Dawlish Warren

2017 ring recovery report

Lee Collins

This years report is my fifth consequtive annual account in which I've collated and documented all my onsite field reads encountered during my frequent vists to Dawlish Warren NNR. This is done out of a personal interest, and on behalf of the Dawlish Warren Recording Group, but I do liase and forward my sightings onto the British Trust for Ornithology. Overall I'd look back on 2017 as being a satisfactory yet fairly mediocre year. There were some obvious highlights yet some noteable omissions too.

Previous reports have deliberately followed a blog type style and have grown in volume annually. A critique of my previous reports and their volume has made me rethink my methodology and presentation of this article. In an effort to try and alleviate the volume issue I've adopted a more formal approach, one which I hope doesn't detract from the overall content and purpose of what I wish to convey.

Before documenting my read returns it's first worth touching upon my visitations, as this will bring some degree of context to my results. During 2017 I'd make 168 visits, this down 26% on the 228 in 2016 and my reasons for this discussed in due course. I also continue to meticulously record my start/ finish times, it would equate to over 816 hours onsite. This is a decent figure but once again a similar percentage drop on the previous year.

But with the impediment issues aside a respectable total of **480** positive field reads were acquired, a drop of just 12% on the 537 from 2016. From this figure **175** individuals were identified (205 in 2016) this my lowest figure in the last four years and involved 19 different species. Sixty eight or 39% would represent new onsite recoveries, the remaining 107 therefore showing some degree of multi-year site fidelity.

Looking back its been a year that's encountered several unforeseen situations which restricted my ability to visit the site. These either of a personal nature but also due to the enforced sea defence works undertaken during the late summer, which prevented a degree of tidal access.

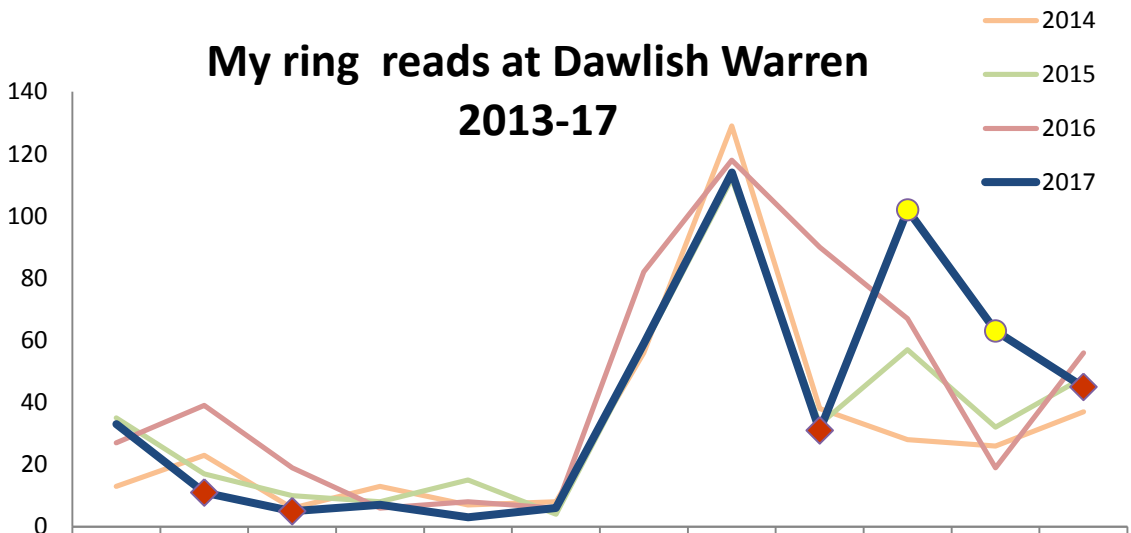
My involvement in assisting the Devon Birds collating their 2016 data material limited my visitations during February and March and would ensure a slow start to proceedings during the first quarter of the year.

Geotube instalation at the neck, Dawlish Warren, 23rd July 2017, Lee Collins

A far greater constraint was unavoidable from early July through to early September. A major sea defence and beach restoration project would alter the landscape, especially around Warren Neck. The heavy machinery needed to undertake this task would result in weeks when no access beyond groyne 10 was officially enforced. However, there were times when the work temporarily ceased, which enabled me to access the hide.

Recharge of beach, Dawlish Warren, 1st July 2017, Lee Collins

On a more personal level a three week birding holiday to Australia and New Caledonia during September and also guiding on a birding tour to Ethiopia during late November through to mid-December meant I'd have limited onsite presence during the months in question.

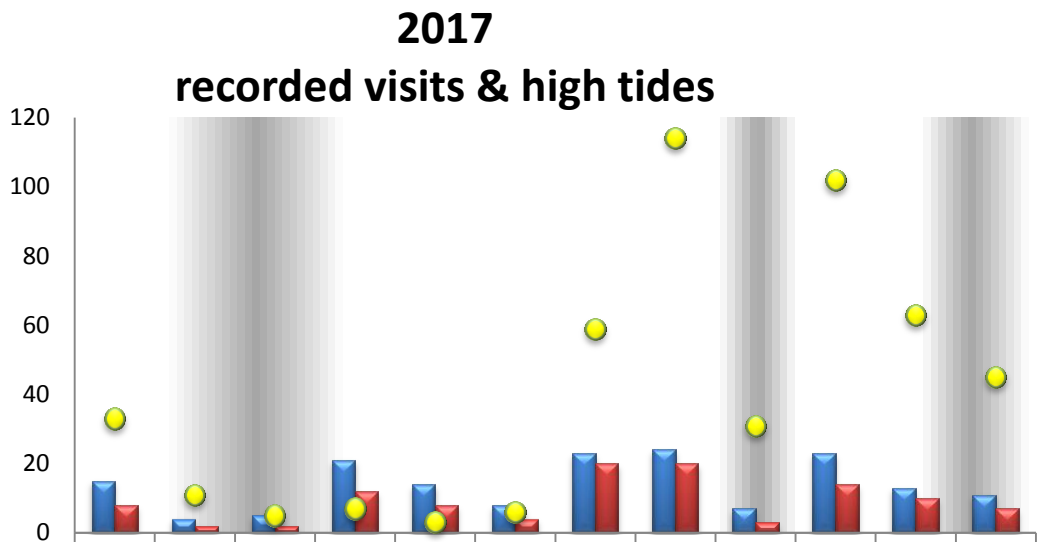


	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2014	13	23	6	13	7	8	56	129	38	28	26	37
2015	35	17	10	8	15	4	58	112	33	57	32	48
2016	27	39	19	6	8	6	82	118	90	67	19	56
2017	33	11	5	7	3	6	59	114	31	102	63	45

The chart above documents my reads from 2017, plotting them along with the proceeding three years. The overall correlation continues to follow a similar pattern, showing great comparability during the first eight months of each year. A greater degree of margin is encountered throughout the last four months of the year although this can be accounted by foreign vacations during this period.

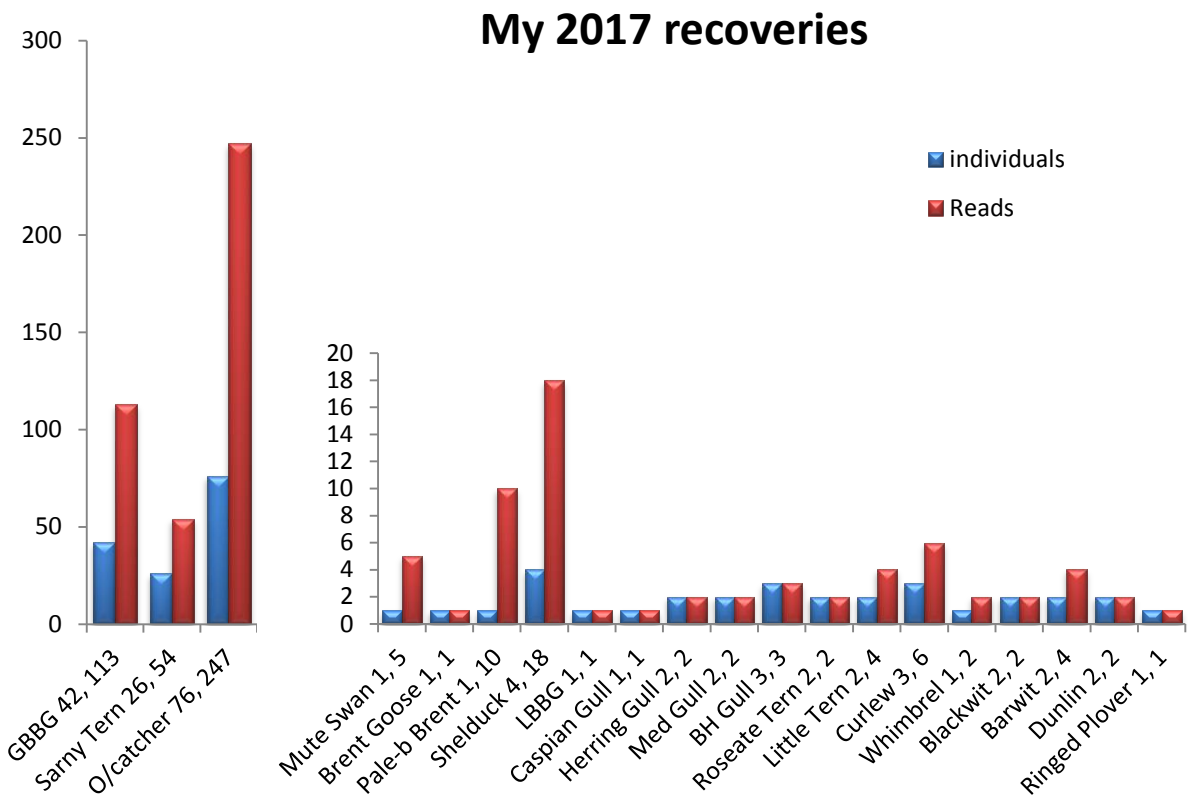
I have highlighted some of the months during 2017 with a red diamond, these to emphasize restricted coverage during the respected months in question. Likewise I've also highlighted two months with a yellow circle, these to accentuate very productive months.

As a direct result of my ring recovery work over the last few years I now monitor my high tide coverage. I catagorise a 3.7metre tide or higher as the most beneficially advantageous. Of course I'm also present over lower high tides but find these tides reduce ring reading opportunities. When focusing on Oystercatcher recoveries such tides don't bring them close enough to attempt to read the metal BTO rings. The table below shows a breakdown of the year, it includes 3.7 metre or higher high tide visitations to gauge a degree of success rate . It's worth stressing that the chart displays a fairly accurate representation in regards recoveries to tidal visitations although some smaller tides did generate some reads, invariably Great Black-backed Gulls (coded colour rings).



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
visits	15	4	5	21	14	8	23	24	7	23	13	11
3.7+ High tides	8	2	2	12	8	4	20	20	3	14	10	7
reads	33	11	5	7	3	6	59	114	31	102	63	45

So now I'd like to focus more on my actual reads over the year. As per previous reports I find the best method of doing this is visually by way of a chart. It's a more eye-catching means of displaying my results and the split table below uses two sets of data to include and impress upon how many individuals of each species were encountered (blue) and positive reads acquired (red). The latter set of data is used to convey multiple reads of individuals on differing dates. Monitoring a marked individuals duration of stay has additional scientific merit. Recordings, be it a passage migrant seen on a single date or in several instances staying surprisingly much longer (see Whimbrel, Sandwich and Little Tern) is useful to determine not only behaviourism but also site importance. Another aspect of multi reads draws upon an even greater degree of site fidelity. My Oystercatcher recovery work not only reaffirms this yet adds vital longevity based data.



In this next section, I'd like to focus on my documented recoveries by species and will start by looking at my most recorded and arguably most important work, on Oystercatchers.

Oystercatcher

Oystercatchers account for the vast majority of my recovery work and during 2017 resulted in 52% of all my reads acquired.

My main aim in acquiring these reads is primarily focused on collating longevity based data. Something I'm able to undertake given a relatively abundant number of historical captured individuals ringed onsite, which date back several decades.

Over the second winter period peak counts would confirm we have approximately 1,700 birds onsite and my recovery results which span both winter periods would indicate that at least 4% of birds present are ringed.

Individuals identified during 2017: 76 (147 since 2012)
Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 247, a 1% increase on the 236 from 2016.
These broken down as: 38 coded ring reads (15%), 136 by a wasp X BTO combo (56%) and 73 just BTO ring reads (29%).
My total accumilation of reads during 2012-17= 759
New individuals recorded during 2017: 10 (four Exe ringed birds, including one ringed 1992 and another in 1994). A green darvic ringed bird (T701) ringed in Vardheia, Norway in July 2017. This overwintered over the second winter period and was recorded on eight occasions.

Oystercatcher (T701), Dawlish Warren, 10 November 2017, Lee Collins

Locations and numbers of where ringed.

Most observed: yellow darvic ringed bird T24. It was recorded on 17 dates during 2017 (absent between 5 March and 24 July). This bird was ringed at Balleter, Aberdeenshire, Scotland in April

2012, with an additional darvic ring added during the spring of 2014. Since then its regularly been recorded every winter period over the last four years. Conforming to the species behaviour of wintering site fidelity and now totals 40 onsite sightings.

Oystercatcher (T24), Dawlish Warren, 16 October 2017, Lee Collins

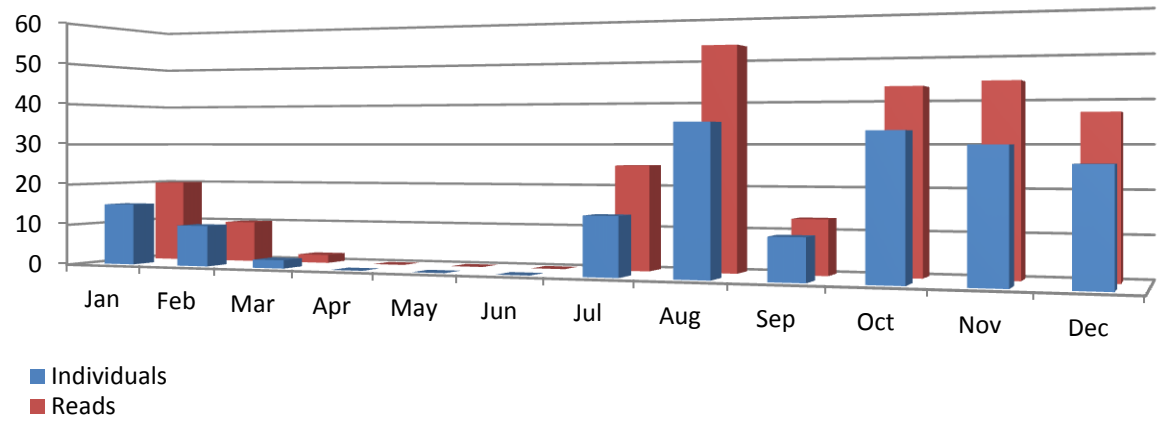
One significant additional acount worthy of inclusion involved its migratory movement. Kevin Rylands noted its presence onsite on the 5th March and interestingly was noted 717kms away at breeding grounds in Aberdeenshire five days later on the 10th.

Oldest: two Exe ringed birds from 1983.

Furthest travelled: Icelandic ringed T701 (1752km), recorded over both winter periods totalling 16 observations during 2017.

Exe ringed birds: 61 individuals or **81**% of the total recorded. The species longevity plays a key role in why I persist in making such reads. As well as the two birds ringed in 1983 a further breakdown shows additional recoveries from: 1989= 5 individuals, 1990= 3, 1992= 2, 1994= 2, 1997= 6, 1998= 1, 2000= 20 and 2004= 20.

Timing of reads: The chart below plots both counts and individuals over the calendar year. The overall pattern of sightings follows a similar trend to previous years, with few reads gained during mid-March through to early July. A lower than expected return during the months of February, March, September, November and December would be inhibited due to a lack of visitations due to oversea's birding commitments or assisting DBWPS with administrative duties.



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Individuals	15	10	2	0	0	0	14	35	10	33	30	26
Reads	20	10	2	0	0	0	25	53	13	43	44	37

Incomplete reads: *15, potentially constituting new individuals.*
A direct consequence of undertaking such a difficult task of trying to read the metal BTO rings is that many times I'm thwarted by only gaining partial reads. Any involving a three to six digit read of unknown individuals are recorded. Due to the species wintering site fidelity my chances of encountering the same individual at a later date are fairly high. Therefore whenever finding a new bird never positively identified before I cross-reference this to my partial reads file to see if this matches any. An excellent example being a postive read made in January 2018, yet matched a four digit partial read from December 2015.
Wasp rings - These are pre-darvic and administered to many of our Exe ringed birds during the 90's through to 2004. I wrote about these in my 2016 report and on how to interpretate them. A high percentage of these rings now have some of the outer surface worn away revealing the black underneath. Each wear pattern is unique and therefore beneficial as an identification aid.

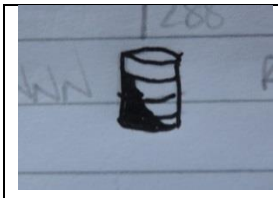
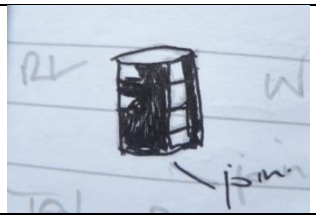
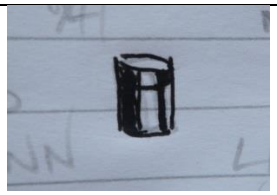
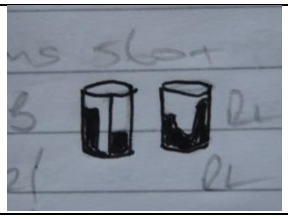
Wasp rings –wear patterns

Green (faded), coded blank, blank, narrow. Distictive wear pattern. Narrow band at bottom of ring not visible due to wear. The wasp wear is now so unique with a black spike that I'm able to identify this individual on this alone. This bird was initially ringed in January 1990.

White, coded narrow, narrow, blank.
A small wear patch is just visible on the left of the image, below the narrow band in the middle of the ring.

White, ring combo (black bands), narrow, wide, narrow. A very heavily worn ring, much of the white now worn away and therefore mostly black

As well as photographing wasp ring wear patterns I also have a notebook with drawings to aid in documenting as many individuals as possible. B= Blank, N= Narrow, W= Wide. The black area's show where the surface face has worn away.

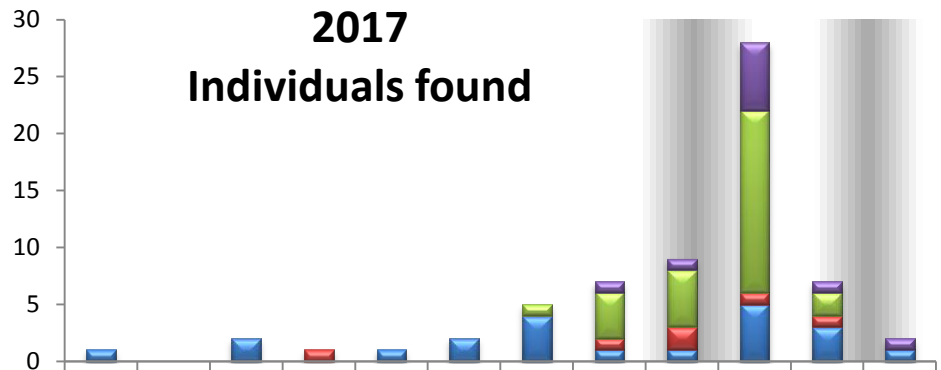
			
NNN Partial wear	**NNN** (different ring) Heavy wear	**NBB** Heavy wear	**BBB** (two angles) Partial wear

Great Black-backed Gull

Individuals identified during 2017: 42 (54 in 2016 and 61 in 2015)
Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 113 (141 in 2016 and 116 in 2015)
Total number of ringed individuals since the first in 2008: me= 229, site= 241

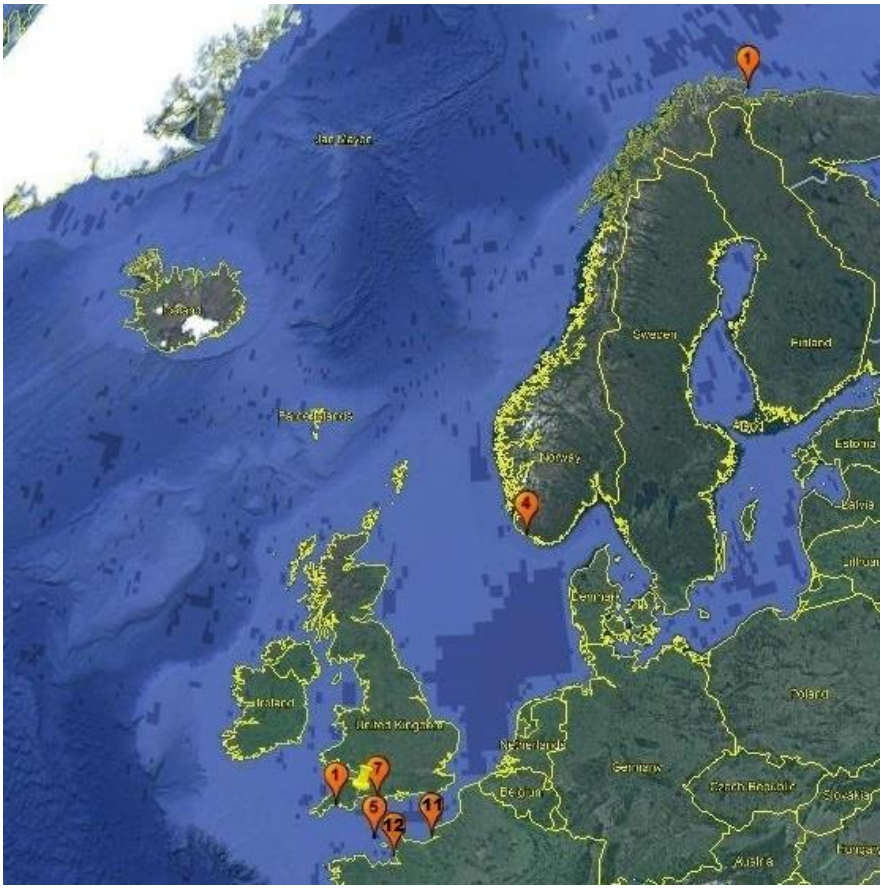
Great Black-backed Gull (two French ringed birds), Dawlish Warren, 16 October 2017, Lee Collins

Annual breakdown: My onsite absense particularly throughout the majority of September and parts of November and December does have a bearing on lower than expected figures during the relevant months in question on the next graph.

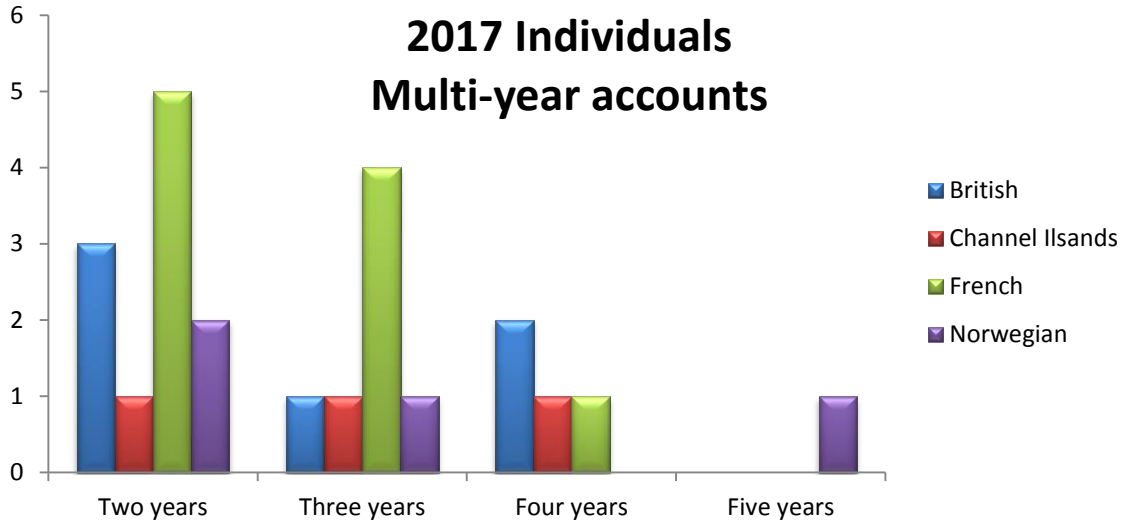


	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Norwegian								1	1	6	1	1
French							1	4	5	16	2	
Channel Islands				1				1	2	1	1	
British	1		2		1	2	4	1	1	5	3	1

Where are they ringed: practically all were from schemes known to me with several previous recoveries: Portland Breakwater, Dorset (7); Looe Island, Cornwall (1); the Channel Islands (5); Chausey Island (12) and Le Harve (11), **France**; Vest-Adger/ Rogaland, **Norway** (4).



Most observed: A Portland bird (P:87B), ringed as a pullus in 2015. Its been almost continually recorded here since October 2015, with sixty-nine sightings to year-end 2017. Throughout 2017 it was seen 27 times, 26 by myself during ten months of this year (this accounting for 23% of all my Great Black-backed Gull reads during 2017). Interestingly it was also encountered five times during the year at the Axe Estuary, 28 kms away by Ian Mclean.
No other individuals follow a similar trait of continual, all year round fidelity. Although a French ringed bird (77R) marked at Le Havre as a pullus in 2014 demonstrates a degree of onsite fideilty yet more seasonal. Fifteen onsite sightings were noted between late July through to late November, which mirrors additional pre-existing autumnal sightings in 2014 (one) and 2016 (nine).
New individuals found: 19 or 45.2%. Five of which were ringed in 2017, these all from Chausey Island, Normandy in France. This included my only ringed juvenile of the year.
Multi-year sightings: 23 or 54.8% (or more accurately 62% if we exclude individuals ringed this year) of the birds recorded over 2017 would therefore display some degree of site fidelity. The best account a Norwegian ringed bird that has now been recorded over the last six winter periods. Eastern clinal variants as discussed in previous annual reports demonstrate a much stronger inclination towards wintering site fidelity.
Additionally, this individual has several Norwegian summering records from 2015 and 2017, proving eastern clinal variants demonstrate genuine long distance migratory behaviour.



When taking the raw data and analysing the results of multi-year observations the outcome can give a somewhat distorted account of what constitutes 'onsite fidelity'. P:87B aside, which over the last few years has become somewhat resident the majority of the remaining twenty-two tell a differing and more balanced account of what our Great Black-backed Gulls actually demonstrate. Practically all our western clinal ringed birds are generally single autumn observations per annum, whilst eastern clinal migrants which also re-appear during mid-autumn are more inclined to remain more localised and invariably encountered several more times, appearing to overwinter locally.
Oldest: a metal ring read of a bird marked in 2003 from Herm, Channel Islands as a pullus. It was also a new bird for 2017, which was observed five times during the autumn (four during late August and once in mid-October). My ability to identify it aided by the fact its left foot was missing.
Furthest travelled: an adult found on 22 October. It was ringed nine years ago at Vardo, North Norway, some 2827kms away (see map). Interestingly the date mirrored that of a previous onsite sighting back in 2013, but with no other winter observations suggests Dawlish Warren merely a stop over to wintering quarters, that currently remain unknown.

As yet unknown recovery: one. This of a Norwegian ringed individual. Its presence over the last two winters has seen it recorded now twelve times onsite, five during 2017. I've been informed it was ringed from a boat yet the Norwegian authorities state they continue to chase exact details from the ringer.
Axe based sightings: Ian Mclean is a like-minded ring reader based on the Axe Estuary, some 28kms away. He had recorded an impressive tally of 73 individuals. Nine of which were also seen at Dawlish Warren.
Additional comments: I'm in regular contact with the project co-ordinator at Portland Breakwater. Terry Coombs would inform me that 2017 would be a very poor breeding year, something also expressed by Bruce Taggart at Looe Island, Cornwall and reflected in my lack of recoveries of juvenile ringed birds, with just one, this ringed in Chausey Island, France.

Sandwich Tern

Sandwich Tern (KLD), Dawlish Warren, 24th July 2017, Lee Collins

As discussed previously the beach recharge and flood defence project undertaken during July and August would frustratingly coincide with the arrival and build-up of Sandwich Terns. From a personal perspective this restricted access over numerous high tides would obviously hinder my ability to undertake ring reads. Despite this I'd reflect on 2017 as being a good year. Down on 2016, although achieving a good haul and left pondering just how many more could I have found if not for the restrictions?

It was also noticeable that their feeding behaviour was affected. Historically they are accustomed to feeding close inshore around the estuary mouth, which was virtually non-existent during 2017. The removal of hundreds of tonnes of sand from the area where they normally feed no doubt the reason

behind this. A direct impact was difficult to gauge as they would remain numerous but would focus their feeding to the confines of the mid-estuary between Cocklesands and Bull Hill.

Our largest counts this year were not noted during the high tide roost but during the incoming and outgoing tides as they gathered on Bull Hill sandbar. This is an area far beyond my ability to acquire any reads. Two dates in mid-August saw counts of 185, down on previous years.

Over the last few years they have developed a preference for roosting on Finger Point, rather than in front of the hide. During 2017 it was obvious that high tide gatherings were disappointingly low. Counts of between just 40 to 70 would have me scratching my head, as these figures wouldn't reflect counts made from Bull Hill just an hour or so previously. I can only surmise a great majority chose to gather on the tip of Warren Point, away from prying eyes yet beneficial due to the lack of human disturbance.

Individuals identified during 2017: 26 (*cf. 32 in 2016* and from 2012-2017= 101)
Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 54 (cf. 78 in 2016)
Timings: two in June (my first ever!), 15 reads in July, 35 in August, 2 in September (last on 3rd). Three additional onsite observations were made after this (I was away in Australia). The last on the 23rd by Alan Keatley constituted our latest ever recovery by eight days!
Details of where ringed:

England: five. Four were colour coded ringed from Coquet/Farne Islands, all new onsite observations. Plus a metal ringed bird from Pylewell Lake, Hampshire, this also recorded in 2015.
Scotland: surprisingly just one, it colour coded ringed and unsurprisingly from the Ythan Estuary.
Wales: four, all colour coded ringed and from the same scheme at the Dyfi Estuary.

Ireland: eight, a great return and remarkably all from the same scheme at Lady's Island Lake, Co. Wexford. Equally fascinating to note was that all seven darvic birds were ringed as pullus during 2015. None of these were recorded back at Wexford during 2017 and all my observations constituted first time recoveries, although one was later refound three weeks after my observation north at Colwyn Bay, Wales. The non-darvic ringed bird was also noteworthy, it was also recorded onsite in 2016 by myself. This bird ringed as a pullus in 1993.
Holland: eight, from two different colonies/ schemes. Seven were darvic ringed, including one now recorded onsite over three different years, whilst another (yellow T87) somewhat defies the normally low observation accounts witnessed by many. Ringed as a pullus at Texel in 2015, it was recorded at Dawlish Warren eleven times between 21 July and 14 August 2015, refound at Salcombe, south Devon on 3 September 2015. It then went unobserved until resurfacing in Nambia in November 2016. It was next encountered rather surprisingly back at Dawlish Warren in late June 2017, reappearing over 600kms away back at Texel, Holland just seven days later, assumingly to breed. Post-breeding dispersal saw it undergo a similar migratory journey as 2015, as once again it reappeared back at Dawlish Warren in late August, although only noted on a single date.

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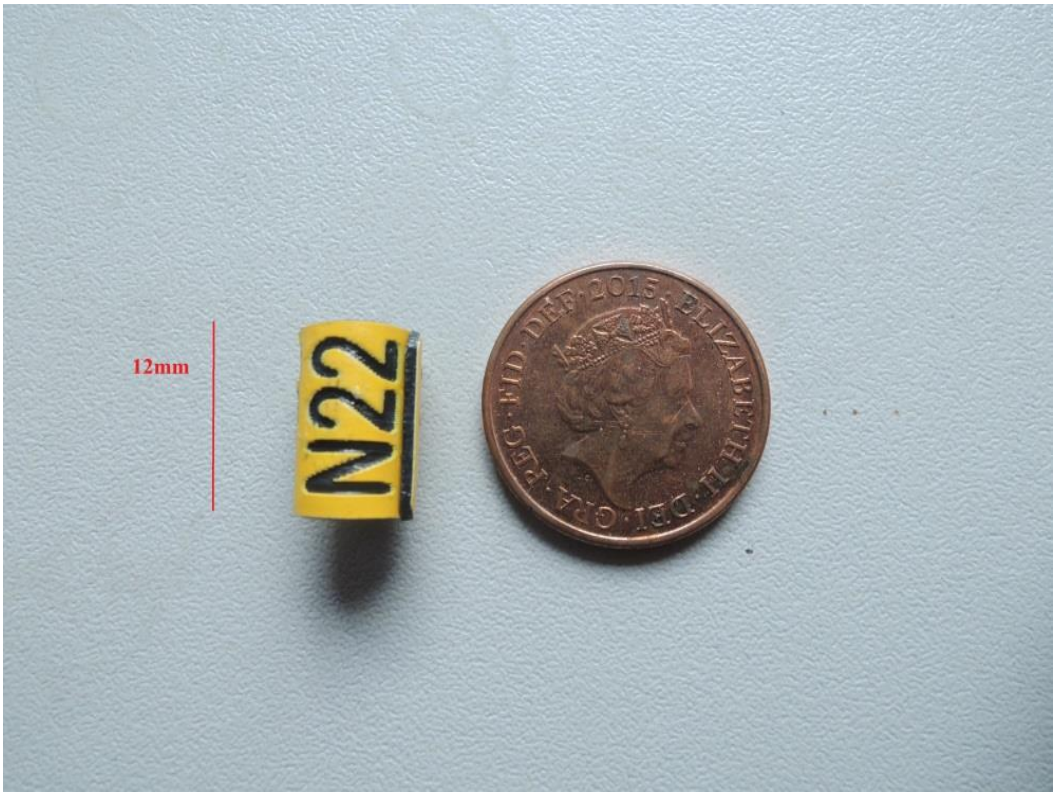
Sandwich Tern (T87), Dawlish Warren, 25th August 2017, Lee Collins

A metal ringed bird was equally fascinating. It was ringed as a pullus in 2008 and its presence has now been noted over three different years at Dawlish Warren (2014, 2015 & 2017), an amazing feat based on the numbers we record and difficulty in acquiring these metal reads.
Rings, Darvic/ metal rings: 23 individuals were darvic ringed whilst the remaining three were positively identified by reading the metal ring.



A Sandwich Tern colour coded ring, next to a one penny coin.

Juveniles: five, all being colour coded ringed and much in keeping with previous years accounts all originated from Holland.

Multi-year onsite observations: Nine individuals (34.6 % of 26 noted, or 45% if we exclude juveniles ringed this year). This is a remarkable percentage and clearly implies Sandwich Terns do unequivocally show some degree of post-breeding dispersal site fidelity. This fact is not unique to 2017 as previous years show similar results.

Our best account was red KAH. It was ringed in 2013 in Wales and been recorded onsite over four different years (2013, 2015, 2016 and 2017). Three other individuals seen during 2017 displayed a similar behaviour pattern with observations over three differing years, whilst five others having been noted over two years.

Longevity: My oldest find during 2017 was ringed as a pullus in 1993 in Wexford, Ireland (metal ring read). At 23 years old it's my oldest ever Sandwich Tern recovery. It has four historic recoveries (plus another from myself in 2016), unusual for a metal ringed bird. All emanate from Brownsea Island, Dorset and interestingly the dates noted during either May or June of 1996, 2006, 2007 and 2008 imply it probably breeds there or certainly has done so in the past.

The two other metal ring reads were from 2006 and 2008. My oldest darvic ringed individual was ringed in 2012.

South African recovery: One bird, red KAL seen in 2017 (and also 2013 and 2016) was recorded at the Western Cape in South Africa in November 2017.

Sandwich Tern (Red KAL), Dawlish Warren, 4 August 2017, Lee Collins

Mute Swan

Individuals identified during 2017: 1

Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 5

Our first recovery since 2014. It was found on the Main Pond on 15 October and would linger until last recorded on 12 November.

Details revealed it was taken into care at West Hatch, Somerset last year from a site in South Wales and released at Exminster Marshes in November 2016.

Brent Goose

Individuals identified during 2017: 2

Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 11

Recovery history:

Dark-bellied- just one was noted, this the 2008 Russian metal ringed individual from Krasnoyarsk that has been recorded annually since the first winter period of 2013. Noted just once in 2017, in early March. Unfortunately I didn't see it during the second winter period, although it may well have been present as it can be tricky to locate.

Pale-bellied- (see title picture) it was found on the 19 October, although may have actually been present since the 5th but been over-looked. I base this conclusion on numbers present during this intervening period. Despite a margin of fluctuation in observational counts, it seemed to be within a party of 26 individuals, that included 12 juveniles. This group lingered several weeks, suggesting they'd overwinter. I'd record its presence a further nine times, last seen on the 20th November. Due

to birding commitments in East Africa from the 21st I'd not record further sightings although it may have lingered until either the 25th or 28th November based again on counts by others. Its next resighting was made on 25 December, having channel hopped over to France at Havre de Regneville within a gathering of some 500 individuals and also noted there into 2018.

It was ringed in Alftantes, Iceland on 11 May 2017 as a juvenile and lingered, being last seen on the 22nd. It's disappearance suggests it continued onwards to breeding grounds probably in the Canadian Arctic. It resurfaced back in Iceland four months later at Myrar, this just a month prior to being recorded at the Warren.

Shelduck

Individuals identified during 2017: 4
Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 18
Timings: January, early February, November and December
Site Fidelity: two yellow darvic ringed birds, SL and NJ were recorded over both winter periods. Both were ringed on the nearby Axe Estuary and each has now been recorded onsite during the last five years.

The other two were metal ringed and both new onsite observations. The first, recorded on five dates between 2 January and 3 February was ringed at Newton Farm, near Cardiff in February 2016. The second, noted over the second winter period was also ringed on the Axe Estuary.

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Individuals identified during 2017: 1
Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 1

Ringed as a pullus at Flat Holm Island, Bristol Channel in July 2014, Blue F:121 had just one prior recovery, from July 2016 in **Portugal**.

This is just my 16th recovery over the last six years. Autumn (August/ September) sightings do account for well over half of these although this was my first ever July recovery.

A second individual was seen in October, a juvenile. I'm convinced I secured a positive read yet the code would not match any known ringing scheme so remains unidentified.

Caspian Gull

Individuals identified during 2017: 1
Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 1

This was without a doubt my best recovery of the year, although for reasons I'll explain in due course wouldn't officially be added to my list until January 2018. It would be my fourth Caspian Gull find onsite, although my first ringed one.

It was found on the 16 October over the high tide roost on Finger Point, and was nestled amongst the huge gathering of 330-plus Great Black-backed Gulls. My mindset was very much drawn upon finding marked colour-ringed individuals, scanning the gathering back and forth, constantly focused

on the legs of each individual. Fourteen were found, my best every single tide accumulation of Gull recoveries. I'd come away happy with my haul, 100% confident on each read.

Arriving home I'd update the database and was curious to require the information on this one particular read, a scheme unfamiliar too me (yellow X815). It appeared that no actual Great Black-backed Gull ringing scheme correlated to my read. I began to doubt the read but was adamant it was correct. Inquisitively, I'd broaden my search and a scheme for Caspian Gulls in Germany seemed to be the only fit. A dilemma ensued. I'd not really focused any great attention to the bird at the time, just noting the ring number and ageing it as a first winter, assuming it to be a Great Black-backed Gull before carrying on with reads. The number I'd read and its age would fit perfectly within an individual from the German ringing programme, but I just felt having not actually identified the bird at the time or taken a photo I couldn't claim it. It was an embarrassing gaffe on my part but something I'd need to learn from.

This situation would all change three months later. On the 17 January 2018 I'd find a different colour marked bird from the same scheme. Again the read was made, but most importantly the bird was seen well, positively identified as a Caspain Gull and photographs acquired. Having a second recovery in such a short period of time had me re-evaluate my October read. In light of this the intervening doubts and uncertainty about claiming it now banished.

However as the bird came from a mixed colony, without plumage details Devon Birds did not feel able to confidently accept the record just on the basis of the ring.

Herring Gull

Individuals identified during 2017: 2

Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 2

Details: both found in April. The first an orange darvic ringed second summer, ringed at Burnham-on-sea as a pullus in 2015. Additional sightings of this from Leicestershire in July 2016 and Somerset in September 2016.

The second was also orange darvic ringed, but administered at Saint-Breven-les-Pins in Brittany, France . This was a third summer, ringed in June 2014 as a pullus. It would have four additional re-sightings, all from France. Geographically each site was in relative close proximity, its southern-most sighting at Bree-les-Bains near La Rochelle.

Both these sub-adult birds are clearly not sedentary, displaying a willingness to disperse and continue to roam quite markedly

Herring Gull, Dawlish Warren, 2 April 2017, Lee Collins

Black-headed Gull

Individuals identified during 2017: 3 (an additional bird seen by I Lakin, late July was colour-ringed in Belgium)

Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 3

Timings: late July through to late August

Details of where ringed: all were colour-ringed, with two from Poland whilst the third was British, ringed at Lea Farm gravel pit, Wokingham

Site Fidelity: all three individuals I noted during 2017 had been recorded onsite before. The Wokingham bird, ringed in 2013 our most prolific, having now been recorded over four different late summers (2013, 2015, 2016 and 2017).

One of the Polish marked birds was ringed in 2012 returned or at least observed for its third late summer (2014, 2016 and 2017). The other ringed in 2016 was also recorded during 2016.

Unsuccessful read: six digit BTO read of a British ringed bird

Mediterranean Gull

Individuals identified during 2017: 2 (*4 in 2016, 6 in 2015 and 10 in 2014*)

Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 2

Timings: early July through to early August

Details of where ringed: both from Belgium

Site Fidelity: again both individuals displayed some degree of post breeding dispersal site fidelity.

Mediterranean Gull, Dawlish Warren, 8 July 2017, Lee Collins

This bird, white 3EXH, which was ringed in June 2013 as a pullus at Beveren was also noted during 2014 and 2016. White 32P1 displays an even far greater degree of onsite fideilty. Having initially been ringed in Poland 2007, it was re-ringed in 2010 in Belgium and it has been recorded here at Dawlish Warren every year since 2009 with the exception of 2012 during the months of July and August.

A poor year for recoveries, no doubt accountable due to the beach recharge works during the key passage period. This was additionally galling by the fact that the late summer of 2017 would go down as our most prolific ever for this species. On the 8 July an impressive display of passage migration witnessed small but regular parties of birds arriving from the east, some continuing south while others heading inland totalling at least 76 individuals. In addition, similar movement although in smaller numbers were noted just days before and after with 27 on the 7th, 43 on the 9th and 23 on the 22nd.

Roseate Tern

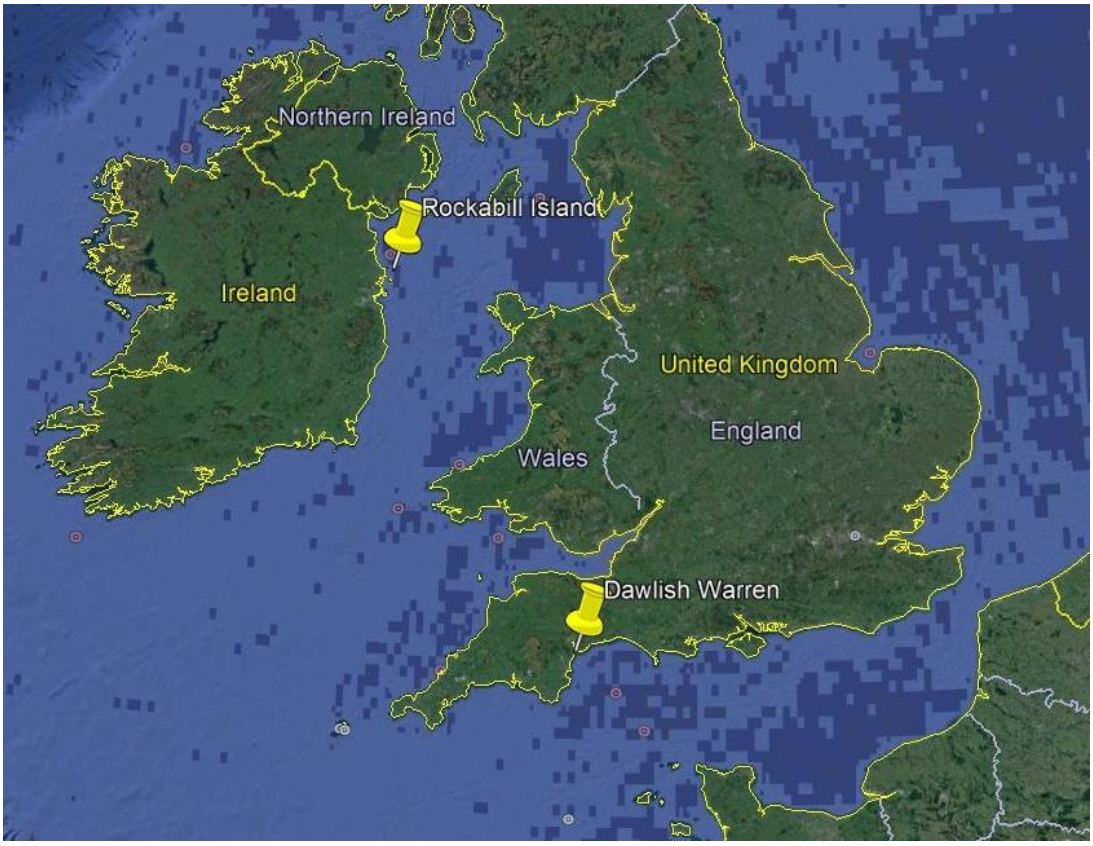
Individuals identified during 2017: 2
Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 2
Timing: 30 July
Details of where ringed: both from Rockabill, Ireland during 2015 as pullus

Rockabill Island, Ireland 2017: Neither individual was recorded at Rockabill during the breeding season of 2017. But in light of the phenomenal ongoing success at this site in which **1597** nests were counted during 2017 these birds may have been present but went overlooked.

Another interesting fact I was to learn was that during 2017 they'd started fitting a small number with GLS monitors. This green device is fitted to the tarsus with the aim that if retrapped at a later date the monitors will allow a full and detailed account of the birds movements during the intervening period. I'll certainly follow this with great interest and armed with this knowledge be mindful of looking for such individuals.

Roseate Tern (19DP), Dawlish Warren, 30 July 2017, Lee Collins

Two Roseate Terns, Dawlish Warrren, 30 July 2017, Lee Collins



Little Tern

Individuals identified during 2017: 2
Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 4
Timing: August
Details of where ringed: Kilcoole, County Wexford, Ireland

Little Tern recoveries rank as some of my most desireable yet most challenging. I've only one previous positive read, that made in 2014 which was ringed in Kilcoole, Ireland. The incredibly small coded colour ring would mean it would take three visits before a positive outcome was reached.

Finding and successfully reading two during 2017 far exceeded expectations. Both were juveniles, the first found on a visit on the 7 August and would linger until the 13th. The second, seen on the 27th. Both were ringed at Kilcoole, County Wexford, their website stating that during the 2017 breeding season an amazing total of 220 chicks had been ringed

Here is a rather poor image of one of them, it dwarfed besides the accompanying Sandwich Terns.

Little Tern, juvenile, Dawlish Warren, 12 August 2017, Lee Collins

Curlew

Individuals identified during 2017: 3
Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 6

A good although somewhat intriguing year in the context of recoveries. The species habit of roosting, sometimes in very large numbers in the saltmarsh, far from prying eyes greatly hampers attempts at recovery work. Bight gatherings are either due to waterborne disturbance from the saltmarsh or early morning high tide roost gatherings, although in both instances birds are very skittish and easily spooked.

Our colour-ringed German ringed bird was recorded over both winter periods, this now the fifth consecutive year, although has probably been overlooked prior to this as ringed back in 2009.

Another multi-observed individual, this ringed as a nestling in Aberdeenshire in 2015 and first recorded in 2016 remained in situ. It must have gone overlooked during the first winter period and first noted yet not posivitly identified in late July, with additional confirmed sightings in August and September. Once again overlooked for the duration of the second winter.

The third individual and new onsite recovery was initially discovered and photographed by Dean Hall in July. It was ringed as a second calendar year bird on the Gann Estuary in Pembrokeshire in September 2016. I'd record additional observations during August and October, the timings and duration of its stay highly suggestive the bird would over winter around the River Exe.

Two other marked birds deem worthy of inclusion. The first, a colour-ringed bird seen in mid-August was positively read, although I'd be informed by the BTO is one of a number of Curlews seen nationwide that appear to have been marked by a rogue scheme, how bizarre! The second was a partial read of a metal ring, which the BTO informed me would certainly have been ringed in Finland.

Whimbrel

Individuals identified during 2017: 1
Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 2

This is the same individual seen in 2016. Yellow D63, ringed in Llansantfraed, Wales in May 2015 was first recorded on the Exe by Matt Knott on the 6 April 2017. Three weeks later Ivan Lakin recorded an unidentified marked bird on the 28th in the late evening which no doubt was the same individual, whilst I positively recorded its presence on the following day.

Much like 2016, its recorded stopover on the lower Exe Estuary of over three week period gives a clear indication to the importance the area has to refuel before moving north to breeding grounds.

Such multi-year passage observations are noteworthy and further enhanced when our first autumn sighting was made seventeen weeks later on the 20 August 2017. It clearly shows that during reverse migration it follows some degree of pattern akin to its migratory route of the spring.

Unfortunately this individual has no other recorded history other than our Exe sightings.

Black-tailed Godwit

Individuals identified during 2017: 2
Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 2
Timing: 22 October
Details of where ringed: one locally ringed at the nearby Axe Estuary in 2011 and also noted onsite in 2014.

The other was a much more interesting individual. It had two rings on each tibia, three uncoded, the other coded. This individual was ringed as an adult at Skagafjarðarsýsla, Siglufjörður in Iceland in July 2010.

It had an impressive CV, with 60 officially documented recoveries (I'd become aware that it frequented Bowling Green Marsh earlier that winter yet not officially recorded) showing summering, wintering and migratory site fidelity.

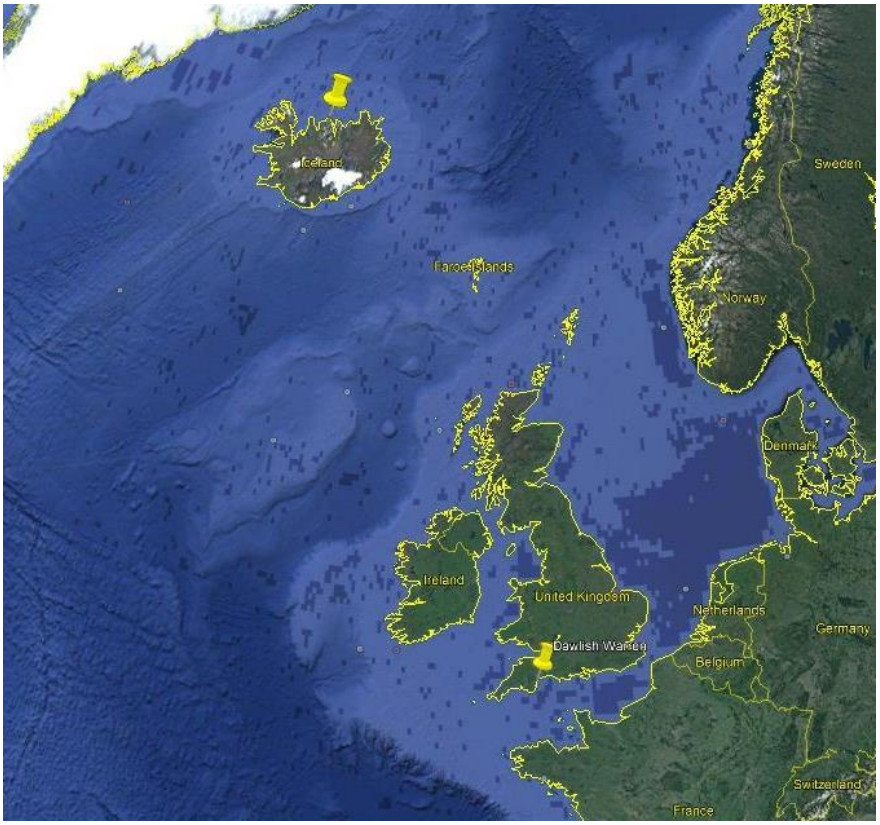
Observations in Northern Iceland are near annual, present during 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2017 in the vicinity to where it had originally been ringed. The timings were interesting, most years its earliest presence recorded in early May, although in 2014 in late April. Late summer observations were less frequent although again in 2014 remained until the second week of July.

Its migratory history follows a similar pattern, for which behavioural traits are clearly evident. It informs us that the Blackwater Estuary at Heybridge, Essex clearly is a critical stopover point. Its importance cannot be underestimated. Observations have been annual since 2011. Spring sightings were noted during April 2011, March 2014 and surprisingly early in 2015 (mid-February to early March). When combined with an even greater set of post-breeding autumn passage accounts from August- September 2012, August- October 2013, July- August 2014, July- September 2015, July- October 2016 and July- September 2017 it unequivocally demonstrates this stopover site is crucially important.

There are no documented accounts of sightings between its breeding grounds in Iceland and Essex. Explanations could be numerous, the most obvious the general unwillingness of British birders to engage in seeking out and reporting colour-ringed birds. But it's also a scientific fact that Godwits are known to undertake very long migratory movements in one journey. Bar-tailed Godwits using the Asian Pacific flyway travel several thousand kilometres in a single journey. Does this Black-tailed Godwit do the same and travel from breeding grounds in Iceland and Essex in one hit? It maybe a possibility and evidence to support this lie in the fact its stay in Essex over a two-three month period each autumn is needed to refuel before moving on to wintering quarters.

Winter site fidelity would seem to exist yet is more poorly documented. Sightings from the upper Exe Estuary in October/ November 2010, November 2011 and December 2012/ January 2013 support this yet no official sightings over the subsequent three winters have been recorded. It's a safe assumption based on its behavioural traits that it did in fact overwinter during this period in question, yet either went overlooked or unrecorded. My observation along with comments raised by an experienced Bowling Green Marsh birder show the bird present during the second winter period of 2017 on the Exe.

One final titbit, sightings from elsewhere are practically non-existent but worth mentioning. It was seen inland at Blashford Lakes, Hampshire on the 24 March 2013. Out of curiousness I dug out my 2013 annual Devon Bird report and was interested to read 'the coldest March since 1962'. Now the timings of its movement fits in with early spring passage but Blashford's relative close proximity to the Exe of just 119 kms away may suggest poor weather could have grounded its progress. One further sighting a week later showed in remained close by, moving back slightly west and encountered at Poole Harbour, had the harsh weather drawn it back to the coast? An interesting bird for sure!



Bar-tailed Godwit

Individuals identified during 2017: 2
Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 4
Timing: 23 April to 1 May. These my first since May 2012.
Details of where ringed: both from the Waddensee, Holland. Both using a system of uncoded colour rings and a single uncoded flag. The dates of both clearly reflect passage migrants rather than wintering birds.

The first found on the 23 April was only recorded on a single date, this ringed in May 2015 and had no recovery history at all, mine the first.

The second bird was found on the 28 April by Ivan Lakin which lingered for at least four days, last recorded on the 1 May. It was ringed in August 2011 with additional sightings at nearby Texel in May 2014 and 2015 and April 2016.

Dunlin

Individuals identified during 2017: 2 (5 in 2016)
Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 2
Timing: early January
Details of where ringed: both had tiny white coded rings administered from a scheme at the mouth of the River Vistula, Poland. One was a new find whilst the other was also recorded a month prior in December 2016. Suggestive that this if not both individuals had probably overwintered. Finding these two during my second and third visit of the year was encouraging. Frustratingly the rest of the year drew a blank despite my valiant efforts.

Dunlin recoveries are for many reasons a difficult proposition. Firstly finding any marked bird within a four figure gathering is arduous work. Feeding birds often wade in shallow water obscuring the ring, whilst high tide gatherings also inhibit me. They generally bunch tightly together and therefore only a fraction are visible at any given moment. It must also be stressed that the colour coded rings themselves are very small, so even when finding one a close view is essential to accomplish a positive outcome.

Dunlins are known to display very strong wintering site fidelity and with seven different darvic ringed individuals found over the last few years I am somewhat disappointed by the paucity of my success rate. A lack of onsite multi-winter observations could suggest a high mortality rate. This may well influence proceedings yet based on the fact I have very limited multi-observations over a single winter period would imply that such birds do overwinter yet go undetected.

Ringed Plover

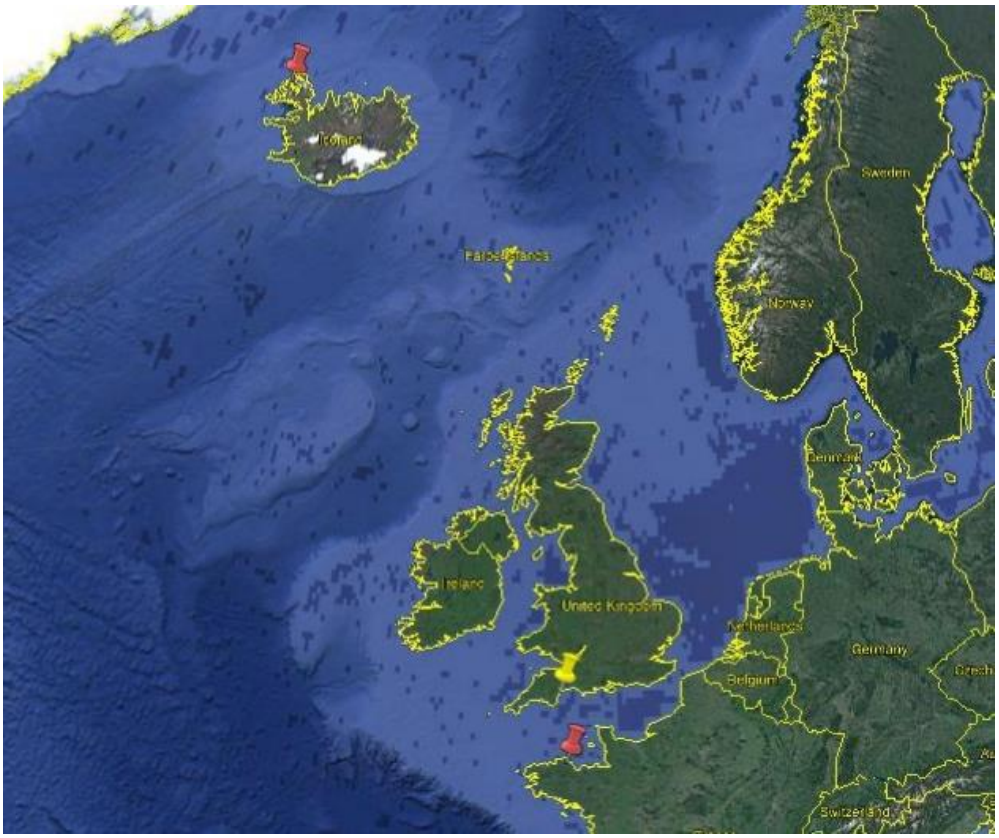
Individuals identified during 2017: 1

Number of positive field reads made in 2017: 1

Timing: 1 May

Details of where ringed: Scarfasker, Iceland whilst incubating on 3 June 2014.

Recovery history: additional sightings in 2015 and 2016 during the breeding seasons at Sudurtangi, Iceland. This an area within close proximity to where it was originally ringed. Other sightings between the date ringed and my sighting in May 2017 are very limited, with just a single autumn record for September 2015 in Pleubian, France.



Although completely irrelevant to this report I thought I'd include two more reads made during 2017. Neither were from Dawlish Warren, indeed not even in the UK but from Australia. Whilst birding the Cairn's Esplanade, Queensland feasting on an array of birds that would include Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints and Sandplovers I found amongst them a good number of Great Knots. Two were marked with coded flags. Both were ringed 5951 kms away in Chongming Island, China. These two represent my furthest travelled birds in regards ringing to recovery sites.