

My 2013 Ringed recovery challenge at Dawlish Warren

By Lee Collins



Sanderling, Dawlish Warren 20th July 2009, Lee Collins. This bird was a key reason why I started looking for ringed birds. Left leg- white over red, right leg- red 'flag' over white over green. The bird was rung Ghana in Oct 2008.

I'm a stalwart at Dawlish Warren, and have now birded there for 30 years. I am passionate about the place and it brings me great joy, frequent success and avian fulfilment.

Although you'll find me out every weekend, the lure of a chance encounter with a scarce or rare bird is always a key reason for going out, but nowadays this is not my only motivation.

I've become hooked on another aspect of birding that, although not everybody's cup of tea, brings me immense pleasure. I can't honestly point to a specific moment in time when this happened it more of developed but

do fondly recall an early experience back in 2009. Watching my first colour ringed Sanderling, and later astonished to find it was rung in Ghana. Little then did I know that these early encounters would inspire me to amend my birding philosophy, now I look much closer at [all birds](#).

Each year has seen an improvement in the numbers I have recorded, and with 2013 dawning I set myself the ambitious target of hoping to find and read [one hundred individual birds](#) - a big jump on the fifty five found in 2012. It would need a lot effort and obviously a great deal of time birding the site. Records show I made visits on 155 dates to Dawlish Warren NNR in 2013.

Every opportunity needed to be taken although that said a small percentage of birds will always remain just too far away to gain an accurate read. That's all part of the masochistic spirit that comes with such endeavours, starring forlornly at a bird just wishing it would inch closer. Darvic rings (Gulls and Terns), colour rings (Waders) and even BTO metal rings (predominantly Oystercatchers) were all targeted. Should I remain strict and stay with 100 different birds or perhaps lessen the challenge and say 100 reads? But, then, I could find one individual and record its long stay on countless different dates which would obviously taint things somewhat. No- I had set myself a target, and one hundred different birds was my challenge and would remain my aim.

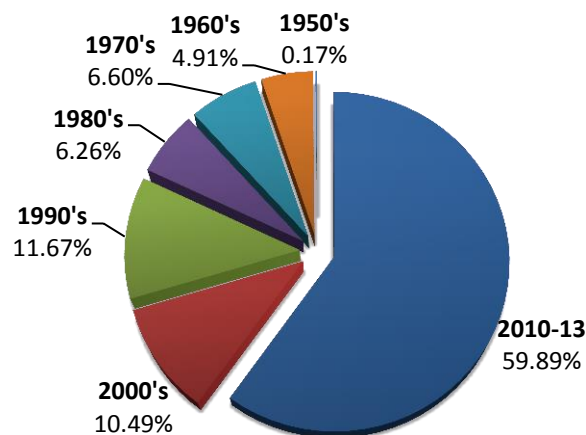
I am proud of the results I have achieved in just a few years of doing this kind of birding. This is my first ever foray into print, and I have deliberately avoided making it a scientific report and instead have tried to write a readable and personal review, in the hope that it may encourage others to follow suit. It seems that very few of the local birding community try to read rings, and I wanted to put something in writing to highlight my efforts and the satisfaction that can be gained by taking a broader approach when out birdwatching. It goes without saying the data is also valuable to the BTO and other ringing and conservation organisations in gaining more information on bird movements, dispersal and longevity.

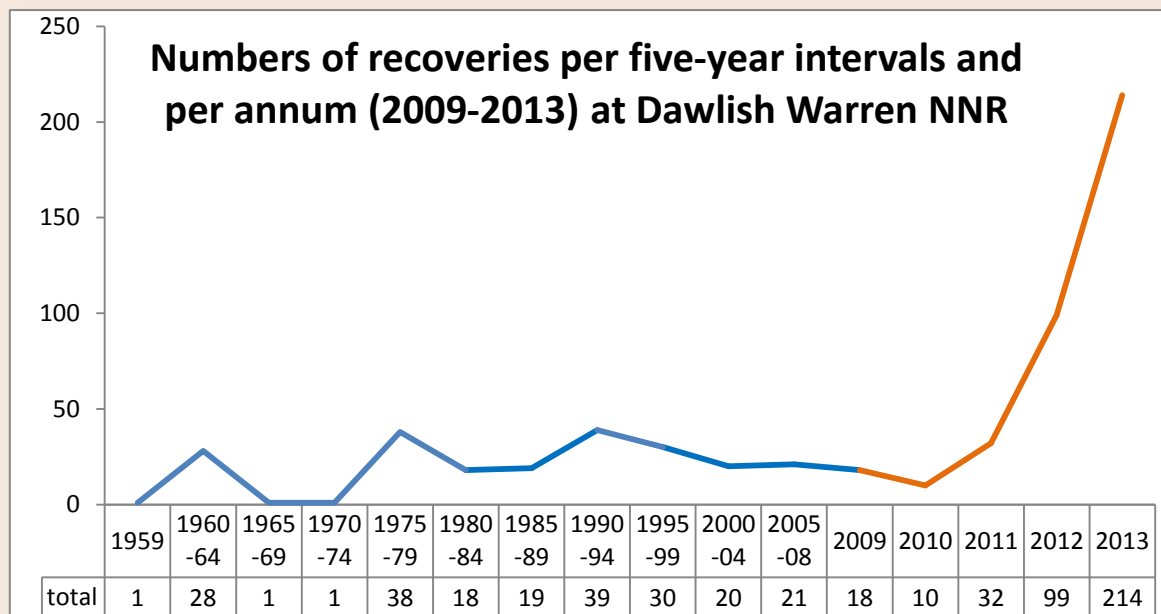
Historic overview

To put my year into context, Ivan Lakin and I have trawled the old Devon annual reports and also had excellent assistance from the BTO with the aim of acquiring all known recoveries at Dawlish Warren. This has allowed me to compile a substantial database and shows the first recovery was a Welsh

ringed Black-headed Gull way back in 1959. Another 29 recoveries were made in the 60's, 39 in the 70's, 37 in the 80's, 69 in the 90's and 62 in 00's with a substantial jump of 355 in the last four years (*could the Dawlish Warren Recording Group achieve 1000 for this decade?*).

Ringed Recoveries at Dawlish Warren NNR





So it's now the end of 2013 and I've had chance to sit down and analyse all the data. It shows me there have been 592 recoveries and is represented by 37 different species. It holds only five passerines, a Greenfinch from the 60's, Reed Warbler (dead) in the 90's, a Chiffchaff (retrap), Blackbird (retrap?) and Robin (dead) in the 2000's and so all the rest are coastal/ estuarine species.

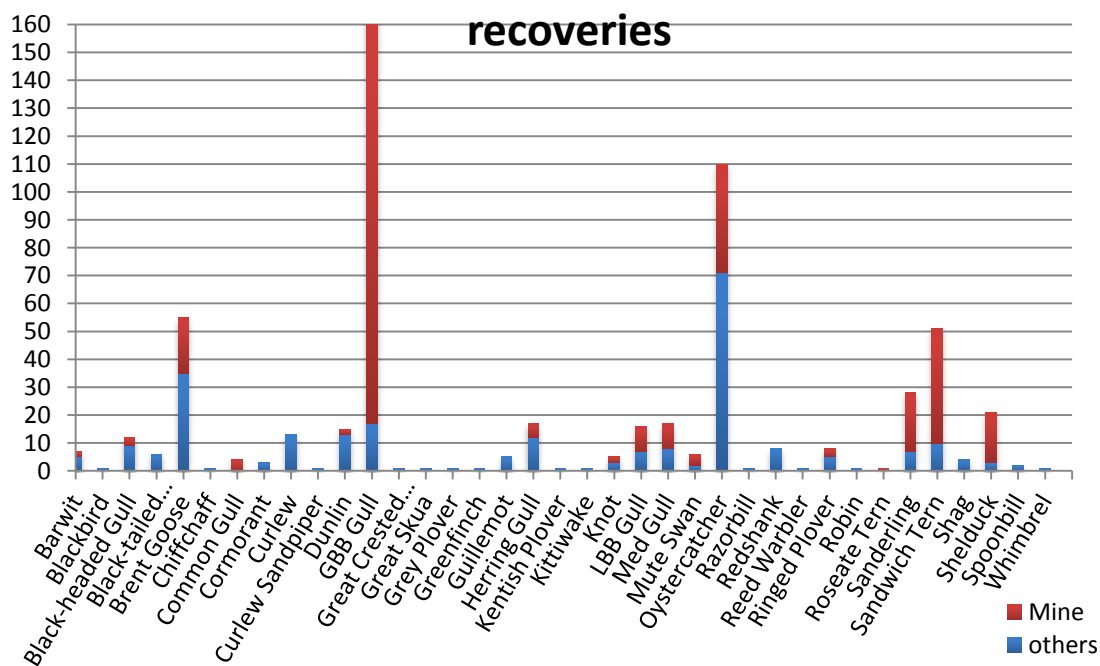
Waders account for practically all the early records from the 60's right through to 2004 and I can only surmise that a large percentage of these relate to recaptures from cannon netting. Although I don't have any information on this, I know this was undertaken but haven't specific dates on when cannon netting started, finished or even the frequency it occurred at Dawlish Warren. But Oystercatcher recoveries from the 60's right through to my recent reads this year, show Oystercatchers recoveries (55) were initially administered with rings here at Dawlish Warren from 1962 through to 2004. Other species both rung then later recaptured at Dawlish Warren include Curlew (10), Dunlin (2), Knot (3) and Redshank (8) during this same period.

I was generally surprised at the lack of seabird (Auks) recoveries, as I know during the 80's my good friend Dave Jewell did much voluntary work on behalf of the RSPB. The national project was called the 'Beached Bird Survey' in which he (and I in my first exploratory forays into birdwatching in 1984) would walk Dawlish and Dawlish Warren beach to look for bird corpses on the tideline, record the species, numbers and look for evidence of rings and oiling. Although my memory is hazy I do recall auks were sadly found with some frequency but can't recall actually finding any ringed birds.

Taking this data I have used a map to illustrate where birds have been ringed then recovered at Dawlish Warren. It's generally self-explanatory although solid black stars include countries I have recoveries from, whereas other stars are via other finders. The map doesn't cover Africa but we've also found birds from Mauritania and Ghana. This clearly shows the vast movements birds undertake and the potential rewards out there in discovering a foreign ringed bird.

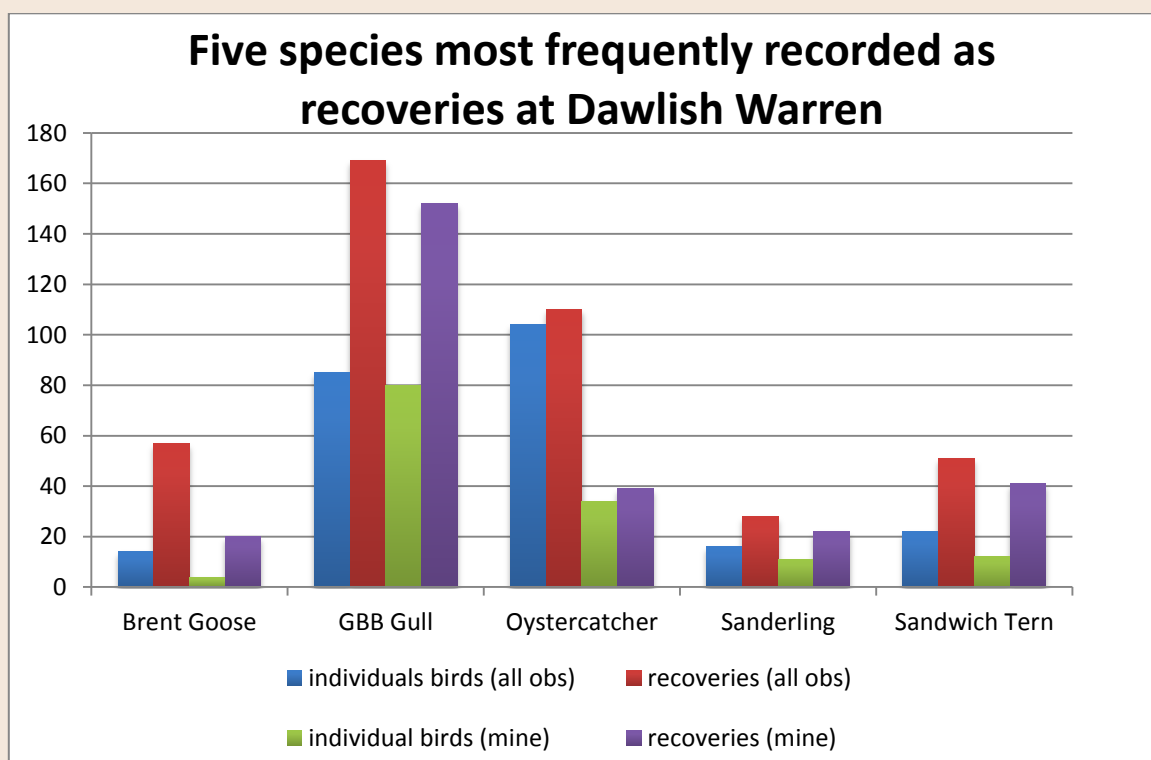


Complete list of all Dawlish Warren recoveries



The above table I have used to demonstrate all the ringed recoveries up till the end of 2013. By this it implies every read and so if the same bird is seen on multiple occasions then each occasion is included as a recovery. On the table below I have singled out the five highest recorded species, but taken the data from the table above and gone into a little more detail. I have tried to demonstrate a direct comparison between 'individual' birds in relation to total reads. Thus if the same ringed bird is counted several times but on

different dates the recovery bar will increase although individual bar will remain the same. This obviously has some merit as it demonstrates certain birds choose to remain present on site. An example being several of our darvic ringed Sandwich Terns this autumn were to linger, with one individual noted over a six week period and noted on twelve different dates. This is invaluable information hence my desire to try to convey such data in the second table.



It also depicts that although we've 57 Brent Goose recoveries it only in fact accounts for 14 different individuals, which I will expand on later in this report.

Although there is not such a variance in Great Black-backed Gulls between the amounts of individuals compared to reads, it shows that of the 169 recoveries (152 which are mine) it involves 85 different birds. The most frequently seen bird has been recorded nineteen times between 1 Sept 2012 and Dec 2013, although was absent over seven months

between 22 Feb and 12 Oct 2013. With the application of the Darvic ring it tells us this bird (JA700), originally ringed in Norway July 2008, chose to linger around the Exe Estuary during the second winter of 2012/ first winter of 2013, then went un-noticed or more likely moved away to breeding grounds (?) before returning the following winter.

This is not the only example of site fidelity, I could expand on many more Great Black-backed Gull examples but will highlight two other individual birds that have each been

noted on at least ten occasions. I could do a whole article on Great Black-backed Gulls based on the data I now hold. This is now by far the most observed recovery species on site (169 recoveries) and is further enhanced by the fact the first bird was only read just six years ago in 2008. Testament if needed that darvic rings do significantly improve the odds in getting recoveries.

I am proud of my involvement and it shows that so much more can be done if people are prepared to look for/ find and read a ringed bird. Of the 592 recovered at Dawlish Warren I have been involved in 331, this being 56% as

of year-end 2013. I've found 18 different species, but still hanker after finding new species and do get gripped when friends of mine find a ringed bird that I'm not able to see. Common Tern, Turnstone, Grey Plover, Redshank and Cormorant are just a few species I've yet to find and very much hope that 2014 can bring me some success in this area.

I do expect these figures to rise dramatically in the next few years and wish to also give credit to Dave Jewell, Ivan Lakin, Kevin Rylands and Alan Keatley for their efforts and support as well.

Different ringing systems

Metal rings

Just in case some of you are unfamiliar with the jargon used I'd like to start by explaining a bit more about the rings I read. Metal BTO rings are self-explanatory, we've all seen them. These metal rings are stamped with a unique code and administered to the leg of a captured bird. Ringing using this method accounts for the vast majority of birds rung and has been in use now for almost 100 years. This is by far the hardest to gain a read in the field unless recaptured by use of netting (which I don't do) or finding a dead bird. Reading these rings on birds such as passerines I find impossible so my focus with these are based largely around Oystercatchers, which are plentiful during high tides, although I have also read Shelduck, Mute Swan and Brent Goose.

I have found that even the oldest Oystercatchers, several of which being 20 years or older have had no recovery history recorded. I've no doubt they've spent every winter on the Exe and just gone about their

lives with nobody taking any interest in actively trying to read the rings. I certainly don't wish to denounce the use of metal BTO rings but this clearly shows that these kind of rings do have their limitations, reading them in the field is hard, very hard indeed. Without a reasonably close view to start with you are going to find it nigh on impossible. All the British recoveries I have been able to read have a seven digit code (two letters followed by five numbers) that wraps its way around the ring. Over high tide roosts such as Dawlish Warren birds can come very close in front the hide, which helps me but when roosting can stand motionless for long periods of time and the down side of this is that only two/ three digits on the ring are actually viewable and so your still four/ five digits away from getting a full read. You need patience, or better still a more active bird although not too active. I find it best when the tide is still incoming and pushing birds closer, forcing them to frequently move. I have a note book littered with partial reads of metal rings but it just

makes the thrill at getting a full read that much more rewarding.

Oystercatchers are clearly present in large numbers and visible, but don't get the attention from seasoned birdwatchers unless undertaking a count, which isn't a common past-time by many and a whole new topic (counts [*lack*] of commoner birds) in itself. Is this because it's a common species and we are naturally drawn to looking at smaller waders or the fact that these kind of reads are difficult (*I'm sure if Darvic rings were*

administered to them they'd yield more results?) or perhaps both are a contributing factor.

Obviously every recovery sent to BTO will have some merit, as it may assist to confirm sight dependency or bird longevity. So although a large percentage of my Dawlish Warren Oystercatcher reads were originally rung at Dawlish Warren, this could seem uninteresting, but they do play a small part in the overall knowledge, survival rate, site dependency and distribution of this species.

Darvic Rings

Darvic Rings are a newer concept and are coloured plastic rings, also administered to the legs. Rings come in a variety of colours and coded with a set of numbers/ letters or combination of both and are much easier to read to those eager enough out there looking for them.

Metal BTO rings are also applied to the other leg, but once you have confidently read the

darvic code this is sufficient to get a reply back from BTO on the birds history. You don't have to read the metal ring as well!

This is by far the most numerous recovery method over the last few years, with 85 different Great Black-backed Gulls recorded in just six years. Other Gulls have been noted plus we've had Brent Geese, a few Mute Swan and several Sandwich Terns and Shelducks.



Great Black-backed Gull (first winter), Dawlish Warren 20 Dec 2013, Lee Collins. With black darvic ring, code 24N, rung in Le Havre, Seine- Maritime, Normandy as a pullus on 1st July 2013. Thirty one of our eighty five GBBG recoveries originate from Northern France.

Colour ring combinations

For smaller birds such as waders, Darvic rings would be far too small to be effective, so using colour rings are another innovation. I have included several pictures in this article but it's still imperative that you make sure you get an accurate read. I say this as when two rings are placed one on top the other of the same colour it can give the impression of being a single ring.

I think it also helpful to point out many ringers use 'flags'. These are colour rings that also include a projection, these can be coded (stamped with a letter/ number combination) or blank and with regards to Sanderlings the colour of the 'flag' is a useful indication as to where the bird was rung. All Sanderling 'flags' are blank but a green flag is only applied on breeding grounds in Greenland or on migration stopover sites in Iceland, red flags

on wintering grounds in Ghana, white flags are Mauritanian and I've seen a blue flag which was Portuguese.

This system has had some teething problems as I must point out that I have seen several Sanderlings that have lost one or more colour rings. This is a pitfall to both ringer and reader in that these birds may become unidentifiable to a specific bird. If in the case of Sanderling you find a bird like this and it has less than five rings there's a good chance it's lost one at some stage. Please report them nevertheless, because the ringer will likely still be able to tell you where a bird was rung. We've also encountered a bird that displayed a pink/ fleshy coloured ring. This is not a colour used in Sanderlings, the outcome it would appear was a faulty red ring that had through wear faded very badly.



Bar-tailed Godwit, Dawlish Warren May 2012, Lee Collins. Showing a red 'flag' over yellow over yellow, rung in Holland.

These three methods of monitoring birds are the only three I have personal experience of. Other examples such as wing tags, neck collars and bill saddles are also used although I have to confess I've never encountered any of these to date locally.

I must point out that any ring read, whether a metal BTO ring, coded Darvic or colour-ringed you must get a 100% positive read. Although you may become frustrated at maybe say a 90% read or an educational guess (3's and 8's, 5's and 9's 4's and A's, 8's and B's can look similar if not seen well), these must be although not entirely disregarded (the partial read may help in a future view of the same bird) should not be submitted, although there are exceptions.

It's also worth mentioning that as technology hurtles forward at an amazing rate, so too does ringing technology. No doubt most of you will be aware of the latest innovation of satellite tracking devices. Some of these were recently used and jointly funded by the Devon Birdwatching Society (DBWPS) and Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) and

administered over the summer of 2013 to four Devonian Cuckoo's on Dartmoor. Such innovations allow amazing online access as to the bird's ongoing perilous lives as they undertake huge journey's south in search of warmer climes. This is a new concept but an important tool to promote, educate and highlight the important work of the BTO and other organisations on such rapidly declining species such as Cuckoo's. Unfortunately two have perished on their journey south, but as of late Nov the two remaining birds have managed to cross the Sahara and are now wintering around West Africa in the Congo. You can follow their progress online by visiting <http://www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/cuckoo-tracking> and looking for birds Whortle and Tor.

Through my contact with Jeroen Reneerkens he also informs me that small birds can be administered with Geolocators. These tiny data loggers need to be retrieved after one or two years to download the information about the bird's journeys. Last year he started using these in his Sanderling research.

My 2013 exploits

So getting back to my quest this year, how did I do?

In total I managed to make 191 reads, concerning 106 different individuals, this covering 15 different species. Currently eleven are outstanding awaiting replies from the BTO

Breaking this down it shows they emanated from fourteen countries; England (including 11 from the Channel Islands), Scotland (3),

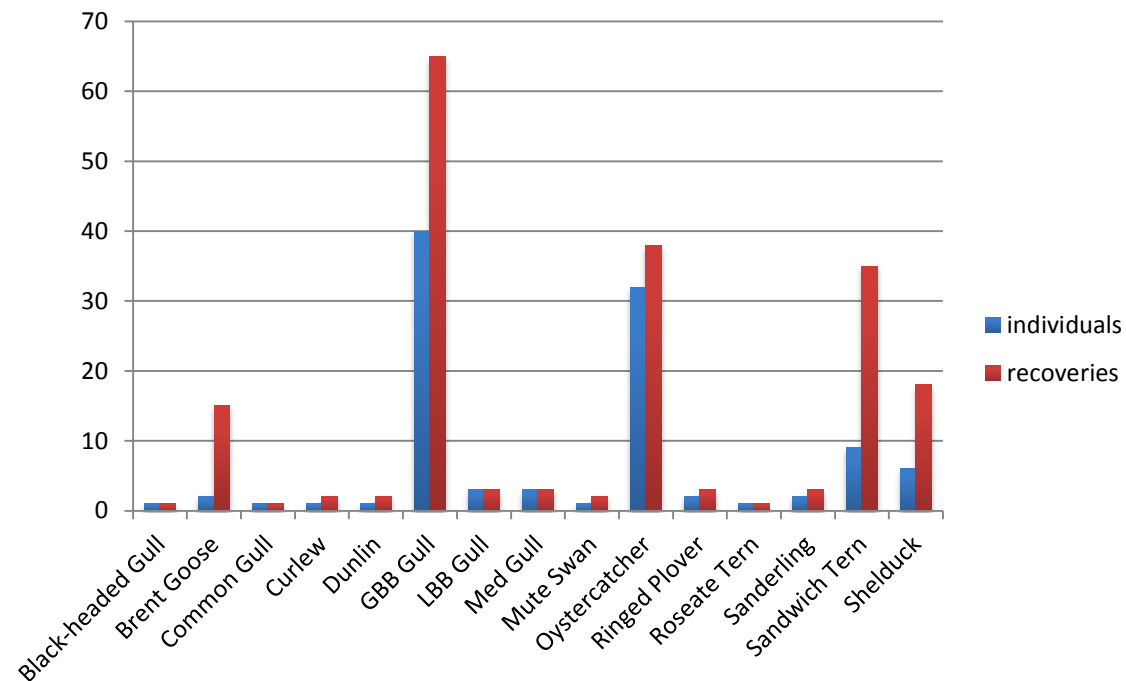
Wales (3), Ireland (1), France (17), Spain (1), Germany (2), Holland (7), Belgium (4); Norway (3), Iceland (2), Greenland (1), Russia (1) and Ghana (1). A map shows the vast distances some cover and conveys a visually more impressive interpretation. Apologises but those eagle-eyed readers who carefully examined the map, you'll note a single star covers Belgium/ Holland and I avoided putting stars for England, Scotland and Wales all through lack of room.



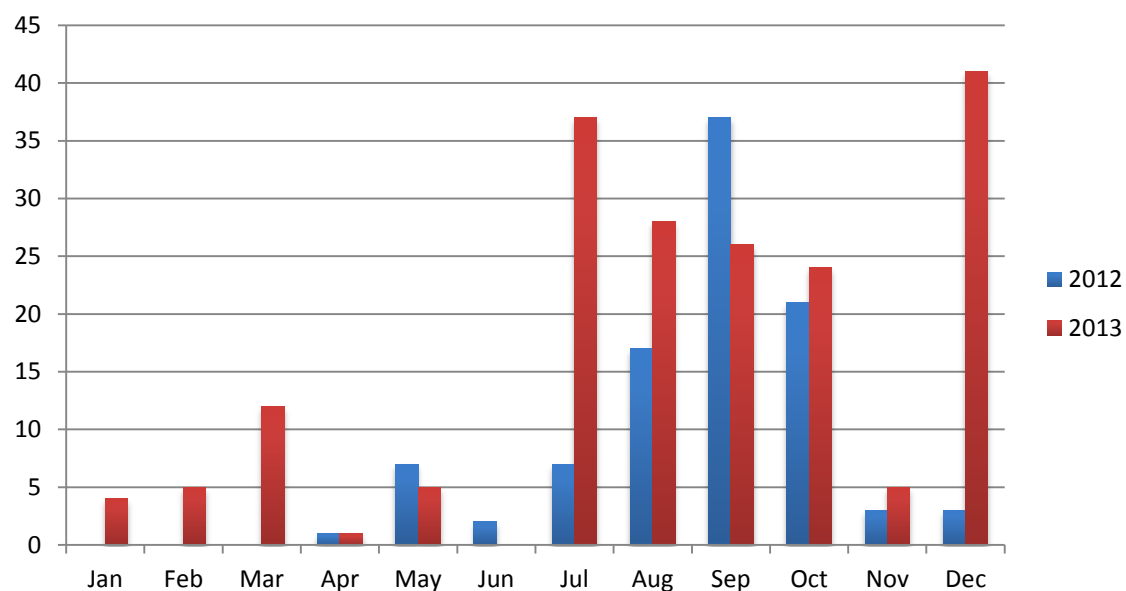
So, miraculously I achieved it, helped in no small part by a late push in December. 2013 brought me many firsts, my first metal read Roseate Tern and Brent Goose, my first colour ringed Ringed Plover (2), Curlew and Dunlin and first darvic Shelducks (3). It was also the year of my first recoveries from Germany, Ireland (surprising) Spain and Russia, as well

as the more seasoned finds from France, Norway, Belgium, Holland, Ghana, Iceland and Greenland. Stuff like this now fascinates me and I wish to share a little more about my 2013 exploits to those who care to read this article. I won't regale every recovery but will highlight some that perhaps has greater merit.

2013- my recoveries at Dawlish Warren



Breakdown on when recoveries made at Dawlish Warren



The table above indicates when I saw ringed birds at Dawlish Warren over the last two years. It shows that finding such birds is possible twelve months of the year. Peaks between July through to October clearly

indicate I have much more success during these months. July and August 2013 was very productive months for Sandwich Terns, nine different birds were found but even more incredibly accounted for 35 reads, which I

explain in more details later in the report. September and October are key months for finding Great Black-backed Gulls, numbers rise massively during this period, ringed birds are generally present but will get overlooked if not looked for.

December 2013's spike accounts for the fact I needed to go that extra mile to achieve my

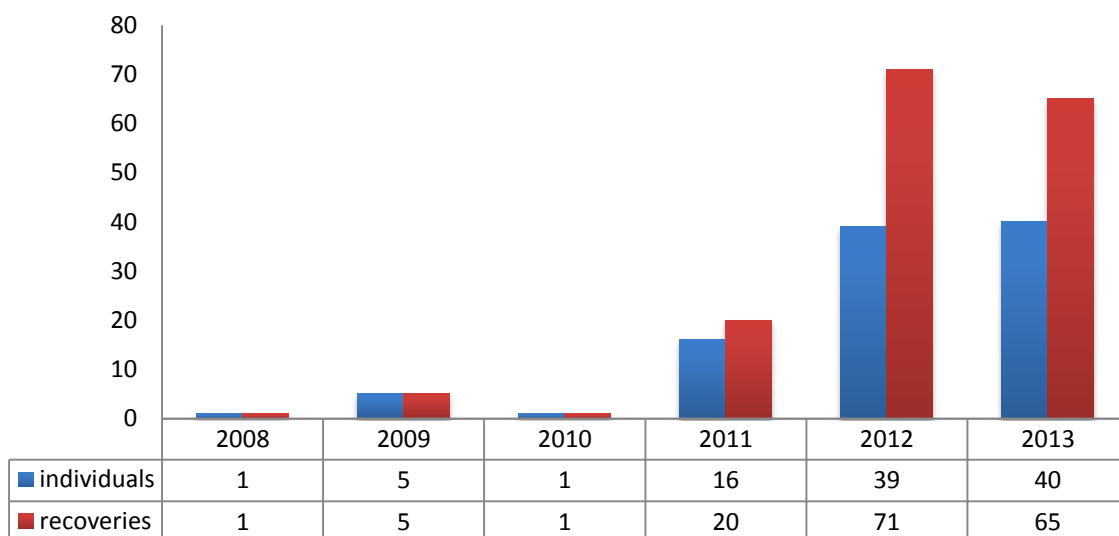
goal! This was helped greatly by the unsettled/ stormy weather during the last ten days of the year. Prior to this my ambitious target seemed just frustratingly out of reach. But birds seeking shelter during the awful weather and my desire to stick it out proved invaluable.

Great Black-backed Gull

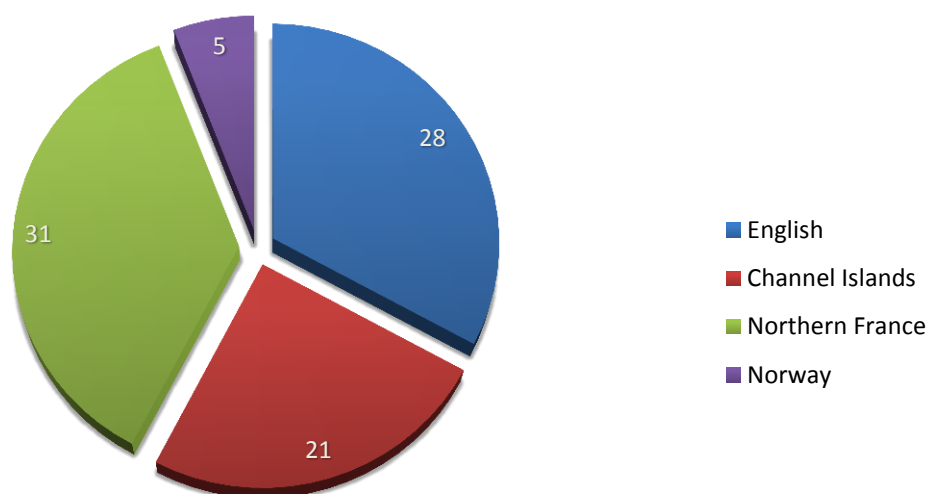
The easiest and most frequent ringed observations as per previous years were large Gulls harbouring Darvic's. Great Black-backed Gulls accounted for the majority with 65 recoveries, comprising of 40 different individuals. As in previous years no real surprises with birds discovered arriving from Looe in Cornwall [*Bruce Taggart*], Portland Harbour, Dorset [*Terry Coombs*], Normandy [*Sebastien Provost or Fabrice Gallien*] and Le Havre [*Gilles le Guillou*] in Northern France, and the Channel Islands [*Paul Veron*] plus a few longer distant migrants from Norway. In just a few short years of reading them Dawlish Warren has now amassed 85 different

GBBG's. Many have only been recorded once, no doubt just passing through but twenty six birds have been seen on more than one occasion and eleven birds seen at least five times. Although these birds aren't site loyal all year round, a large build up over the autumn period can produce two hundred plus birds (with a site maxima of 855 in Sept 2006) on any given day over the high tide roost. I would expect with such numbers to record at least one bird within them harbouring a darvic ring, although on certain days I have observed as many as five different birds, many of which although not seen for months or even several years later have reappeared on site again.

Great Black-Backed Gull recoveries



Origins of all the Dawlish Warren GBBG recoveries



Great Black-backed Gull, Dawlish Warren 22nd December 2013, Lee Collins. Displaying white Darvic ring (P:06B). This bird was rung in Portland Harbour, Dorset on 28 June 2013 as a pullus. Fifteen of our eighty five GBBG recoveries have originated from Portland Harbour.

Mediterranean Gull

Other Gulls were encountered, but nowhere near the same numbers. Mediterranean Gulls unsurprisingly get the most local publicity with regards recoveries in Devon. Over the last 40 years their status has changed from being scarce to now a frequent, even a relatively common visitor to our local estuaries and in ever increasing numbers. This species remains a favourite to many birders and will always brighten up anyone day out birdwatching. I adore them too, especially when they come bearing gifts of displaying a ring.

In 2013 I found three of the four individuals discovered on site this year, two being from France the other from Belgium. I also made a foray into neighbouring Dorset in Dec 2013 that included a stopover at Ferrybridge. The numbers they count around the Weymouth area are staggering, at times number over a five hundred. My stay at Ferrybridge was frustratingly brief but observed about ten birds, two of which were darvic ringed. I was delighted to find one had been ringed at Palic Lake, in Serbia as a pullus in 2009.

Common Gull

I've only ever seen one ringed Common Gull, it was a Dutch bird rung in 2008 as a pullus, which remained for three days in late July 2013. But interestingly the same bird was present for a single day two years prior in July

2011, which is suggestive Dawlish Warren is a stopover during migration for this individual. Nine days prior to finding it in 2013 the bird was also recorded in the Netherland's.

Black-headed Gull

Although a common bird at the Warren, it has very few recoveries. Large numbers are frequently noted roosting offshore or in the estuary confines and during the day disperse to feed, either moving upriver, linger offshore or remain in the estuary. Occasionally large numbers gather on the shoreline during the autumn which is the best opportunity to look for darvic ringed birds.

Prior to 2013 I'd only found two darvic ringed Black-headed Gulls, these having been

originally ringed in Lithuania and Poland (with historic recoveries also from Lithuania and Estonia) therefore any addition would be eagerly anticipated. Two were found in 2013, just one by myself, the other by Kevin Rylands. Both were juveniles, appearing within a week of each other and what's interesting is that both originated from the same ringing scheme, alas not from Eastern Europe but from Berkshire.

Roseate Tern

Of course every recovery is useful to BTO but from a personal perspective there were some very ultra-rewarding reads. My personal highlight was in reading a metal BTO ring on a Roseate Tern. In recent years I'd made every effort to photograph them, with a great deal of success but this was before metal ring reading was on my radar. Although this

species is seen frequently on spring and autumn passage, with many harbouring metal rings, none had ever been read and so we'd always asked ourselves are these Irish (Rockabill) or Northumberland (Coquet) birds? A frustrating conundrum and one I'd challenged myself to address and resolve.



Roseate Tern, Dawlish Warren 11 July 2009, with metal ring (unread). Lee Collins

This year, another bird came close enough in front the hide and fighting the urge to grab the camera I concentrated on reading the ring. Once confident I'd read the ring, cue big smile, immensely contented at achieving a small goal I'd set myself and then a few pictures for the website.

I was to discover a few days later through Kevin Rylands's RSPB contact in the North East this bird was from Coquet Island, Northumberland. Of course one reading doesn't confirm all our birds are from

Northumberland, but it now categorically proves we do get them from their breeding grounds in the Northeast. But surely based on the geographical proximity we must also see Irish breeders pass through the site. It remains one of my key goals in the forthcoming years to read more Roseate Tern rings and further understand more about this beautiful and enigmatic species (my favourite Warren bird). I also challenge others who visit during July/ August to join me in this quest (that said Darvic rings would be so much easier and better).

Sandwich Tern

Sandwich Terns recoveries were also extremely rewarding in 2013. Very small darvic rings are now administered to this species and a keen eye is needed to gain a 100% read. In 2012 we found and read three different birds so a haul of ten in 2013 exceeded all our expectations. Although seen in quiet large numbers in spring and autumn around Dawlish Warren it has never been recorded as breeding in Devon, its nearest colony is in Dorset. This makes the data we've collected very useful in determining where some of the birds that stop off here have

summered. In 2013 we had a lone spring (Scottish ringed) bird and nine in the autumn. These included five Dutch juveniles and most surprisingly all would linger and account for 29 reads between the five individuals (N50=12, NL1=5, NC9=4, NFN=6 & NCZ=2). With other recoveries ringed in East Scotland and a recovery from West Wales it now proves we get birds from far and wide and such information would not have been possible without the application of the rings or our endeavours in reading them.



Sandwich Tern (juvenile), Dawlish Warren, 21 July 2012, Dave Jewell. Dutch blue darvic ring (N5R).

As I said earlier, five of the autumn birds were juveniles rung as pulli, some 500km away in Holland, in two small colonies in close proximity to each other. This can't be coincidental and is significant when you consider each individual would linger and be observed over several occasions, demonstrating Dawlish Warren a key site for this species.

The first (N50) appeared on 20 July and was to frequent the area for six weeks, seen on twelve separate dates and last recorded on 31st Aug. Without Darvic rings we can only guess as to how long birds choose to linger before moving south, but here we had unequivocal evidence that this one bird had chosen to frequent Dawlish Warren, perhaps building up its strength and gain weight ahead of its mammoth journey south.



Sandwich Tern (juvenile), Dawlish Warren, 29 July 2013, Lee Collins. Dutch white darvic ring (NC9).

Another perhaps even more noteworthy Sarny tale was played out on 21 July. Another juvenile (NL1) from Holland was found by myself, Dave Jewell and Alan Keatley and whilst observing it an adult with a different colour darvic ring came into view. Over the next few hours or so of studying the interaction between both, begging behaviour suggested we had an adult with its offspring together. Knowing from experience the juvenile darvic ring was Dutch and the adult a Scottish bird I was both perplexed but also very excited. That evening I emailed both coordinators from the respective schemes. The Scottish ringed bird had a colourful past, as it was metal rung in Belgium in 2007, with the darvic ring administered later, on its recapture on autumn passage at the Ythan Estuary in Scotland in 2011. One obvious question needed to be asked and so I queried Pim Woolf, the coordinator in Holland as to whether this Scottish rung adult had been recorded this summer on breeding grounds in Holland? He mentioned he'd seen a bird in June with a red darvic ring and although not got a full read had a partial one that was

muted by Ewan Weston in Scotland as one of his, from a single flight photo. It was assumed based on the picture the coded darvic was 'ELV' although not conclusive. Here just were a few weeks later they were getting corresponding emails from myself saying I'd seen a Dutch juvenile and Scottish adult (ELV) together at Dawlish Warren. Puzzle solved and nice to be involved in such a delightful tale, one that would have gone overlooked without rings. It's also worth mentioning that both these birds were to be recorded over five dates, frequently in close association with both last seen on 27th July, no doubt having departed together.

On 15 Sept another adult and juvenile combination sporting red darvic rings appeared, but with an unfamiliar coding scheme to me. In fading light I stuck with them from the hide and as the tide inched them closer managed to confidently read both rings. I've become familiar with some darvic codes and these ones were new and unfamiliar to me, so it's always exciting to find out where they had originated from. Both

birds were not rung on breeding sites as per other recoveries but on passage at the Dyfi Est. Wales, about 218kms away, only twenty one days previously.

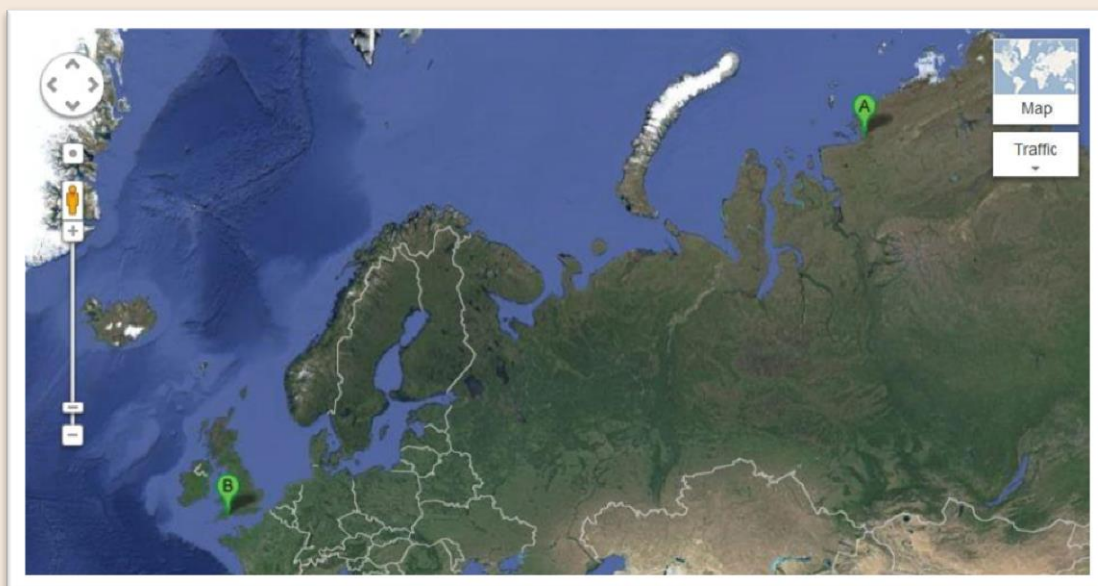
I mentioned earlier in this report the need for caution and making sure of a 100% read. The spring Sandwich Tern certainly highlights this. On 22 March I found a ringed bird and the adrenalin immediately kicked in to get the read. It was frustratingly just on the very limits of my ability to try to read it. I was pushing hard, not wishing to let this opportunity go but in truth was making an educated guess based on the shape of each digit. In my notebook I scribbled the code 703. It seemed to fit but on getting home and looking online there were no projects that used the specific three number coded system that I'd noted. Damn, but after all I consoled

myself it wasn't a 100% positive read. That was that, or so I thought. Sixteen days later on 7 April, Kevin Rylands and Ivan Lakin gained a positive read on a Sandwich Tern, informing me its code was EDZ. It was only our second Sandwich Tern emanating from the Ythan Estuary in Scotland, after our first was found the previous autumn. Our new bird was rung on 17 August 2010 and an exciting find as only our fourth darvic Sandwich Tern recovery. But why have I mentioned all this? Look a bit closer at EDZ, visualise it 180 degrees and what do you see, 703 would be a good bet! I didn't submit my March read although I'm sure it was the same bird. But it shows it's useful not to disregard such information and highlights if it was the same bird that it lingered here for at least two weeks in the spring before moving on to its breeding grounds.

Brent Goose

Getting back to metal rings, who actively goes out there way to read any? Not many of you I guess? February saw lots of rain and a subsequence benefit saw the Golf Course behind the hide closed. The Brents having no disturbance from Golfers took up residence and allowed close and sustained views. By chance one had a shiny metal ring and so the challenge had been set. Moskva was clearly

visible on the ring, a good start as potentially my first Russian recovery and I'm assuming a very long travelled bird. With a little patience I nailed the reading and was delighted that after sending an exploratory email to Russia, a reply just a few days later confirmed it was rung some 4700kms away on the Middle Beacon Island, way up north in Arctic Russia near the Kara Sea.



Brent Goose map, illustrating the distance it travelled, some 4679kms as the crow fly's.

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Although I know Brents breed in Arctic Russia I was thrilled to discover this. I'm sure just months prior it would have no doubt been roaming this desolate area, the onset of colder weather forcing it west and to warmer wintering grounds. I've watched TV documentaries in which this species raise their young on the barren, windswept tundra, ever vigilant to marauding Snowy Owls that will willingly predate on the small young and these images bring home to me the vast distances these birds cover in their quest to find favourable wintering grounds. This bird was rung in 2008 and mine was the first recovery of this individual. Further reads of the same bird were made twice more during the first winter period. The story doesn't end there, another chance to study a grazing flock on the Golf course the following winter on the 24th November yielded another shiny ring,

cue opportunity. Yep, I know that bird, obviously it's not possible to discern one on looks alone but the ring yes I know that ring number. I was delighted to see its return and a bit surprised. Individual birds obviously have some winter site fidelity and this bird had chosen to cover thousands of miles in its desire to return to the Exe Estuary.

I don't know why I was so surprised to see it return as we do have another bird that has a red and orange darvic rings on it. It has been recorded several times here over the last seven years plus a history of being recorded in Holland and Denmark. But rather than having a juicy ringing past several thousand miles away instead originates from Powderham just a few miles away, rung way back on 8 Feb 1996, making it now at least 17 years old.



Brent Goose, Dawlish Warren 20 Oct 2013, Dave Jewell

Several more records have come to light since writing this report, all dating back from the 90's. It involves a further eight different birds and comprises of 19 recoveries. Most were colour ringed from Tundra Russia, far, far away some

4500kms in the Taymyr Peninsula, Siberia. The first recovery was noted back in 92, with the last in 98 and probably reflects a concerted effort by the Russians to monitor this species back in the early 90's.

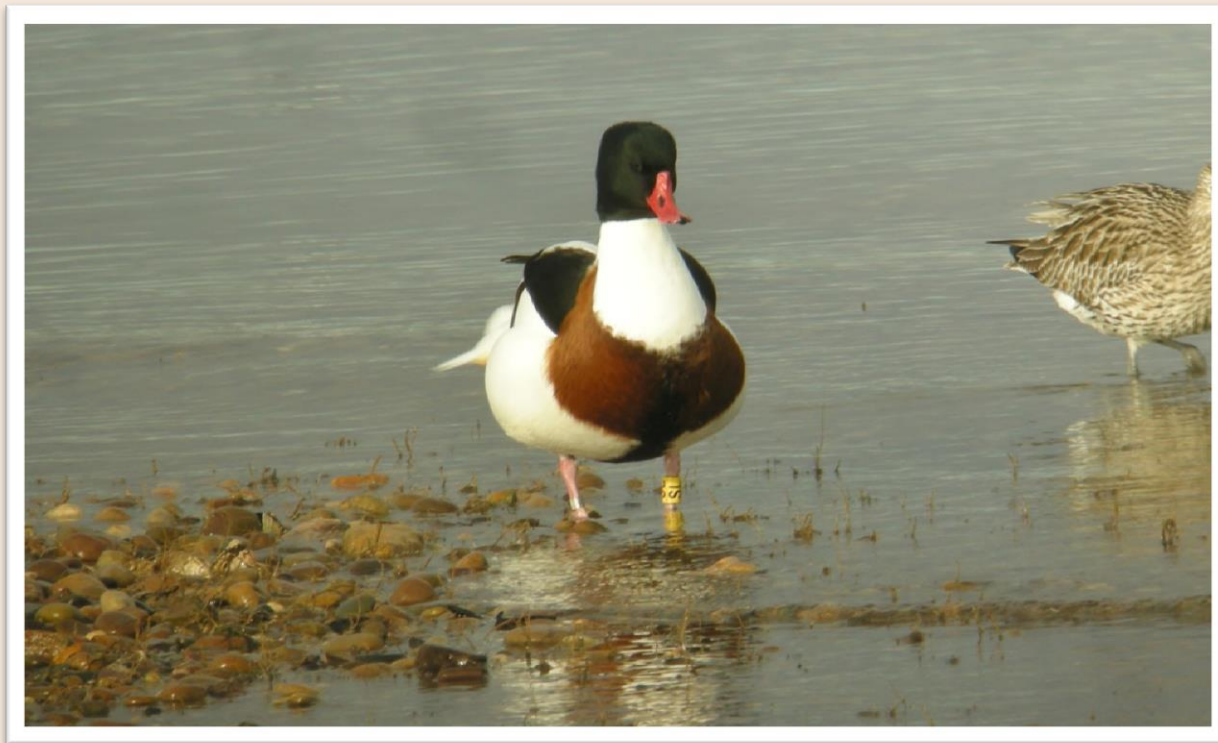
Shelduck

2013 saw our first ever Dawlish Warren Shelduck recovery in January, a BTO ringed bird that was initially rung in September 2005 in Steart, Somerset and by the end of December the bird remains present onsite.

On an even more local level, we'd always asked ourselves why we'd never recorded an Axe bird? The Axe Estuary Ringing Group (AERG) has captured 363 birds since 2006, although yellow darvics have only been administered to any recaptured or new birds since 2010. With Seaton Marshes just 28kms east it seemed only a matter of time when

we'd discover one at Dawlish Warren as surely not all Axe birds could remain totally site loyal. We were to find four of them (JB, TP, SL & NJ), two in the spring and two over the second winter, although surprisingly none would choose to linger.

To round off a memorable Shelduck recovery year two further metal BTO rings were read in December and I currently await a reply from BTO on their life histories



Shelduck, Dawlish Warren 8th Dec 2013, Lee Collins. This bird 'SL' was one of four found that was ringed on the Axe Estuary.

Sanderling

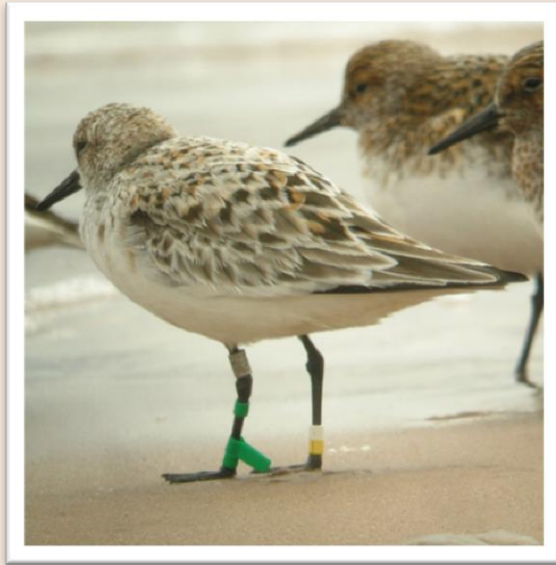
This species interests me greatly. BTO rings are far too small to read in the field and Darvic rings not the most practical solution, so colour ring combinations are used. In recent years I've found many Sanderlings like this and it astonishes me the distances this species travels.

Jeroen Reneerkens from the Netherlands has spent the last few summer months in

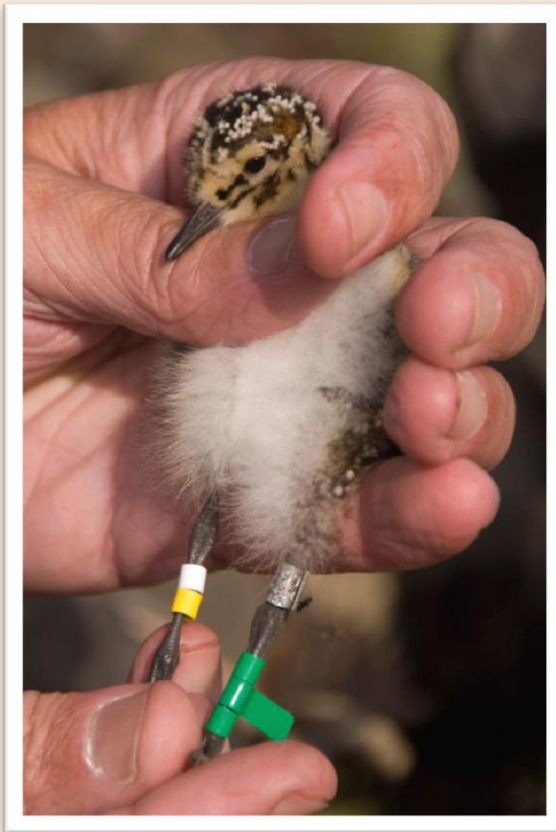
Greenland and Iceland doing vital research, administering colour rings and he coordinates the project for this species which also sees birds captured and rung on their wintering grounds in Mauritania and Ghana. I've been fortunate enough to have found eleven different Sanderlings, two being in 2013. These recoveries have been ringed in Greenland (2), Iceland (1), Portugal (1), Mauritania (1) and Ghana (6).



Sanderling(colour ringed), Dawlish Warren 19th July 2013. Lee Collins. This bird shows yellow over yellow over red 'flag' on left leg, red over red on right leg. This bird was rung at Asenko village, Ghana in Sept 2012, 5082kms away.



Sanderling (colour ringed), Dawlish Warren 6th June 2010
© Lee Collins. This bird shows green over green 'flag' over green on left leg, white over yellow on right leg



Same bird, rung on its nest as a four day old chick in Zackenberg, Northeast Greenland in 4th July 2009, 2769kms away. Same bird show when rung, Jeroen Reneerkens.

When you study a map of the world its mind-blowing to think of the distances these small birds travel each year. Dawlish Warren can host large gatherings during the migration seasons so is a useful indicator this is a valuable stopover.

I am frequently at great pains to point out to birders or casual, tideline walkers at Dawlish Warren the huge distances they cover and need to avoid unnecessary disturbance to them as they frantically scurry along the shoreline feeding or resting up on the beach over the high tides.

Ghana as the crow flies is over 5000kms away from the Warren, likewise Greenland in the other direction over 2700kms away! None have stayed long, with 50% only recorded on a single date, whilst the others have stayed a maximum of three days. The desire to continue on is strong and it is imperative their stay here is taken to resting up and feeding without unnecessary disturbance.

As an aside and although not relevant to my exploits in 2013 I did wish too also mention a recovery from 2012.

A colour ringed Sanderling was discovered on 19th May and remained present until the 21st. Visually it was no different to any other Sanderling recovery, its red flag promoting its ringing origins from Ghana, just as many before and since.



Sanderling, Dawlish Warren, 19 May 2012, Lee Collins

But this bird's CV heralded an impressive history; it was ringed as all our Ghanaian Sanderlings in Asenko Village back on the 7th October 2008 and would winter in the area, being noted also in February and March 2009. It then went unseen whilst on its northerly passage later that year but was noted over two days at Northern France on 9-10 August 2009, no doubt heading back to wintering grounds somewhere in west Africa. Asenko Village must have a strong lure for many wintering Sanderlings (generally getting between 2-3000 each winter) as the same bird was again noted in November 2009 and February 2010. It then went unobserved again this time for twelve months, during this time it no doubt had undergone the massive journey north to breeding grounds, then back to winter in Africa. On the 17th February 2010 it reappeared again, but not back at Ghana this time but much further south in Walvis Bay, NAMIBIA! It was astonishing news and just further emphasised the immense journeys these birds undertake. Three months later and this well-travelled bird was back in the Northern hemisphere, having travelled in excess of 8000kms in the intervening period and was discovered in late May 2010 at North Uist, Outer Hebrides.

Did it breed successfully in Greenland that year? We will never know for sure, but its appearance back in western France on 24 July 2010 just 55 days after its sighting in North Uist was interesting and clearly shows this bird didn't spend long on breeding grounds, once again heading back to winter quarters. Wanting more help on this and many matters regarding Sanderlings, I'm in frequent communication with Jeroen in the Netherlands. He did verify most Sanderlings arrive in Greenland late May/ early June and leave at the earliest mid-July. Additional factors on their duration of stay need to be borne in mind, such as breeding success/ predation (Arctic Fox's will predate on them, although the Lemmings population each year does effect this) or the fact that sometimes just a single adult (can be either male or female) stays to raise the chick, whilst the other starts its journey back south. Therefore knowing this it's quite feasible based on the timelines that this bird did breed in Greenland.

Once again it went unrecorded, this time for thirteen months and resurfaced back in Northern France in August 2011, like many other of its recoveries noted on just a single date. It then went

unseen over the following winter, no doubt back in an area of West Africa and finally entertained a small but willing crowd of enthusiasts at Dawlish Warren between the 19-21 May 2012.

In writing up this bird's history I felt compelled to re-contact Ghana and discover more on recoveries

of this bird since our sighting at Dawlish Warren. They're reply sadly informs me they have not had any and so with a twenty month 'no-show' I fear it may have perished.



Sanderling recovery map.
A= Asenko Village, Ghana, B= Northern France, C= Walvis Bay, Namibia,
D= North Uist, Outer Hebrides, E= Dawlish Warren

It is perhaps not surprising that with such huge expanses of barren areas in their Breeding grounds and hundreds of miles of beaches at their Wintering grounds, coupled with a lack of observers at these areas the bird's whereabouts will go unnoticed for long periods of time. It is certainly more likely they'll be recorded as they migrate through Western Europe at more well watched birdwatching sites during passage time.

We now have sixteen documented recoveries of colour ringed Sanderlings that I am aware of, all in the last five years. Breaking this down we've had two in 2009, four in 2010, three in 2011, two in 2012 and five in 2013. Another statistic worthy of publishing relates to the recovery dates. Of the sixteen recovered, four were in May, four in June

(first week in three, 13th on the other), six in July (later part of month) and two in August. I find the June records particularly intriguing so delving a little deeper can see that three of the four birds were second calendar year birds and so making their first journeys north to breeding grounds. It's almost 2800kms to known breeding grounds in Greenland from Dawlish Warren and although I don't have data to publish, it shows that if birds are passing through Dawlish Warren late May/ early June and returning late July then they undergo a punishingly long journey in a very short period of time.

Based on the information I now know on recoveries at Dawlish Warren and dates they're present on breeding grounds, the 2800km distance

between these areas must be travelled in just a matter of days. Newly fitted Geolocators should hopefully in the next few years give us a far better understanding as to how quickly they make this

journey. I look forward with anticipation to hopefully finding one at Dawlish Warren in the next few years harbouring such a device.

Dunlin

I have always hoped to find other small colour ringed waders and this year added another two different species. The first was a spring discovery, one evening over a high tide, where a distant view of a 'blinged-up' Dunlin caught my eye, feeding on the beach amongst a flock of mixed waders. Using the cover of the dunes to get closer without flushing them, and quickly found the bird and read the colour

combination, although the picture I took was more of a record shot because of the poor light. As I'd no experience on this species ringing history I used the website **www.cr-birding.org** and found the ringers details without a problem and within a day had a reply saying the bird was rung in Galicia, Spain on 4 May 2013, some 997 kms away just 20 days ago!



Dunlin (record shot), Dawlish Warren, 25th May 2013. Tibia is lime, tarsus lime over green over white. Lee Collins

Ringed Plover

August sees Dawlish Warren gain a huge build-up of Ringed Plovers, each year recording figures of National and sometimes International importance. I along with the other local birders make a concerted effort to count these as we do with all waders twelve months of the year. But on 2 Aug whilst half

way through a count from the hide I noticed the tell-tail sign of a bright red ring on a single bird, although it was partially obscured and a bit distant to be able to see the full colour combination. I hurriedly made my way out the hide and round to the entrance to the bight and scanned excitedly from there. I was closer

to the flock but the glasswort still hampered my views and after a quick scan of the flock couldn't initially find the bird. I knew it was still present and took a slower, more methodical scan and bingo, there it was. It had single rings above the knee (tibia) and below (tarsus) on each leg and a positive reading followed shortly thereafter. The same bird was present the following day on my visit over the incoming tide and was incredible joined by a second colour ringed bird from the same scheme.

Oystercatcher

Having become fairly proficient at finding lots of Darvic rings over the last few years I upped the ante and felt the need to address the issue of reading BTO metal rings, a much harder concept altogether. A concentrated effort to painstakingly read Oystercatcher metal BTO rings although a challenge yielded 32 different birds. Most of these (19, although await answers from BTO on nine more) were initially rung at Dawlish Warren between 1989 and 2004 and clearly shows birds stay loyal each winter to the Warren, although others also reached us from Ireland, Wales, the Isle of Man, Orkney and my first ever foreign ringed bird, an immature from Holland. I discovered this in the last week of the year and eagerly await a reply.

Oystercatchers are very long lived birds (the BTO stating the longevity record being 40 years, 1 month and two days) and a study/ringing project by the Devon and Cornwall Ringing Group was undertaken some twenty years ago. I do not have a great deal of information of the numbers rung, although I am looking into acquiring such data. But over the last 30 years of birding Dawlish Warren, Oystercatchers have always roosted in large numbers and must confess in the past I became blasé about them, giving them little

A reply stated the first bird was rung (with a metal ring) in NW Iceland as a pullus in June 2005, some 2052kms away and recaptured again in Iceland in June 2011, where colour rings were then administered. Since then it had been recorded a further 15 times, all from breeding grounds in Iceland and never been recorded elsewhere until my recovery. The second bird was from Stokkeyri, SW Iceland (1853km away) and rung in 8 July 2012, although I never unfortunately received any further information back on the bird's complete history.

thought. That's one good thing about trying to find and read rings, you now take a much closer look at the commoner birds. As much as I love watching/ finding rares or scarce migrants I now also get a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction from gaining a reading of a ringed bird, even of an Oystercatcher knowing fully well from the outset it was originally ringed at Dawlish Warren several years prior. But surprises are always possible as historic data has shown Oystercatchers have reached us from Estonia and Norway.

This aspect of birding has really opened my eyes. It may be marginalised and given little thought or effort by the majority of the birding scene. But I find it extremely rewarding and an additional spin off to all this is that I have now forged some new friendships with ringers from throughout Europe, as I am in frequent communication with them over the recoveries I have seen.

I very much hope that you have enjoyed reading about this and would like to take this opportunity to ask that if anybody does visit Dawlish Warren and manages to read any ringed bird I would be greatly interested to add such findings to the database. Contact can be sought either through the County

recorder who could forward this on or easier still through the Dawlish Warren website, which I am sure many of you are already very familiar with **www.dawlishwarren.co.uk**

I would finally like to say that maybe in 2014 you set yourself a new target. That of saying to yourself I am going to try this and find at least one ringed bird and submit your sighting to the BTO. If every active birder was to do just a single read once a year just imagine how much additional, valuable data would be made available to the BTO. So next time you're out, look closer at those commoner birds, don't be discouraged if you fail with getting a read every time. The rewards are there and just waiting to be discovered. Sanderlings have recently been discovered at high altitude passing over the Swiss Alps, Sandwich Terns and Roseate Terns in the

United States are also extremely prominent finds but I also think some of my records are noteworthy (too me they are).

Useful websites I think worthy of promoting are **EURing**, this allows you to submit a reading to BTO, although prepare yourself for a wait of several months for a reply. I also use **CR-Birding**, this is an excellent website, although requires a little more application in order to yield the information you desire. But once you get use to it it then allows you email access direct to the ringer and I have found that in most instances the replies normally take days rather than months like you get with EURing.

Thank you for taking a few minutes to read this, I hope you found it useful and interesting and it's hoped by writing this may just encourage you to do something similar.