirmed onsite read of an Irish bird. No information was provided to inform me if the bird had been recorded during the

summer of 2015, although with the number of pairs breeding at Rockabill it's perhaps not surprising it may have been overlooked.

Curiosity got the better of me after finding and reading the ring on this bird and led me to question just how many Roseate Tern recoveries were made away from their breeding colonies in the UK during 2015, I assumed not many? So I fired off an e-mail to the BTO, their reply from reports they'd received implied mine was the only one!

The remaining period throughout the latter part of July and early August was a lean time for observing this species. The bird found on the 17th was not seen again despite me making almost daily visits to cover the high tides. My next and no doubt different bird was found on the 27th although it always remained far too distant to attempt a ring read. I only observed five other birds thereafter, with two individuals in early August. One bird being of particular interest as it appeared to be a first summer, this most unusual. This would have made a great read, although sadly it also never came close enough to even attempt trying. Here's a record shot of the bird in question (it is hard to see in the picture, but note it's double ringed).

Roseate Tern, first summer, 2nd August, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

Although not relevant to my ringing report I'd have three late sightings by Dawlish Warren standards, with singles noted on the 31st August and the 6th and 18th September, each observation of flight views only. Any September find is noteworthy as this is far from an annual occurence.

Brent Goose

Over the last few years two ringed individuals have remained loyal each winter to the lower Exe. During 2015 one bearing coloured darvic rings on both legs was noted on just a single date, noted on the 20th March, this being the sixteenth recorded observation, with the first way back in November 1998. It was ringed as an adult on 8th February 1996, making this bird at least nineteen years old.

Although it was not seen during the second winter period I have come to recognise this individual doesn't generally frequent the recording area with great frequency, no doubt favouring other areas of the Exe in which to feed and its occasional observations onsite perhaps during times of displacement through disturbance or

flooding. Mortality is also an obvious factor, although I hope in due course it will put in a reappearance to prove its still alive and well.

Our second bird is metal ringed, this administered on the 30th July 2008 at a place called Middle Beacon Island, Krasnoyarsk, Siberia this being 4679kms away. My first reading of it was made back on 2nd February 2013 when feeding within a flock on the flooded Golf Course. Seen then I've always paid particular attention to any feeding flock on the Golf Course and rewarded with ten further observations pre-2015. It remained present during the first winter period of this year, noted during January and February having gone unobserved during the second winter period of 2014. After making several unsuccessful scans of feeding birds throughout December 2015 I was delighted to finally record its return on the 23rd, to confirm its fourth consecutive winter onsite.

Shelduck

2014 was a hugely rewarding year for recording and learning more about this species, December being a particularly fruitful month and accounting for most of my recovery work for this species. Numbers onsite each mid-winter generally total between 50-80 individuals, although there is a great deal of localised movement and it's not uncommon to witness birds arriving in off the sea from the east, assumedly individuals arriving from the nearby Axe Estuary.

This year I'd record five different individuals, this down on the ten seen in 2014, actually making 18 reads. January was productive, making nine reads, concerning four Axe Estuary Ringing Group (AERG) individuals. Throughout the remaining first winter period I drew a blank and my next opportunities arouse during the months of October and November, these constituted my first ever reads for these respective months (it must be borne in mind I've only three years experience attempting reads for this species). Counts onsite during October generally remain in single figures and build as the winter progresses, with several dozen generally present during November. During December, the 'key month' was a disappointing time noting just three ringed individuals, well down on the last two Decembers despite good numbers of birds present.

Just one bird was new, it being a darvic ringed individual from the AERG scheme, this one of four birds from this project noted onsite this year. My only metal ring read was made in mid-December, this a bird ringed in Steart, Somerset in 2005 and its sighting constituted my fourteenth and fifteenth read of it over the last four winters.

I hope this report has been enjoyable to read, interesting in its content and maybe inspired readers to become more pro-active during 2016 and beyond in finding and submitting your own recoveries, be they from the Warren or wherever you go birding.

Thanks must go to all the ringers I've been in contact with over the last 12 months, the list too numerous to mention each by name. It goes without saying thanks must also go to the BTO, with specific acknowledgement to Lee Barber, his time, support and patience has been invaluable and greatly appreciated. Roger Swinfen also deserves a mention, for his cooperation with my Oystercatcher recovery work, the information he has supplied has been a great help along with his patience in the identification of wasp ringed individuals. I also wanted to thank all other members of the Dawlish Warren Recording Group for their continued support and allowing me to showcase my work on the fantastic Dawlish Warren website. Finally my thanks must go to both Teignbridge District Council and the Devon Wildlife Trust, as without the availability / access to the hide I'd certainly never have be able to achieve the outstanding results you've just read about. Long may this continue.