

2014

Another year of ring recoveries at Dawlish Warren NNR

Lee Collins



Black-headed Gull (Polish ringed), 7th September 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

This is my second endeavour at writing up a report on ring recoveries at Dawlish Warren NNR. This aspect of birding I have found to be very rewarding and with millions of birds ringed each year the chance encounter of finding such a bird isn't as hard as you would think. Some reads are easy, others more difficult, while some remain impossible due to a brief view or distance involved. But I have now become addicted to this 'niche' and it's my desire to share with people my experiences and results in the hope it encourages others to also integrate it into their birding day.

Although neither scientifically trained, academically blessed or a ringer, I am a passionate and dedicated patch birder spanning some 30 years. Armed with my optics and a small compact Nikon P310 camera I now incorporate finding ringed birds into my frequent visits onsite and hope that this report and its images make an interesting read.

After a very successful 2013 in which I found 106 different ringed birds at Dawlish Warren NNR (*see a published account of this in Devon Birds and at <http://www.dawlishwarren.co.uk/2013%20Ringing.pdf>*), 2014 was the start of a new year and so began a new challenge. I'd always planned to continue looking for recoveries, this aspect of birding I find enjoyable and fascinating but I didn't start off this year with any particular target in mind. I'd set myself smaller goals, such as finding my 100th GBBG, and my 200th individual recovery for site, both of which were eminently achievable during the year. Added to that I'd wanted to find a few new species to my recovery list and top of the pile the possibility of finding a Geolocator-fitted Sanderling. This is something *Jeroen Reneerkens* brought to my attention back in 2013, saying he now fits these devices to some birds on breeding grounds in Greenland.

January and February witnessed a sustained period of very wet and unsettled weather, this culminated in attracting large gathering of gulls to the Exe Estuary. Like many other local birders, white-wingers were the primary focus and having connected with a couple of Glaucous Gulls and also seeing Matt Knott's first winter Kumliens and the recording group also finding another it did prove a fascinating time. Of the thousands of commoner gulls present, the vast majority were too distant to check for darvic rings, but perseverance did pay off and the rewards were forthcoming, ensuring a productive start to the New Year.

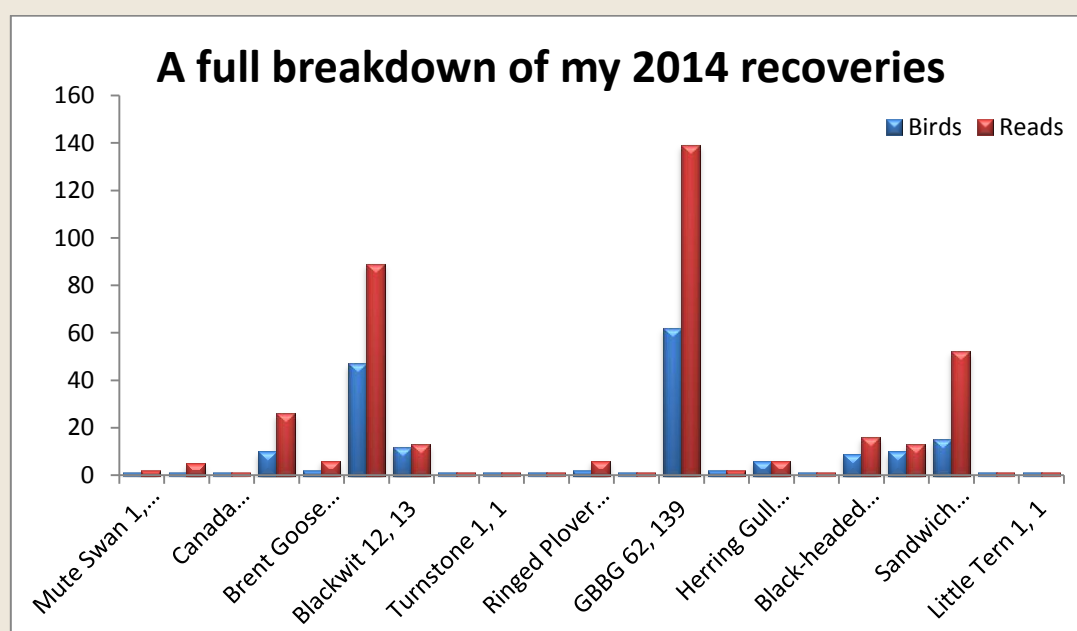
I found three new ringed Herring Gulls, a species with surprisingly few previous Warren recoveries, a few Great Black-backed Gulls, a stunning Lesser Black-backed Gull and the site's second ever darvic ring read of Common Gull.

By late February, I'd ring reads from 20 different birds, well up on my 2013's exploits. Recoveries are generally lean during the first two months of the year, but with a much better than expected start it got me thinking if I should try to find 100+ individuals this year and possibly beat 2013's mammoth effort. And so with another 10 months birding left all I had to do was find 80 more ringed individuals and eagerly await the return of

hundreds of Sandwich Terns, hopefully an obligingly Roseate Tern (or two), thousands of Laridae and throw in some waders for good measure. Like any form of birding there is always the chance of the odd surprise.

So how did I do for 2014, well the answer is simple, amazingly well! Overall the Recording Group made 398 successful total reads. I personally recorded **188** different birds, making **384** successful reads composing of **21** different species. Each figure a substantial increase on what I recorded in 2013 (*cf 2013= 106 birds, 193 reads & 15 species*). A cursory enquiry to the site's Senior Ranger informed me they're three staff surprisingly hadn't recorded any over 2014.

Graphs have been added to give a visual representation of the results and their associated tables show a full breakdown of the results. All 21 species are shown along the horizontal axis. The two bars for each species illustrate how many individuals of each species I recorded (blue bar), the red bar the total number of occasions reads were made of all these individuals. It's important to indicate the numbers of reads, as this can indicate long or short-term site fidelity of, for instance, wintering birds or may imply brief passage stopovers.



To illustrate this point, let's evaluate the Cormorant from the table: I managed to find my first readable darvic-ringed bird this year. It was a juvenile and was noted by myself on five separate dates, showing it was present on over fifteen days in August.

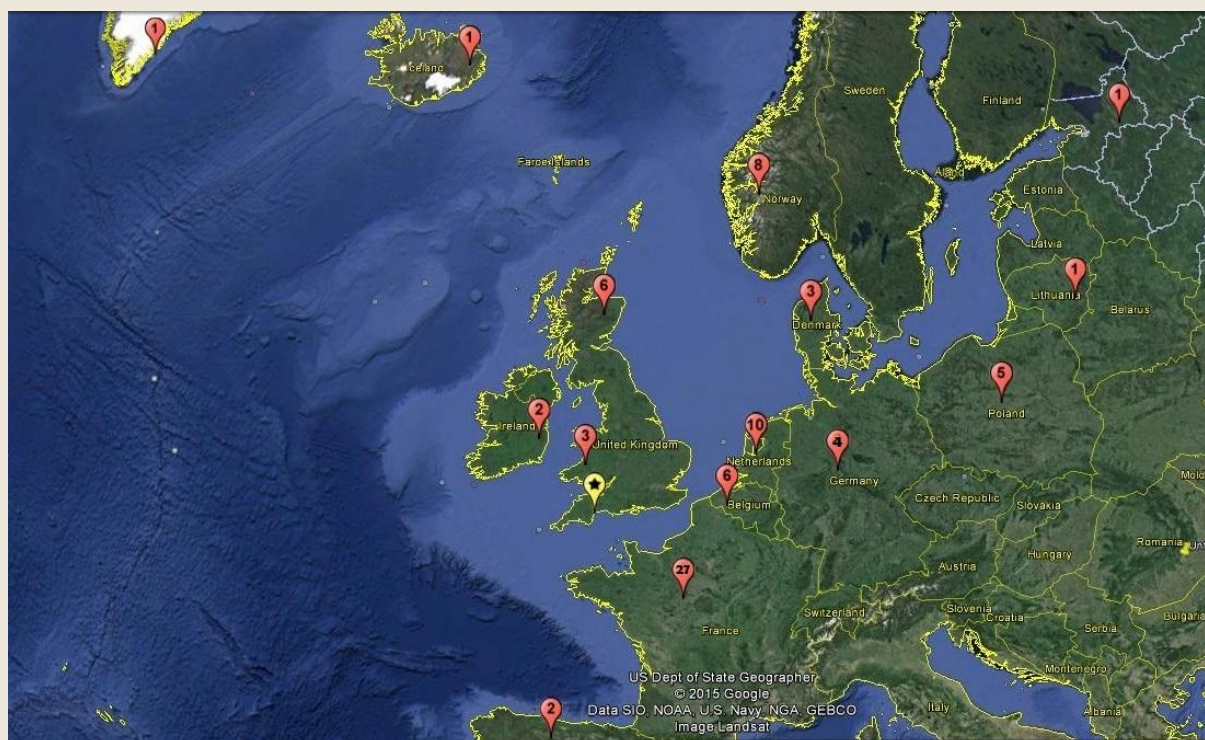
During 2014 I was onsite 230 days, on many occasions visiting twice to cover both tides when suitable. There is no substitute for hours spent in the field, be it in the hope of finding a rare bird or in this case finding ringed birds and my full time job with its unusual working hours allows me ample opportunities to pursue a heavy site presence during daylight hours.

Highlights were numerous and will expand on them later in the report but I must admit top of the pile was in reading the tiny darvic ring on a juvenile Little Tern in August (Kevin Rylands was the initial finder), especially as it took three attempts over several days to finally get close enough views to get a positive read. This constitutes the first ever ring recovery in Devon for this species and in fact was only the third Irish-

ringed Little Tern found in the UK, following dead birds in Cumbria (2009) and West Midlands (2002).

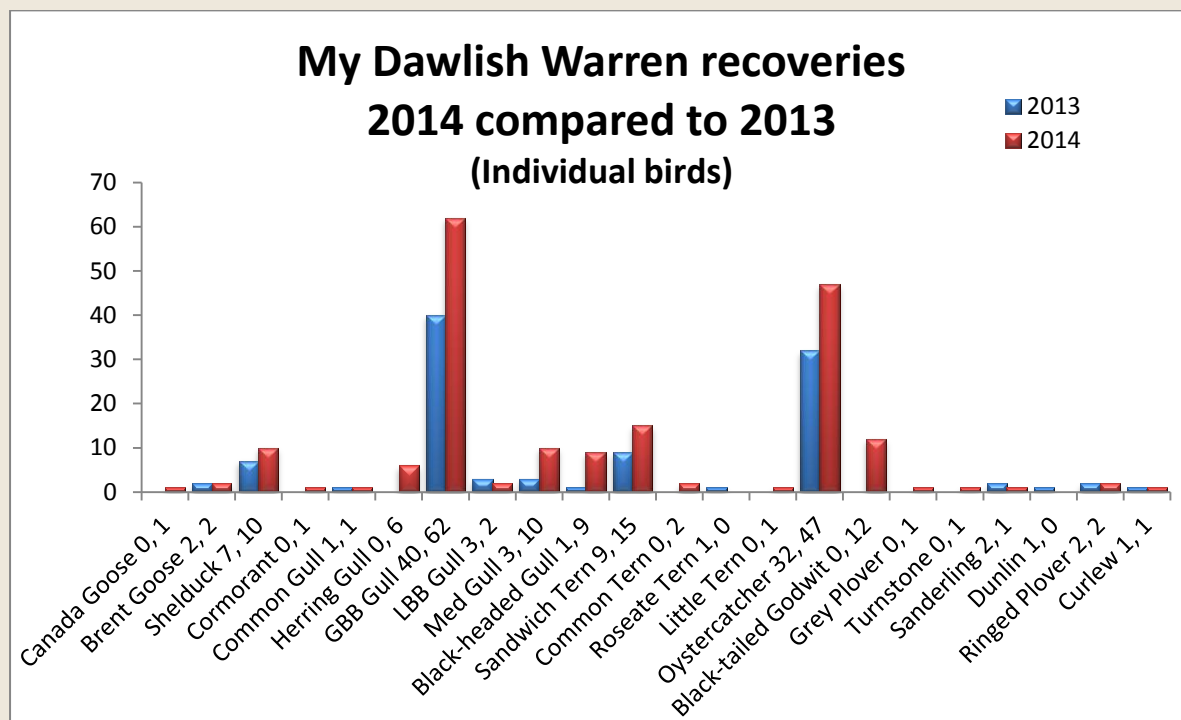
Other highlights included many new species added to my list, colour-ringed Turnstone, Grey Plover and several Black-tailed Godwits, darvic-ringed Common Tern and Cormorant and to show every bird was targeted the site's first ever metal read of a Canada Goose.

Where did they all come from? If we exclude British birds and focus only on ringed birds from overseas then it shows I saw birds from twelve countries- Belgium (6), Denmark (3), France (27), Germany (4), Greenland (1), Holland (10), Ireland (2), Norway (8), Poland (5), Russia (1), Spain (2) and Lithuania (1). Frustratingly a Swedish bird couldn't be included due to not clinching a full read, plus I missed our only Icelandic recovery this year. The farthest travelled in relation to direct line distance between ringed site and Dawlish Warren was the returning metal ringed Brent Goose, seen numerous times over January and March. This was ringed a mind boggling 4679 kms away.



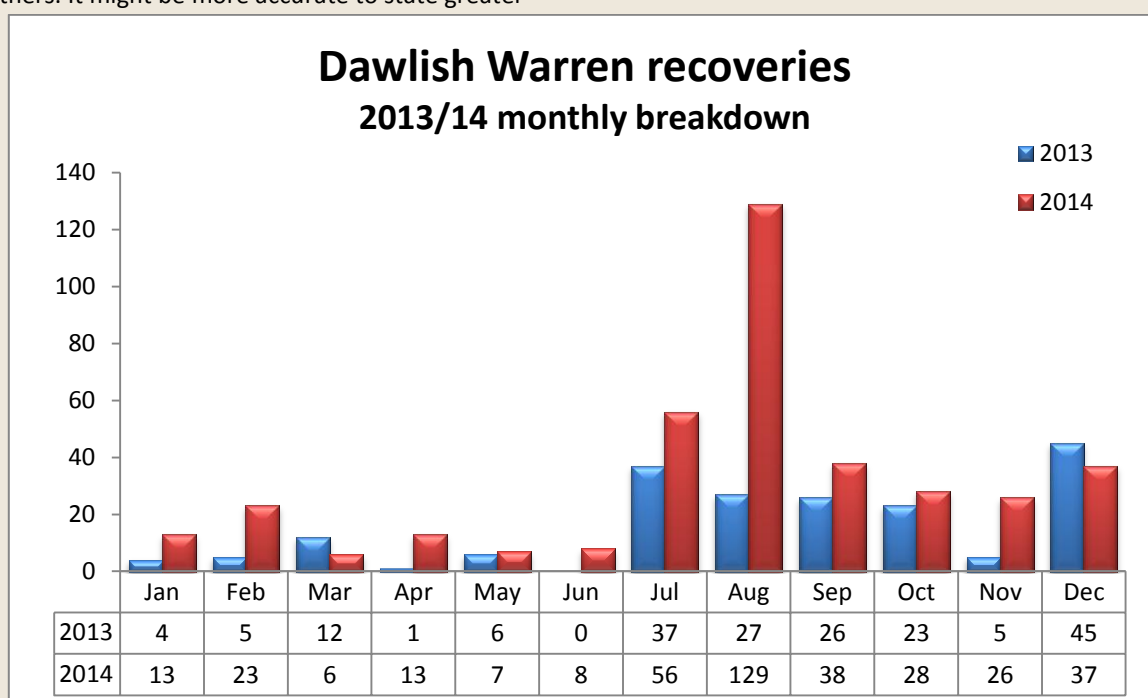
I have drawn up the table below; this in effect shows the last two years' worth of results, specifically focussing on individual birds (188) as opposed to reads (384). Its aim to highlight what

can be achieved in undertaking such a project and visually impress upon people just how much extra was recorded in 2014 in comparison to what was a magnificent 2013.



I have drawn up the table below to illustrate when all my recoveries were recorded over the calendar year, be they new birds or a subsequent read of a bird already recorded before. The aim of this table is too show recoveries are possible every month of the year, although does give a clear indication that certain months are much more productive than others. It might be more accurate to state greater

time and effort is devoted to reading rings over the summer period when birding is perhaps perceived as more mundane for those seeking rarities or migrants. During the spring and autumn I obviously spend less time doing this as I focussed my efforts on more mainstream patch-working pursuits.



As you'll see, July was a fantastic month, the best ever at the time in regards the pursuit of reading ringed birds with 56 observations made. Mid-summer is a time generally regarded by many to be a time of inactivity, with many choosing to stray away from birding pursuits in search of butterflies, moths and dragonflies. I look at it differently and see it as an opportunity to focus a great deal of my time on reading ringed birds.

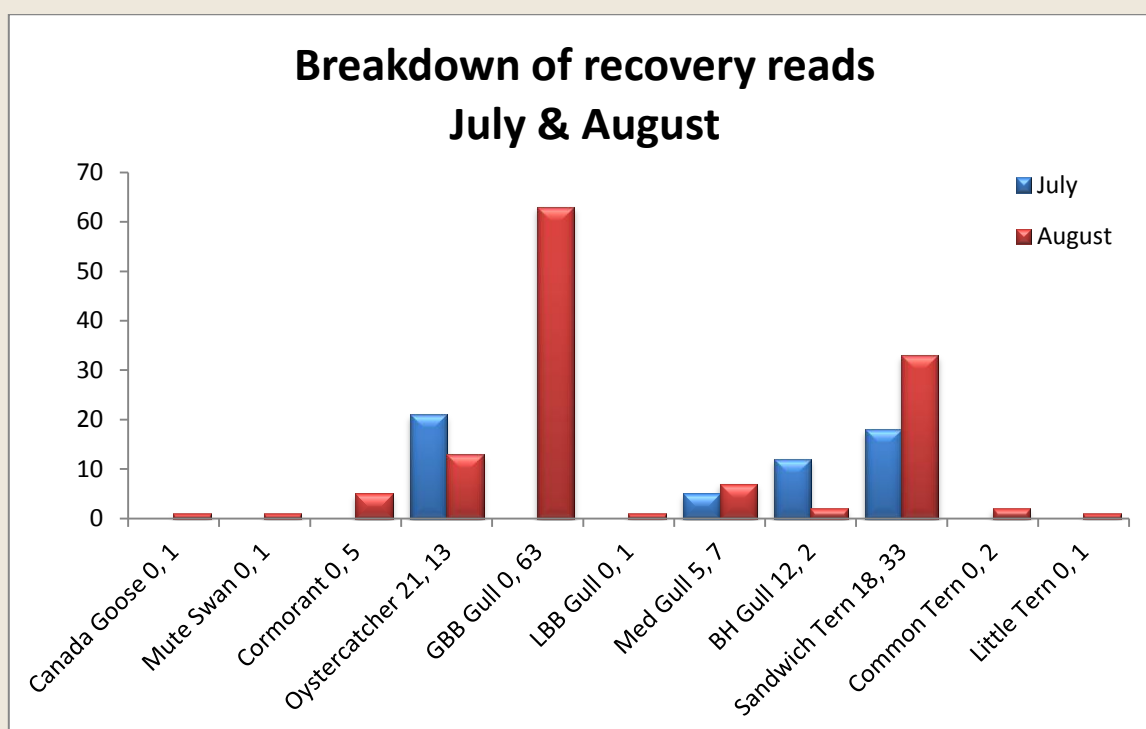
My efforts focussed either in the hide observing Oystercatchers and boisterous Sandwich Terns or along the dune ridge, observing masses of Black-headed Gulls and within them several Mediterranean Gulls gathering over evening high tides to feed on the shoreline. Both afford great opportunities to find and read several ringed birds on each visit.

To some this may seem uninteresting, but for me they were exciting times, with so much scope to add more and more finds to my year list. Not all were darvic rings too I must hasten to add, the hide is a fantastic place to gain incredibly close views of many species and this year I added several reads of metal rings on Sandwich Terns as well as a few Black-headed Gulls and Mediterranean Gulls.

The month of August was to surpass even July's rich bounty; this month was dominated by gulls, with Great Black-backed Gulls starting to build in numbers with birds of all ages, included several of our first juveniles.

Good numbers of Mediterranean Gulls remained well represented throughout the month, this included six ringed birds. It also included my first darvic bearing Cormorant, again a time that saw a swell in numbers, no doubt post breeding dispersal.

Terns were also a key feature; Sandwich numbers would build and as expected would total a few hundred. Yet these were complemented with an exceptional arrival of Commons, these frequented the area from the 19th for several weeks. Gaining accurate counts were always difficult, although would peak on the 27th, when at least 865 were seen onsite. Star billing though went to one of the Little Terns; first seen on the 25th, this juvenile was also noted on the 27th but on both dates it tantalisingly remained just a bit too far away for a read. Last seen on the 29th I was fortunate to finally get a positive read, this is the first Devon recovery for this species.



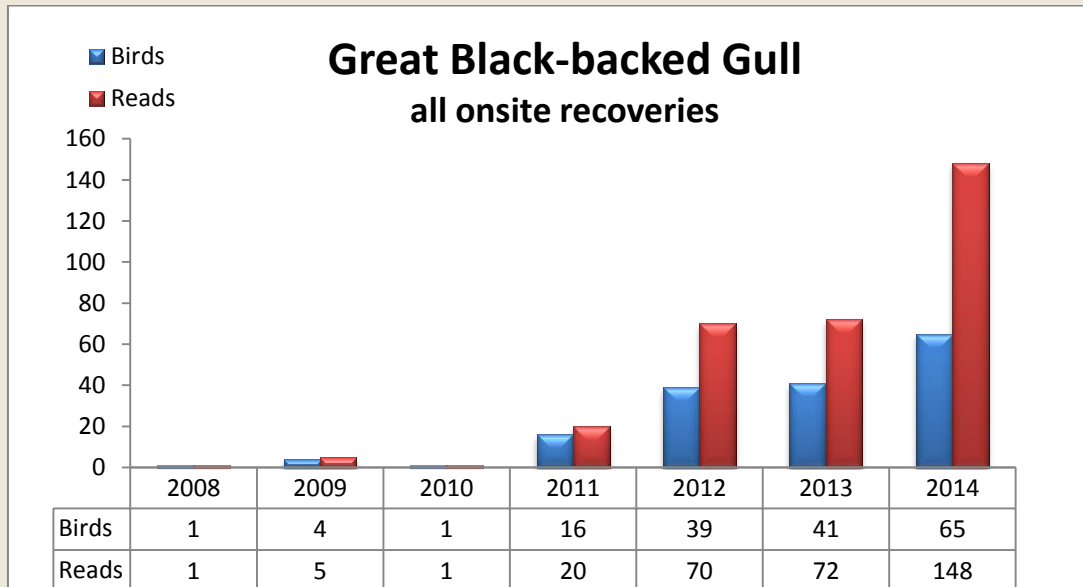
I would now like to expand more on each species noted over 2014, giving more details where appropriate on some of the more interesting finds

and also put into some context the volumes recorded this year in relationship to historic reads either onsite or from a County perspective

Great Black-backed Gull

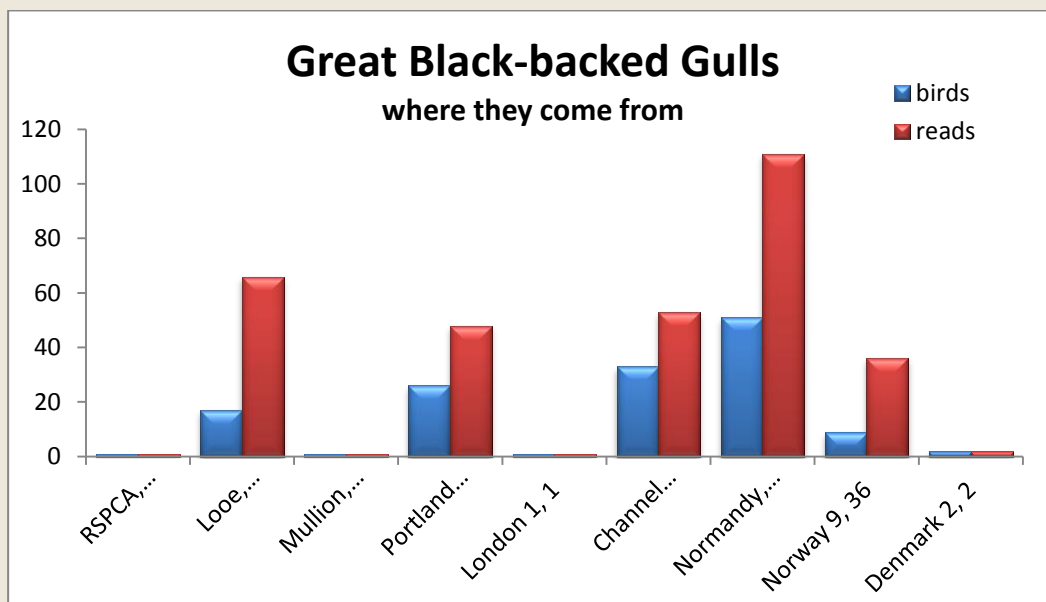
This is the single most observed species in regards ring recoveries, and although many visiting birders give little concern to looking at them, I and the members of the Recording Group do make a concerted effort to scan them for darvic rings.

Whilst the increase in recoveries is no doubt down to greater observer effort, as with other species, the proliferation of ringing schemes has no doubt also contributed to the increase.



With the first onsite read only made back in 2008, we have a short history on this particular species, but now we have a bountiful list of subsequent finds, that does allow us to evaluate where they come from and substantiate most are passage birds, although a few do linger.

Where do they all come from? The site has now recorded 140 different birds (317 reads), with a high percentage being birds ringed in the English Channel, here's a complete breakdown of them.



Multiple date observations of individuals aren't particularly numerous, as 99 of the 140 individuals ever recorded onsite have, so far, only been seen on just a single date. Fifteen birds have been recorded on at least five different dates, although many of these are over a single autumn/ winter period. This therefore informs us returning ringed birds showing some wintering site fidelity aren't prolific.

Two birds that have wintered over several years include a Norwegian bird (JA700) that was ringed as a pullus in 2008 and has been recorded 23 times onsite. All observations having been made between the months of September and February, these being 13 times in 2012, seven times in 2013 and three times in 2014, (although just once over second winter period in 2014). The other is a Cornish bird from Looe; this has been recorded onsite 44 occasions, our most recorded ringed bird of any species onsite. T

his bird (L:AJ6) was ringed in 2010 as a pullus, and so hadn't reached breeding maturity until this year. This birds visitations span nine calendar months of the year (not being seen over June, July although more bizarrely October). It was first noted in September 2012 and seen four times over 2012. It has been seen with great frequency since August 2013, recorded 11 times in 2013 and in 2014 noted

on 29 occasions between January/ May and August/ December.

Getting back to my year list and one of my personal targets in 2014 as I stated before was to hopefully find my 100th different Great Black-backed Gull onsite. By the end of 2013 I'd found 81 different individuals, leaving me what I felt was an achievable goal. By the end of 2014, I'd reached my one hundredth individual with some ease, in fact have now seen 133 different ringed birds.

detailed breakdown of 2014 shows I made 139 readings (*this constitutes 36.3% of all 2014 readings onsite*), finding 62 different ringed individuals (*almost 33% of all positively read ringed individuals onsite in 2014*), 52 of these were new birds, the other ten although seen in 2014 had also been recorded onsite pre-2014.

As in previous years most of our birds have predominantly come from five ringing schemes, these broken down as (2014= birds: reads): Bruce Taggarts from Looe Island, Cornwall (6:33), Terry Coombs via Portland Harbour, Dorset (15:25), Paul Veron from Guernsey (10:13), Gilles le Guillou from Le Havre, France (13:29), and Sebastien Provost &/or Fabrice Gallien via Normandy, France (10:25). More travelled birds from Norway do occasionally occur; in 2014 I found an impressive tally of five, as well as my first ever Danish birds (2).



Great Black-backed Gull (first winter) 9th Feb 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins. This overwintering bird has been seen at least nine times onsite and was originally ringed in Le Havre, Normandy, France on 1 July 2013 as a pullus.

Numbers onsite fluctuate throughout the year, swelled during periods of unsettled weather, building from late July and good numbers remain around the lower Exe until November. They congregate on an incoming tide on Bull Hill, this a large sandbar within the estuary before being pushed off on a rising tide, many then choosing to congregate onsite.

My best ever find was made this year, but it wasn't from a new scheme from some far flung destination. It was a more low key affair, in fact a chance encounter that could quite easily have gone unnoticed. The bird in question didn't have a darvic ring on it at all, just a metal ring and was seen on the island in front the hide. It was clearly

originally ringed on the Channel Islands and having secured a positive read I contacted Paul Veron with this news. It transpires it was administered pre-darvic, back in 1990 and therefore it was 24 years old and tantalisingly close to becoming the oldest Great Black-backed Gull ever recorded, which is documented as 24 years, 11 months and 25 days. Paul was still very happy, stating it was his oldest recovery of this species to date and what's more fascinating was the fact this individual bird hadn't actually been recorded during the intervening 24 years and two months between when ringed as a pullus and my sighting in August 2014. This is the case for many metal ringed birds and highlights the immense value of darvic or colour ringing.



Great Black-backed Gull, 1st November 2014, Dawlish Warren , Lee Collins. Ringed in the Channel Islands

I am not sure how many people use the BTO website <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/publications/online-ringing-reports>.

It has a vast array of data regards both ringing and recovery details, which allows filtering to a county-base level. It's a great educational and interesting online library for anybody interested in such pursuits. Although whilst studying the recoveries

in Devon for this species it became obvious something was clearly awry. It stated as of 2013, Devon had recorded 105 different individual birds, 83 from British ringed schemes, and 22 from the continent, including an eye-catching report of one from Canada, found dead in Millbridge, Plymouth in 2007, but just two from France. This was clearly inaccurate based on the dozens of French birds I had recorded onsite, 30 in fact pre 2014. In my pursuit to gain quick replies I'd used the excellent **cr-birding** website, giving me direct contact to

individual ringers, but it transpires this information to my great surprise isn't necessarily then passed onto the BTO. I do wish to give special praise to Mark Grantham at the BTO, as having discussed this dilemma with him he took the burgeoning Dawlish Warren database and systematically went through it, taking all unaccounted BTO records, not just the masses of Great Black-backed Gulls, and gaining an additional 260+ Dawlish Warren recoveries for the BTO.

Lesser Black-backed Gull

This species isn't prone to roosting onsite in large numbers like its bigger cousins; birds tend to generally pass through overhead and so reflected in the ratio of 10 : 1 of recoveries compared to Great Black-backs (LBBG 17 to GBBG 169), these numbers based on observations prior to 2014.

This stunning adult (7J4) dropped in unobserved on 4th Feb in front the hide and was a chance

encounter that almost got missed. Although not a well-travelled bird, having been ringed 138km away as an adult at Chouet Landfill site in Guernsey on 16 May 2011, it was recorded 15 times around the vicinity and mine was its first sighting away from the Channel Islands.



Lesser Black-backed Gull, 4th Feb 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins. Ringed in the Channel Islands

Herring Gull

A species that, although numerous, has very few recoveries to date onsite, with sixteen pre-2014. With a large build-up of feeding Laridae during the unsettled weather over January and February I did

encounter three birds harbouring darvic rings. Over the entirety of the year we recorded six ringed individuals.



Herring Gull (Lithuanian ringed), 31st December 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

This bird, yellow 3L23 pictured above was an exciting find on the very last day of the year, a fabulous day which yielded nine ring reads. The unsettled weather drew more large gulls into the Bight than usual for the time of year. The ringing scheme was unfamiliar to me and on getting home I was excited to discover this bird was Lithuanian ringed. This first winter bird was ringed at Kretuono, Lithuania (close to the Belarus border) on 17th May 2014 as a pullus. In the intervening 228 days, having successfully fledged it had then

travelled the 2026 kms, with our report being the first recovery of this bird. On checking the BTO website it informs us that Continental ringed Herring Gull recoveries in Devon aren't that abundant, with just eight if we exclude the Channel Islands. Most of these are from France, although singles from Germany, Holland and Russia complete the rest, ours (of the *argentatus* subspecies) being the only Lithuanian recovery for this species in the county.



Herring Gull, 8th Feb 2014 Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

This bird really had a very weathered Darvic ring and was assumed therefore to be an old bird. It was a scheme that was unfamiliar to me and I eagerly awaited a reply on information about it. News came and informed me the bird was ringed only 14km away at Heathfield Landfill, Newton Abbot but what drew me was its age. It had been ringed way back on 2 August 2000 over 13 years ago, my oldest ever darvic recovery and the ring

that was green to the eye was in fact originally an orange ring. With only two previous recoveries from August 2002 and 2006 both from Lyme Regis this bird is another example of how often birds with identifiable rings do get overlooked. The same bird was probably present ten months later, as on 31st December and 1st January 2015, a bird with a ring looking the same was present but too distant to read.

Common Gull

We do see a large build-up of Common Gulls annually every February, with counts although difficult to accurately make show roosting birds in the saltmarsh reached 169+ this year. But these birds are very distant and hence recoveries are meagre, with just one bird recorded prior to 2014.

On 18th February I found a small party of mixed smaller gulls in front the hide. Within them the

Bonaparte's Gull and three Mediterranean Gulls initially drew my attention although the discovery of a Common Gull with a darvic ring it quickly refocused my interest.

This bird (JE64) was ringed as an adult on 9 April 2006 at Vest-Agder, Norway and what I really found fascinating was the fact that my sighting and report of it was its first recovery since being ringed almost eight years prior.



Common Gull, 18th Feb 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

Mediterranean Gull

With nine pre-2014 recoveries on site, seven of which I'd seen myself, it's perhaps of no surprise that all have been ringed overseas. Belgium with four recoveries is the most frequent, although we've had others from Holland, France, Poland and a single bird from Hungary.

With large numbers appearing all over Devon this year during the late summer, including good numbers of juveniles implied must have been a stellar breeding year for this species. It was also a year in which I found 10 different ringed birds, thus doubling known recoveries for the site in just a three month window (June/ August).

Ages were to vary and broken down as five juveniles, a first summer and four adults. Nine of these were first-time observations onsite, the other 32P1 has an interesting history. This

individual was originally ringed in May 2007, at Przykona Reservoir, Poland with a red darvic, coded PAR7 and noted three times here at Dawlish Warren in July 2009. In June 2010 it was recaptured at Berendrecht, Antwerpen, Belgium where the original darvic was replaced by a new one and now donning a white ring, coded 32P1. Since then it has been recorded onsite numerous times over several years, always during either July or August, being noted in 2010/11 & 2013/14. Offsite observations include several from the River Axe, east Devon (Dec 2010, Jan 2011 and Feb 2012) and others further afield from Sussex and France but none over the summer months to indicate where it might breed. This does indicate this particular bird has some post breeding migratory pattern, that includes a stopover to the confines of the lower Exe estuary.



Mediterranean Gull (32P1), adult, 26th July 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins



Mediterranean Gull (ANZE, German ringed), juvenile, 11th August 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

The remaining nine birds noted this year were to show no apparent desire to linger, with eight seen on just a single date, with the other seen over a two day period. All these birds were ringed on the

Continent, with four from France (all juveniles), three from Belgium (two adults and a first summer) and two from Germany (adult and a juvenile).

Black-headed Gull

This is another species that has a poor recovery rate in regards their relative abundance. Pre-2014 there have been 10 recoveries onsite, a few being eastern migrants originating from the Baltic states via Lithuania and Estonia as well as several from Poland. Personally I'd found three pre-2014 and therefore felt 2014 gave me a reasonable chance of finding some ringed birds this year.

Seeing this species isn't problematic yet views are generally of distant saltmarsh roost gatherings or offshore feeders, both non-starters for recoveries. Late summer evening tides can draw large gatherings to the tideline, as the rotting seaweed appears to harbour a wealth of feeding opportunities.

Over June and July Bowling Green Marsh was the place to be. Black-headed Gull numbers were amassing, peaking at three thousand and within them a first summer Ross's Gull, which would lure many to visit (including myself), its stay a British

record of 74 days, but would also include three different Bonaparte's Gulls and a Little Gull. This factor alone ensured any small gull gathering at Dawlish Warren needed scrutinizing.

2014 was to prove a very productive year in regards recoveries, with nine found and successfully read (plus I was unable to get a full read on a metal ringed Lithuanian bird from the hide). All were noted between late June and early September.

Five were from Poland, plus I had my first German bird and three English birds, darvic ringed juveniles via Blashford Lakes, Hants and Cerney Wick, Gloucs and a metal ring read via Cambridgeshire. It was interesting to discover that one of the Polish ringed birds seen in 2014 (TEXT) was also noted onsite back in 2012. This is of definite interest and begs the question will the same bird or any of the other birds seen in 2014 be noted again in the next few years?



Black-headed Gull (Polish ringed), 26 July 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

Six out of the nine birds I recorded this year were seen on multiple occasions, which due to the sheer volume of birds present was of no great surprise. This data contradicts pre-2014 multi-date observations with just one other historic account, mine in 2013. Yet this can easily be addressed

when you consider 2014's efforts were more focused on such exploits. Late summer gatherings onsite are the norm, numbers totalling several hundred witnessed each year, although does prove if you're not out searching for ringed birds you probably won't see any.



Black-headed Gull (German ringed), 25th July 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

Finding any ringed Gull is welcomed, particularly foreign ringed birds. Yet taking a broader outlook, especially of multi date observations provides valuable information, allowing us to confirm a particular bird(s) onsite presence. Taking this a

step further, if the same bird(s) are noted over differing years it will confirm some kind of migratory pattern or site importance as a post-breeding stopover (see *Mediterranean Gull 32P1*).

Sandwich Tern

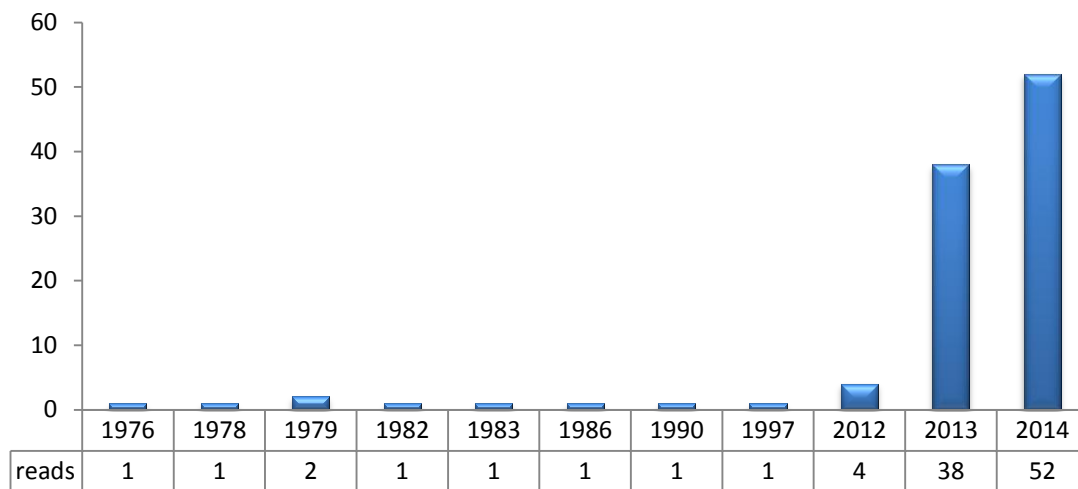
After a hugely successful 2013 in which I found nine different darvic-ringed bird's expectations for a similar year were high. The spring period was unproductive, but not unexpected as birds don't tend to congregate in front the hide over this period.

Over the last two years a lot of time and effort has gone into finding and reading ringed birds, which has led to some amazing results. Although we do get good numbers onsite, with autumn counts annually exceeding two hundred birds these are all migrants as Sandwich Terns have never been recorded to have bred in the County. Now thanks to the efforts undertaken over the last few years by the Recording Group, specifically over the

autumn period, it unequivocally proves that many individuals do remain onsite for several weeks at a time.

It's during mid-July we start to see a build-up of returning post breeding birds, which include our first juveniles. July and August was a hugely productive time, in which I managed to read rings on 15 different birds (eight being darvic ringed birds, the additional seven being metal ring reads, which in comparison to darvic rings are a whole lot more difficult to attain) making an impressive 52 readings.

Sandwich Tern recoveries at Dawlish Warren



As per 2013, several birds were noted multiple times, with two of this year's Dutch ringed juveniles noted on fifteen and ten different dates, respectively. The longest being Lime NR7, which

was first observed on the 23rd July and last recorded on the 17th August, this a span of 26 days (in 2013, one juvenile bird stayed 43 days).



Sandwich Tern, juvenile with Lime ring (NR7), 31st July 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins



Sandwich Tern, Blue N09, 28th August 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

Other interesting observations I believe also worth documenting regard the very first read of the year. It too was a darvic-ringed bird from Holland, but an adult. This bird, blue **N09**, which was ringed in 2012 as a pullus, was recorded the following winter several times in Namibia. News like this although not ground-breaking, as birds do winter even further south in South Africa really does excite me. It's so fascinating to find such well-travelled birds. I observed it twice, but the dates between each observation, 13 July & 28 August being 47 days apart. This could either indicate that it may have lingered onsite but went unnoticed, which is plausible amongst so many gathering birds that aren't always obligingly sat in front the hide or that it's a more mobile bird, which just happened to have been noted onsite with a six week gap. I write this as adults proven to have

bred in Holland (and their pulli) do annually turn up in Scotland each year, clearly showing birds don't just foray west but also hundreds of miles north over each autumn, perhaps encouraged by rich feeding grounds before they migrate south to warmer African shores for the winter.

My last darvic-ringed bird, Blue **KH6** was a juvenile and from a new ringing scheme for me, this being from Blakeney Point in Norfolk. Blue **NS5** was yet another Dutch birds seen just once in 2014, yet recorded twice onsite back in 2012. While metal ring reads as expected being pre darvic applied birds yielded three from Holland (one of which was seen four times over a period of 24 days), two from Belgium and two from Pylewell Lake, Hants, one of these ringed back in 2002 as a pullus.

Common Tern

Perhaps a surprise to some reading this, but is a species that although not uncommon during the spring and autumn onsite has never actually had a Warren ringing recovery. BTO published records inform us there have only been nine previous county recoveries, all of dead birds, the last being 25 years ago at Sidmouth in 1989.

Determined to address this issue I made a conscious effort to rectify this site omission. BTO metal ringed birds aren't uncommon and frequently seen but frustratingly have always

remained just too distant to make a positive read. As stated earlier, late August saw huge numbers appear onsite, with the high percentage of juveniles present indicating a very successful breeding year. This year's post breeding dispersal was on a huge scale, enticed to the area with the abundance of food source. At times the close inshore and estuary mouth was positively alive with small baitfish, making the water surface seemingly boil as they are attracted to the surface by larger fish preying upon them.



Common Tern (darvic-ringed), first winter, 29th August 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

I managed my first of three reads on the 26th August, a juvenile that was double metal ringed and quickly followed this up with another BTO ring read on the 28th. News from the BTO on this second read on the 28th informed me this bird was ringed at Dublin Bay, Ireland in 2011.

On the 29th I was pleased to find a third, this one supporting a black darvic ring (see photo above), a first winter bird within a flock of over one hundred gathered on Finger Point. It did lead me a merry dance to begin with, as although the black ring was obvious its code wasn't initially readable, but undeterred I stuck with it, determined to secure

the read. It would oblige, positioning itself so that a read then became straightforward and even allowing me to get some distant but acceptable photographs. News on its life history arrived just a few days later; it had been ringed as a pullus at RSPB Saltholme, Stockton-on-Tees, Northumberland on the 4th July 2014.

Getting back to the first bird seen on 26th August, this bird was also a juvenile and gave incredibly close views from the hide. It was double metal ringed, with one on each leg. I'd managed a good read of one ring, the non-BTO ring somewhat akin to the ones administered to Roseate Terns (Rosy

specials). But over the prevailing months that passed I was surprised to find the BTO didn't have the bird's history on record or even the fact it knew of a scheme administering two metal rings to Common Terns! Widening my effort, the RSPB also drew a blank, as did the Irish who administer similar such rings at their Roseate Tern colonies, I even resorted to using Birdforum. I still haven't

found news to this day on double metal ringed Commons, but that's not to say I've given up all hope, who knows in years to come news may surface. But frustratingly for now the bird's identity will have to remain unknown.

I very much hope that over the next few summers I can continue to add more records of this species.

Little Tern

A species that has never had a recorded recovery in the county and if honest wasn't one I'd expected to see. I've seen pictures of colour-ringed birds online yet although Dawlish Warren remains a key site for seeing this species in the county, very few birds are actually seen sat within the terns, mostly seen flying offshore.

So when Kevin Rylands found a juvenile on the 25th and tentatively suggested it might have a darvic ring suddenly both our efforts became focused on trying to read it. Despite our valiant efforts it remained just a bit too far away, the ring unreadable. But with the ring colouration (green) and its left leg application we at least felt confident we could narrow it down to a specific scheme and its site origins. The bird was again seen on the 27th, although yet again gave me frustratingly unreadable views. It appeared that the tiny ring administered was just too small to get a field read.

It was once again present on the 29th. I found it as I scanned the terns on Finger Point. I had just gotten

onto a Roseate Tern when the darvic-ringed Little Tern came into my scope view, I just couldn't let this third opportunity go to waste. The darvic ring itself is tiny and I was further hindered with an annoying westerly breeze. But I remained determined, resolutely watching it, all the while the scope vibrating just enough from the wind to make a clean read unobtainable. Luckily for me a boarded signpost was a few feet away, and I sought refuge behind it. This got me out of the breeze and made all the difference as within less than 30 seconds later with the scope on full x70 magnification I was finally able to get a positive read.

Reads like these are exciting and enlightening. This bird was ringed on 28th June 2014 and was one of 135 chicks that were administered with darvic rings at Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow, Ireland this year. They'd fitted rings to 60% of their chicks, great work on their part at what must be a spectacular breeding colony.

Black-tailed Godwit

This species although abundant on the River Exe tends to favour the upper reaches of the river and although seen regularly at the Warren they're only seen in relatively small numbers, although bigger counts are noted during unsettled weather or prolonged periods of wet weather drawing them away from more favoured feeding grounds.

I'd yet to find a colour ringed Blackwit onsite and so was eager to correct this. Blackwit recoveries aren't common onsite, with just five previous records, the last being in 2009, plus we do have two from 2000 that were colour ringed in Iceland.

Overall 2014 was a hugely successful time, as I noted 12 colour ringed birds. These were found on six different dates; twice over the first winter period (three birds), twice over April (seven birds, one of which was also seen in January), once in October and once in late November (two birds). These were all noted during bouts of wet or unsettled conditions draw down to site no doubt from the upper Exe, although the November observation might have been new arrivals as one bird had been recorded in Holland a month prior.

So let's analyse the twelve different birds I recorded; all had six colour rings applied, with three on each tibia. Eleven were ringed just 28 kms away at Seaton, these having the colour codes yellow over red over yellow on the right tibia. Nine of the 11 were ringed in 2013 with one from 2011 and 2012. All were previously noted on the Exe on at least on one occasion, yet I was genuinely surprised on each bird's history at the lack of sightings from further afield. Perhaps the mild winter past proving not severe/ cold enough to see any birds, or at least birds I observed, venture away from their immediate wintering grounds, although would have expected more northerly based observations of birds en-route to breeding grounds.

The only standout migrant observation being one of the birds that I found in November that was ringed at Seaton back in 2011. Fifty five days after being trapped and ringed in March 2011 it had been noted on South Ronaldsay, Orkney in April.

The remaining bird was found on the 22 November 2014, from a scheme that was unfamiliar to me. Its green over yellow over green on its right tibia had my attention straight away. It was also a UK ringed bird, having been ringed in Oct 2013 at Iken in Suffolk. Its life history stating it was seen locally at Exminster a month after colour rings were administered, with additional reports of it in Lincolnshire in September 2014 and Holland October 2014.

***During recent communication with Pete Potts, the UK coordinator on Black-tailed Godwits he did ask that he kept informed of any recoveries. Therefore I would ask anybody in Devon finding such a bird, be it an Axe bird or another scheme to include Pete in any future correspondence, his email details can be found on the cr-birding website <http://www.cr-birding.org/>.*

Grey Plover

The BTO website has no known recoveries of this species in Devon, although the 1964 annual DBR report contradicts this, with a long staying bird caught and ringed at Dawlish Warren in November 1963 that remained onsite that winter and was last recorded during the summer of 1964.

I found one with a metal ring over the first winter period within a large gathering on the beach. I tried my hardest to read it but was flushed by walkers to my frustration before I could get a full read.

But to my delight on the 4th April another small gathering of waders on the beach contained a

single Grey Plover and this one was colour ringed. Initial views were distant and so I made haste to gain closer views, not wanting to let this opportunity slip. Getting an accurate read was fairly straightforward, although managing to get a good photograph was not possible.

This bird was ringed at Fienteira, Pontvendra, Spain on 30th January 2012 and its subsequent history shows it had nine further sightings all from its wintering grounds from the same area it was initially ringed in Spain over the last two winters. My recovery was the first outside its wintering grounds in Spain, having gone unobserved whilst on passage during 2013.



Grey Plover, 4th April 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins. Record shot

Turnstone

The BTO state that there have been just three county recoveries (1979, 2002 and 2012), although none of these have been at Dawlish Warren. I'd always desired to find one and believed we'd genuine potential due to the reasonable numbers we see onsite. On the 10th May I finally got my reward.

The Turnstone was a cracking adult and was within a small flock of 14 birds yet almost got overlooked. It was initially distant and partially obscured but I got views that certainly suggested it was harbouring colour rings. The poor weather was also not helping but I sat patiently, watching it for ages. The tarsus clearly showed it had three rings, yet this bird did stand or walk for a considerable period of time in its typical hunched-like posture, tibia obscured and I was eager to ensure I got a full read and needed to see if the tibia had an additional ring that I hadn't yet seen. It did have a

ring on the tibia, experience and patience had served me well, and experience had also me leaning towards it being a Spanish bird based on two recoveries in the last nine months (Dunlin and Grey Plover) with a similar ring combination.

News from Spain was forthcoming 24 hours later and confirmed my initial thoughts. Antonia Cordeiro, its ringer informed me of the 76 Turnstones he had fitted with colour rings so far around Pontevedra in Spain that this bird was his very first recovery of any of his birds away from Spain. This was a bit of a surprise, especially bearing in mind our bird was ringed back on 24th December 2011, some 30 months ago and hence others must also be from a similar period. How do 76 ringed birds just go missing or unseen? True some must have perished but many must be out there and go completely unobserved during passage migration to breeding grounds.



Turnstone, Dawlish Warren, 10th May 2014, Lee Collins.

The customary hunched posture of this species does show the yellow over red over blue rings on the Tarsus. The Tibia is hidden as was often the case, but it did have a black ring on it.

Once again it just emphasises the fact so many ringed birds, be they Turnstones or any other species do go unseen for long periods and drives me with more determination than ever to find

more, document them on the website and hopefully also encourage others to look out for them.

Sanderling

Prior to 2014 Dawlish Warren has recorded 16 different birds, with me having seen 12 of these. On the 7th May Kevin Rylands found our 17th, an Icelandic bird that had somehow defied observation since its ringing way back in May 2011, and if truth be known not seeing it grips me slightly!

But you can't dwell on these things and whilst birding just a few days later I picked out a sizeable flock of 45 birds on the beach below John's Watch. I looked through them carefully, although none had rings but they have a tendency to sometimes scuttle from the tideline to top end of the beach. So it's always worthwhile going over them several times in case the time before you'd missed one or two, but I still drew a blank after several scans. That was that or so I thought and moving a few hundred yards back down the Warren I met up

with Ivan and Kevin and they were beaming away whilst pointing down below them on the beach. Another smaller flock of 22 birds were resting close to the shoreline and hearing the word 'Geo' really got my attention.

Geo clearly implied geo-locator, this is a small device that is now administered to some Sanderlings as well as many other bird species and if recaptured at a later date allows a detailed account of the birds travels during the intermittent period.

I'd set my heart on seeing such a bird but had always hoped on actually finding one. Ivan and Kevin had that honour but it didn't in any way diminish the thrill of actually seeing our first geo-fitted bird onsite.

Jeroen Reneerkens was his usual prompt self and his reply was only a matter of hours in coming. He informed me that this bird was ringed on 1st July 2013 at Trail Island, which is in east Greenland. He hopes to recapture it the following summer and so retrieve the geo-locator thereby allowing a detailed account of the bird's movement. But

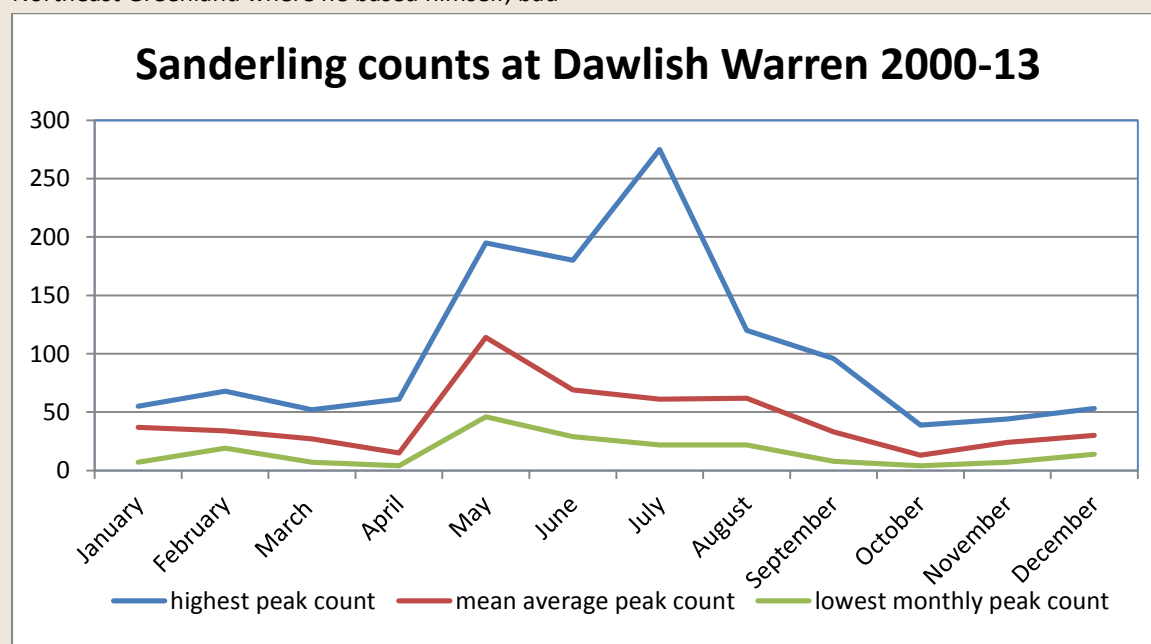
observations such as ours are still vital to him and this bird had three other recoveries, with sightings in September 2013 in France and two recoveries in Spain in Dec 2013 and March 2014. He suggests that this particular bird choose to winter in Europe rather than venture further afield to West Africa.



Sanderling, Dawlish Warren 10th May 2014, Lee Collins. Although not immediately obvious in the picture, on its right leg it has a Geolocator above the knee (Tibia). On its left Tarsus is yellow over white.

During correspondence with Jeroen over December 2014, he informed me he was unsuccessful in refinding our geo-locator tagged bird in Greenland during the breeding season. He also stated it had been a poor breeding year in Northeast Greenland where he based himself; bad

weather with lots of snow meant many delayed laying eggs. This delay appeared to hamper clutch sizes based on personal observations too and he also did report a high predation rate from Arctic Foxes.



I've drawn this table up which although isn't in anyway based on recovery data, but instead takes a broader outlook on counts made of Sanderling during the period 2000-13. I've show this to convey some appreciation of the numbers we get onsite using the extensive Recording Group database held over this period in which we've over 90,000 records, that includes 1,928 Sanderling observational counts.

The blue line depicts the maximum month count from the respective month, the green line is still a maxima monthly count yet the smallest of the monthly maxima over the 14 year period for the relevant month in question and finally the red line the average over the same period, although have only used 12 years, removing the highest and lowest monthly maxima from each month to give some sort of average we'd expect to see at Dawlish Warren

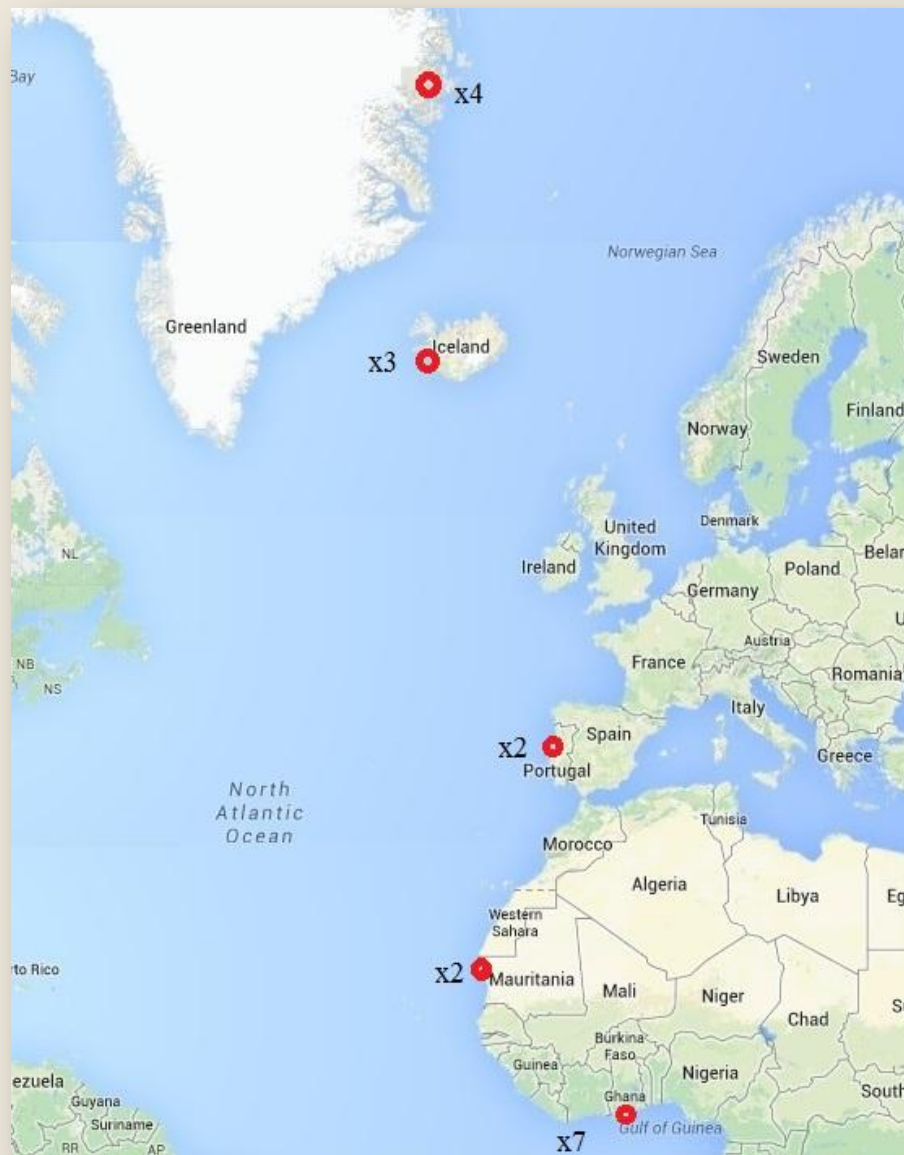
The table clearly shows that although birds are recorded onsite every month of the year numbers swell significantly during May/ early June when birds stopover on their way to breeding grounds, with returning birds reappearing in large numbers soon after during July.

This remains the single most ringed species I wish to find, in no small part because I am drawn to the huge distances they travel from breeding grounds in Greenland to wintering grounds that include a vast swathe of the western African seaboard. International research, using a simple colour-ringing system on their legs has led to major advances in our overall knowledge of this species and purely in the context of Dawlish Warren observations of ringed birds confirms their stay onsite is brief yet undoubtedly important. Choosing to stop to refuel and rest for between one-three days before then moving on.

To date we've recorded 18 identifiable birds (*plus a few others, these either missing a ring or too distant to get an accurate read*), 12 of which I have personally recorded myself. Now after researching this topic and with great help from the coordinator Jereon Reneerkens I can now fairly accurately surmise to which country it was ringed based on which colour flag is used at the time of finding a colour ringed bird.

Here's a list of all our recoveries with details. Distance conveyed as straight line between both sites; duration the number of days between being ringed and subsequently discovered onsite.

Date seen	Duration of stay	Ringed location	Date ringed	Distance in kms	Duration
4/6/2009	One day	Mauritania , Iwik Village, Banc d'Arguin	7/12/2007	3559	545
18/7/2009	Three days	Ghana , Asenko Village	7/10/2008	5082	284+
30/5/2010	Three days	Mauritania , Iwik Village, Banc d'Arguin	23/11/2008	3559	553+
6/6/2010	Three days	Greenland , Zachenberg	4/7/2009	2769	337+
24/7/2010	One day	Iceland , Sanderoi	24/7/2010	1875	67
24/7/2010	One day	<i>Missing a ring, but assumed an Icelandic bird</i>			
29/7/2010	One day	Portugal , Brito Salina, Alcochete, Rio Tejo	16/3/2010	1389	136
22/7/2011	One day	Ghana , Asenko Village	8/10/2011	5082	287
22/7/2011	One day	Portugal , Seixal	1/12/2009	1402	598
11/8/2011	One day	Ghana , Amansure River	11/1/2008	5038	1016
19/5/2012	Three days	Ghana , Asenko Village	7/10/2008	5082	1320+
1/6/2012	Three days	Ghana , Asenko Village	7/2/2011	5082	480+
23/5/2013	Two days	Greenland , Zachenberg	9/7/2012	2769	318+
28/5/2013	Three days	Ghana , Asenko Village	28/5/2013	5082	962+
13/6/2013	One day	Greenland , Hochstetter Forland	27/7/2012	2883	321
19/7/2013	One day	Ghana , Asenko Village	10/9/2012	5082	312
5/8/2013	One day	Iceland , Sanderoi	28/5/2013	1875	69
18/8/2013	Four days	<i>Missing two rings, origin unknown</i>			
7/5/2014	One day	Iceland , Siglingamerki	18/5/2011	1873	1085
10/5/2014	One day	Greenland , Karupelv Valley, Trail Island	1/7/2013	2678	313



The map gives a graphically impressive representation of the huge distances between the ringed sites and Dawlish Warren, I'm sure you'll agree. The distant quoted in the table as in any recovery is in no way representative of the birds overall movement, but the straight-line distance in kms between ringed site and recovery site.

To emphasis this lets take the first recovery in 2009 and think for a minute. During the 545 days

between its capture in Mauritania and sighting at Dawlish Warren, although I haven't information regards other recoveries to back it up, it's safe to assume that it travelled north to Greenland to breed. It then would have headed south to wintering quarters possibly back in western Africa in the autumn on 2008 before coming back north in 2009. So although the 3559kms is in itself impressive, its true distance covered in the intervening 545 days is mind-blowing.

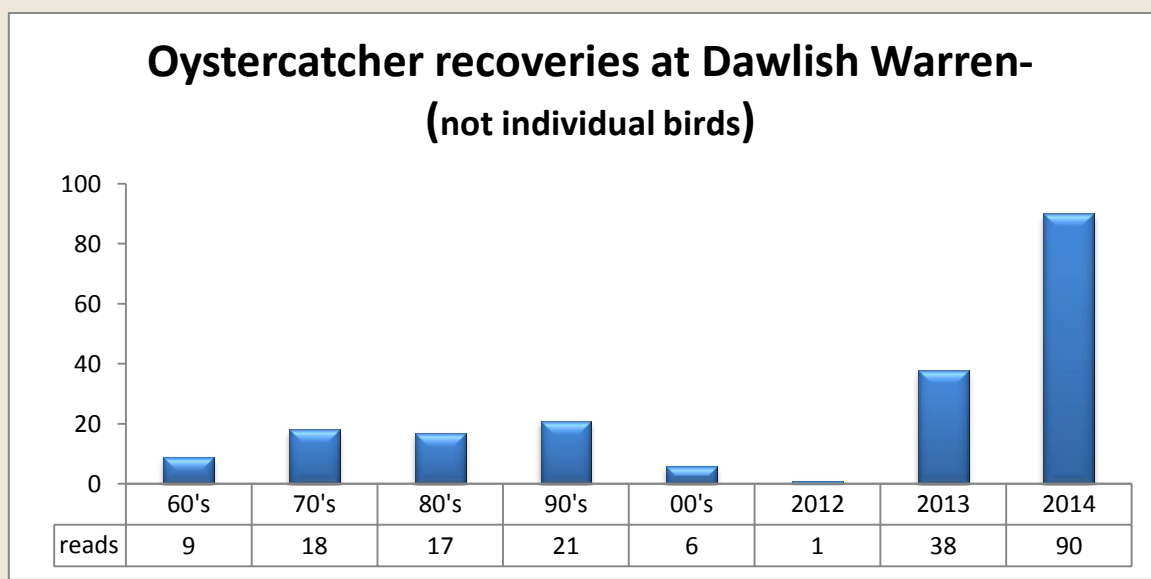
Oystercatcher

This species gets perhaps a raw deal onsite, they're certainly plentiful yet given little attention. I have never seen anybody at the Warren in all my years birding the site actually going out there way to read these rings, despite dozens upon dozens bearing rings (*note- many of the plastic rings on birds in front of the hide do not allow for individual identification the metal ring details are required*). The table below is intended to show all the known recoveries and highlight my efforts over the last two years.

I've drawn up a table (below) from all known published data I've collated that shows when recovery reads (not individual birds) have been made. I can confidently assume that almost all of the 71 records of birds during the periods between the 1960's through to the 2000's generally account from Cannon netting recoveries with the exception of eight known birds found as corpses onsite.

During correspondence with Roger Swinfen over January 2015 in which we discussed Oystercatchers ringed on the Exe he did inform me that on 13 November 1992 of the 137 birds caught during Cannon netting, 36 were retraps. My database only has information on three and so I am missing addition information on 33. This means at this moment in time I am now unfortunately aware my data is incomplete and raises the obvious question that I perhaps am missing many more from other Cannon netting visits! I hope over 2015 to address this issue and gain access to the relevant missing retraps.

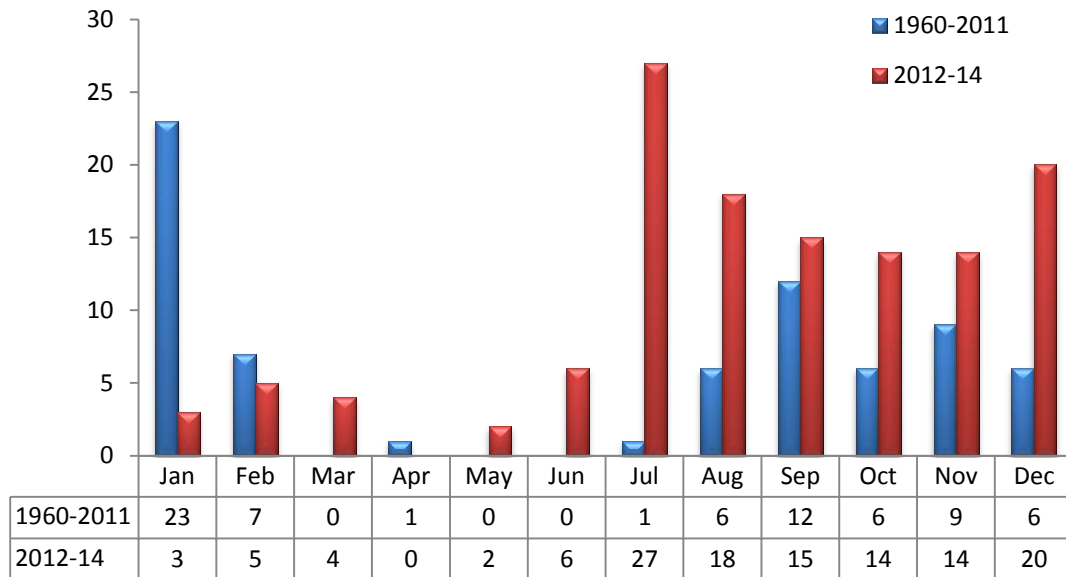
Recent recoveries, from late 2012 to date are reads made by myself, in which I've painstakingly attempted to try to read metal rings on birds as they congregate in front of the hide. In just over two years I've managed to make 128 successful reads (*not individuals*).



Taking this a step further I thought it might be a nice idea to illustrate via a graph all the Oystercatcher reads onsite but broken down as mine and historic reads on a monthly basis. You'll note that the blue columns relates to historic readings (based on records I currently hold) and show a bias towards the autumn and winter, when cannon-netting was

undertaken and I'm sure accounts for a vast majority of these reads. Mine in red are more liberally widespread but clearly shows a more bias attempt at gaining reads in just a few short years during the summer and early autumn, yet would expect winter reads to rise significantly in the forthcoming years to come.

Oystercatcher reads



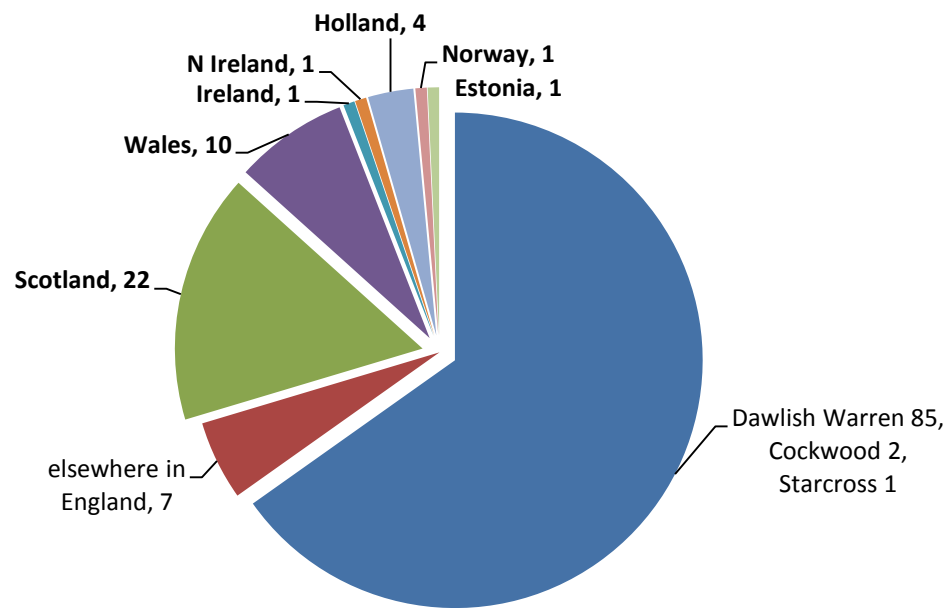
In just two years, from December 2012 to year end 2014 I have read rings on 68 individuals, actually making 128 positive reads. The site from my database shows we've now noted 135 individual birds with positive ring reads, the first on the 17 Oct 1962.

Of the 68 individuals I have positively read 50 were originally ringed at Dawlish Warren, with an additional two from nearby Cockwood. With no actual ringing onsite since 2004, every read of a Dawlish bird constitutes a bird of at least a decade old, with my oldest read ringed back in September 1989 and still present in July 2014. A gap of almost twenty five years and this constitutes the oldest recovery onsite for any species, although well shy of the national oldest ever Oystercatcher, recorded at over 40 years old. To show this 25 year old bird isn't unique I can also lay claim to a further four individuals onsite that also

have a similar longevity, all with a 24 year gap between ringing and finding.

Non Dawlish-ringed birds certainly interest me and perhaps one of the most interesting is of a bird actually found in December 2013. It was only metal ringed but on the right tibia (above the knee) as opposed to the general application to the tarsus (below the knee) really catching my attention, especially as it was a first winter bird. The read was carefully and confidently acquired and was also my first ever foreign ringed Oystercatcher, as I could see it was Dutch. Details arrived in early 2014, giving me its brief history, ringed in Noorderhaven, some 619kms away on a roof! The very same bird with its distinctive tibia ring is also the most recorded Oystercatcher onsite, with 13 overall reads having not only overwintered 2012-13 but also stayed over the summer being seen in June and July and still present in December 2014.

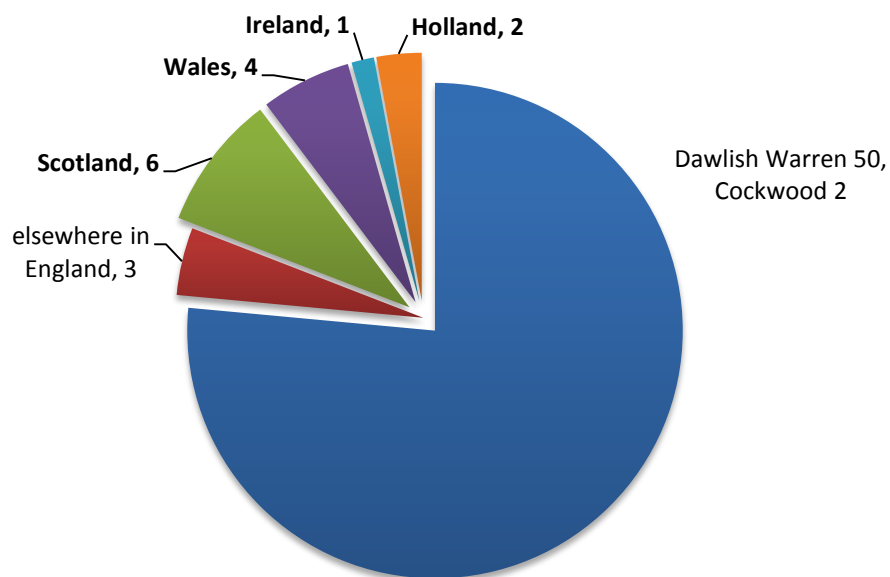
All Dawlish Warren Oystercatchers recoveries 1962/2014- where they were ringed



Both the overall Oystercatcher pie chart (above) and my own recovery pie chart (below) are graphically very similar. The overall pie chart obviously influenced by my reads, as I've personally accounted for about 64% of all known

Oystercatcher recoveries. But this does show that my efforts over the last two years do follow a similar pattern to recoveries made from the 1960's onwards.

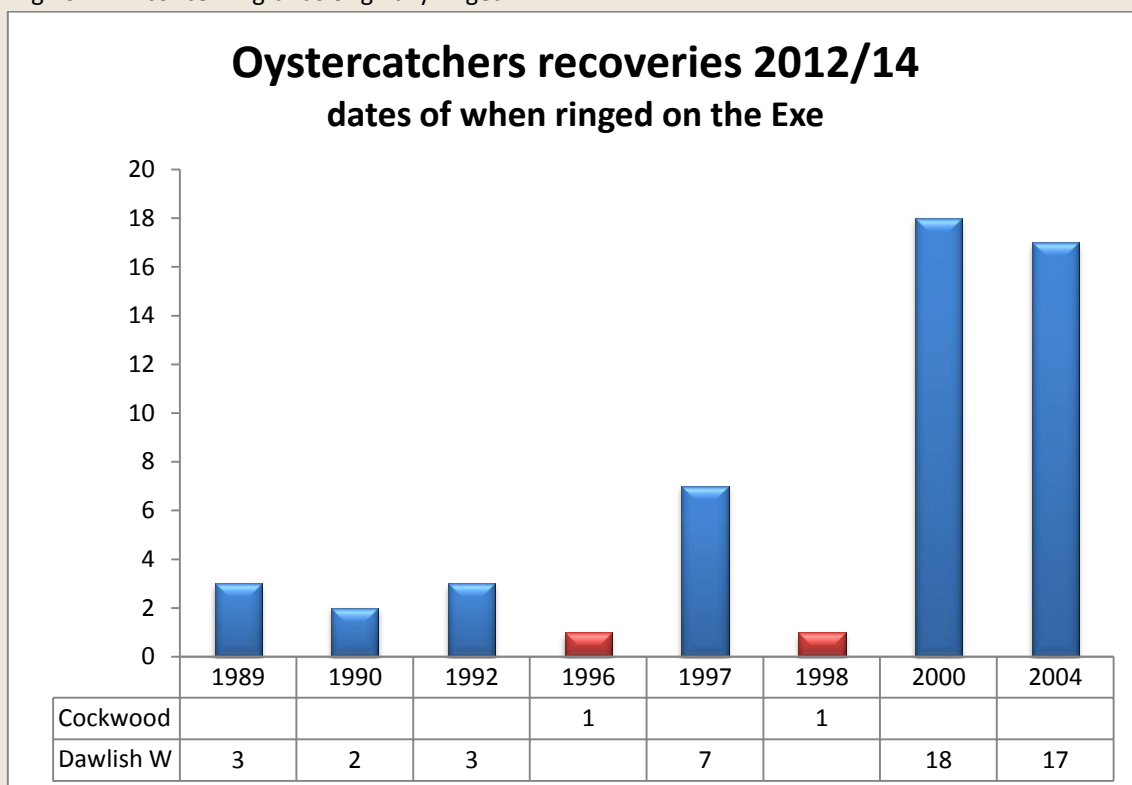
My Dawlish Warren Oystercatchers recoveries 2012/14- where they were ringed



Both pie charts may surprise readers, as it clearly shows a substantial percentage of the recoveries of Oystercatchers at Dawlish Warren are in fact birds that were previously ringed onsite. Is this interesting? Of course it is. No ringing has taken place onsite since 2004 and clearly proves that particular individuals do have strong site fidelity, returning each autumn to winter on the Exe.

Delving a little deeper into locally ringed Oystercatchers on the Exe I have drawn up the table below. This only relates to recoveries made during 2012-14 concerning birds originally ringed

on the Exe. Its intention to inform how many remain present from the dates of rings being applied. It would obviously be very interesting to correlate this in comparison to how many birds were actually ringed per annum, but at present I still do not have access to this information. It must also be stressed that although I have positively read 52 individual birds, relating to locally ringed Oystercatchers recorded between 2012/ 14, this is not exhaustive as I am sure there are plenty more birds present that I still haven't been able to read yet.



Information like this may not appeal to all, but does have obvious merits. These reads don't give us the species overall relative abundance, counts via WeBs or submitted personal counts remain the barometer for assessing short or long term evaluations on this species abundance. But ringed recoveries such as these do reaffirm the strong wintering site fidelity of birds ringed onsite and also help assist in evaluating Oystercatcher longevity.

T24 as depicted below was probably present in July, a bird seen distantly with a bright yellow coded darvic ring was noted, although wasn't able to be read with utter confidence as it actively fed on Bull Hill sandbar in the estuary. On 17th October I finally saw it again, sat among the roosting flock in front of the hide, finally managing a positive

read. It was metal ringed in Ballater Sewerage works, Aberdeenshire in April 2012, with the darvic fitted in March 2014 in the same area.

I've sat in the hide dozens of times till the years end, on many of these occasions carefully scrutinizing the Oystercatchers, so it's of no surprise this bird has been recorded a further four times, it's obviously over-wintering. But what does surprise me and does show is that you do have to pay careful attention in finding such birds, it's easy to go unnoticed when in amongst a roosting flock of over a thousand birds. As per comments made earlier on locally ringed Oystercatcher and their habits on wintering site fidelity, it will be interesting to see if this bird will return over the next few years?



Oystercatcher (Scottish ringed), 1st December 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins.



Oystercatcher (Dutch ringed), 19th July 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

The bird pictured above was also from a scheme that was new as a Warren recovery. It clearly shows coloured rings on both legs with a bold single letter on each ring, with an additional single black band on its left tibia. This was from a Dutch scheme at Sans Van Gent and it was ringed back in 2010. Our sighting was the first recorded report of it away from Holland. It was only recorded once onsite, this single observation along with the unusual date (July) suggests it was a migrant bird, a chance find-encounter of perhaps a failed breeder?

This report goes to great lengths to highlight wintering site fidelity, and although many birds do

summer there is only one recent breeding record on site and only a few on the Exe. Dawlish Warren ringed individuals have been recorded breeding on the Exe but many/most breed much further away in places such as Norway, the Faeroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland. This is best illustrated by two summering birds both rung at Dawlish Warren on 31 May 1981. One FV61422 was two years old when ringed and in 2008-10 at least bred at Dart's Farm, Topsham at the top end of the Exe. The other is perhaps one of the best Warren ringing recoveries; FV61419 was at least three years old when ringed and the ring only was found on 25 August 2010 in an Eagle Owl nest in Hordaland, Norway over 1230km from the Warren.

Ringed Plover

With just six recoveries at Dawlish Warren pre 2014, two of which were in 2013 and just an additional three more in the rest of Devon, the county total stands at just a meagre nine recoveries for this species.

So to find two at Dawlish Warren in 2014 was unexpected and rewarding. The key month onsite is undoubtedly August, where numbers swell significantly, in recent years numbers over this month have reached 500, although numbers were well down in 2014, but still reached 280 on 18th August.

But neither ringed bird was actually seen in August, these were both found later in the autumn. The first was found on 21st September, when an obliging individual allowed close enough views to actually read the metal ring! It took time to get a full read and I was excited to find it wasn't a British ring but assumed to be Danish. Observations of the same bird were also noted on 2nd, 5th and 16th October, this clearly showing that this individual bird had remained present for at least 26 days. An interesting observation as during autumn passage with fluctuating day by day counts I'd always assumed a particular bird would only stay a day or two before continuing its journey onwards, as noted with our previous colour-ringed small waders (numerous Sanderlings

and two Ringed Plovers seen in August 2013). It was ringed at Gedser, Odde, Sydfalster, Denmark as a pullus on 23 July 2013, some 1126kms away, and unsurprisingly based on the fact it was only metal ringed ours was the first reported recovery of it. Observations during November of a metal ringed bird were noted on several occasions, although remained too distant to read, yet a read on 14th December did prove that this bird remains present, therefore may overwinter.

The second bird (shown below) was found on 4th October, but this one was harbouring colour rings on its legs. Found whilst in the hide I noted a bright red ring on its left tibia and immediately focused all my efforts over the next hour watching it, noting a yellow flag on its right tibia which clearly had a code on it. Losing it on more than one occasion as it along with many of the other small waders took flight I had to patiently scan the entire Bight trying to relocate it amongst the c.50 other Ringed Plovers and c.280 Dunlin as the incoming tide slowly brought the waders closer towards me. Matters weren't helped by a strong westerly wind, causing scope shake and the bird's tendency to face away from me into the wind, but with a strong desire to clinch its read on the coded flag I stuck it out and finally managed to get a positive read (NLE) and a bonus of a picture or two as well.



Ringed Plover, 4th October 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

News was forthcoming just hours later, as by that evening I'd a reply to my email, stating it was as I'd assumed a Norwegian bird, ringed just 40 days

prior at Makkevika in west Norway, some 1440kms away. It wasn't present the following evening and had obviously moved on.

Shelduck

Having only started looking at Shelducks, or should I state ringed Shelducks in the last two years I am hoping to learn more about this species wintering behaviour. Counts are frequently made, this has always been a strong ethos of the Recording Group, although birds can hide themselves away in the saltmarsh, out of sight ensuring counts can fluctuate day by day, even hour by hour. Recent numbers certainly suggest we have a minimum of fifty-plus overwintering, yet their habit of spending periods on the water, thus legs hidden does mean ringed birds do go unnoticed.

Pre 2014 we've seven ringed birds recorded onsite (with twenty-one reads) all made in 2013. Four were Axe Estuary darvic ringed birds and an additional three metal ring reads.

2014 was an eventful year, in both the context of reads and individuals, with twenty six reads accounting for ten different individuals. Six were darvic-ringed birds, all from the Axe Estuary Ringing Group (four new ones and two December sightings of birds previously noted in 2013). These are by far the easiest birds to gain a positive read. Of the four Axe birds recorded in 2013, just two were again seen over the second winter period at Dawlish Warren, numerous sightings of both do suggest they are perhaps wintering onsite. Perhaps unsurprisingly the two birds seen over the early spring of 2014 from the Axe, both new discoveries were just single day observations and imply they are passage birds.



Shelduck (Axe Estuary ringed), 29th December 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins.

The remaining four were metal ringed birds, three were ringed at Steart, Somerset, the other locally from the Clyst Estuary. The Clyst bird was ringed way back in 1997, by far and away our oldest Shelduck recovery of the fourteen recorded onsite. A late edit was felt noteworthy, as interesting news of this bird was forthcoming in early 2015 from Keith Grant, after he'd received news of my read via the BTO. He informed me this bird was one of a clutch of six orphaned Shelducks passed to him and he'd used a reliable surrogate Muscovy Duck to help raise them. Later all six were then released onto the Clyst Estuary.

Although we've only two winter's worth of recovery data I suspect certain individuals do have full or partial wintering fidelity onsite. The Clyst ringed bird supports this theory to a degree, not that we have numerous reads but just by the fact it's presence on the Exe thirteen years after the ring was administered. Stronger supporting evidence comes from another metal ringed bird that I have now recorded onsite thirteen times over the last three winters. My reference to partial

fidelity comes from the curious nature of this particular bird. All observations are based on the bird's habit of feeding right in front the hide, making a read straightforward. Yet bar the first observational read on 13th January 2013, all other observations are during the month of December (2013 & 2014). I am at a loss to explain why it only feeds in front the hide during these times and curious to know if it then feeds elsewhere onsite unobserved, which is very plausible or moves to another feeding area on the Exe or indeed only stops off here for a length of time before moving on? This December behaviour was also observed with another two metal ringed birds (both new reads onsite) that were seen many times in the Bight over numerous high tides, although neither bird was noted prior during November or subsequently in January.

Future observations over the forthcoming years may shed more light on this and also come will either support or deny the fidelity theory once we have a greater amount of reference on proven ring reads.

Cormorant

With just a few historic records, the last in 2007, I eagerly awaited my first recovery of this species. I've had several unsuccessful attempts in the past at trying to read metal rings, having never managed a full read and so was delighted on the 15th August when I clapped eyes on an immature

bearing an orange darvic ring. The bird remained present until the 29th and it was originally ringed at Mullion Island, West Cornwall as a pullus on the 17th May 2014. I believe this is a new project started this year, mine being only the second recovery from this scheme.



Cormorant, 17th August 2014, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins

Brent Goose

2014 was in essence the same as 2013, by that I mean the very same two individuals seen over both years.

This may not at first glance seem of interest but once you consider each bird has probably flown over 4600kms to its breeding grounds in Siberia, then flown back to winter back on the Exe, it shows both have wintering site fidelity to the River Exe for a species that has a mammoth migratory route.

The first bird was the Powderham darvic-ringed bird from February 1996. This bird is now at least 18 years old and was recorded over both wintering periods, although only on three occasions.

The other is a metal ringed bird from the Delta River Pyasina, Middle Beacon Island, Krasnoyarsk,

Taymyr, Siberia ringed back on 30 July 2008. This bird was noted three times in March, picked up as it grazed on the Golf course. I was curious to see if it would return again over the second winter period of 2014 and for most of the early winter period no metal ringed bird was found.

I started to feel it may have not made it back, perhaps having perished. But a bird bearing a metal ring was discovered several times in the Bight over December, although gaining a read did prove unsuccessful. It wasn't until late January 2015 that a read was finally made and indeed confirmed the bird was back again. Here is a map to visually impress upon readers the huge distances these species travel each year. Pin A showing the area in which our bird was originally ringed.



Canada Goose

Why would I be interested in Canada Geese is a question many might raise? And perhaps its true I don't give this species much time expect when making counts.

But on the 25th August I found one amongst a flock on the Golf Course with a metal ring. The Warren doesn't have any recovery history for this species,

plus it would be a new species as a recovery for me too. And so from both aspects there was some merit in gaining a positive read. Looking on the BTO website it informed me that Devon has to date 325 recoveries, all from the UK with a lions-share from the Avon (237). And so it came as no great surprise to find out that the bird I saw was ringed at Chew Valley back on 30th June 2009.

This pursuit of mine is undoubtedly rewarding for me, but along the way there do come frustrations. Birds seen too far away to attain a read do obviously happen. Partial reads, especially of metal BTO ringed Oystercatchers are exceedingly numerous, this is to be expected and an obvious pitfall in what I do.

I can also recall three other instances this year when I've found a metal ringed bird, these being a Grey Plover, a Lithuanian Black-headed Gull and a Swedish Dunlin and on each occasion the ring has

been readable but frustratingly been unable to secure a full read.

I'd also wished to add to the single Roseate Tern read I'd made in 2013. But this autumn their presence onsite was poor despite a fantastic breeding season. I did note three birds on the 27th August congregated in front the hide within in a mixed tern gathering containing all six species. Two of the birds (both immatures) were double metal ringed but frustratingly they remained too far away to even attempt a read.

It's also worth highlighting that the two best onsite recoveries this year weren't seen by me, or even observed onsite! Matt Knott found a Yellow-legged Gull with a green ring on Warren Point on 20th July. He observed it from Exmouth, but unfortunately couldn't secure the read. This would have been a significant recovery for this species, as there has never been one recorded in Devon. Green rings are used by the Spanish ringers, with two schemes - Galicia and Catalonia.

Matt also had a flyover Great White Egret on 6th July, this also passed 'Warren airspace'. It was only later after he reviewed some of his pictures he became aware it was colour ringed. It appears this bird was ringed on 10th May 2013 at Lac De-Grande-Lieu in Loire Atlantique, France. This constitutes only the second recovery for Devon.

On drawing to a close, I finish on a sour note. News came to light during 2014 of Teignbridge District Council's plans to relocate the hide's present position, where it has remained in situ for about 35 years. Their intention is to situate it over 100 yards further away from the roost onto the Dune ridge, plus prevent access into the Bight. This would have serious ramifications if current plans develop into a more permanent arrangement. This proposal doesn't sit well with local or visiting birders and will also impact on visiting photographers, the many visitors just keen

to experience nature at such close quarters and educational school groups who will get a vastly inferior view than at present.

I for one was so inspired way back in 1984 as a young 14 year old boy that it ultimately led me to take the path I have followed, after witnessing my first high tide gathering.

It will also seriously impact my ability to continue ring reading on a great deal of species that do choose to currently use the roost site in front of the hide. Roseate, Sandwich and Common Terns, waders, small gulls and perhaps most importantly of all, Oystercatcher data will then be impossible to attain.

With almost 600 ring reads in just two years I feel I have amassed a significant and invaluable collection of worthwhile data. It's helped confirm in numerous examples onsite fidelity, convey and document avian longevity and also the reads help inform us just how well travelled our birds are and how long they remain before moving on. All invaluable data in both a local, national and even international context.

It remains my intention to look for; document and monitor ringed birds, although the thought of these potential changes leaves me with a very heavy heart.

Acknowledgements are numerous, but thanks must go to the BTO, especially Mark Grantham for their help, the ringers, too, for their time and effort in contacting me back with news and updates. And finally all other members of the Warren Recording Group for their assistance, patience and input.