

# 2018 Dawlish Warren ringed recovery report

Lee Collins



For six consecutive years I have actively engaged in the process of seeking out ringed birds at Dawlish Warren NNR. It's an aspect of birding alien to most yet I find it hugely appealing, enjoyable and enlightening. Birding Dawlish Warren is without doubt my spiritual home and over the last few years my leanings towards finding, recording and documenting marked birds has now become my primary focus during high tide visitations. I do this under no official capacity and to clarify to those who don't know me I am not a ringer.

This reports overall aim is of course to highlight my findings over the calendar year of 2018, although I frequently reflect and draw upon comparisons to previous years. In its simplest form comparing the overall total of reads against another year is easy, yet flawed. Hours spent annually onsite, indeed high tide visitations can fluctuate year upon year and thus in better gaining a better understanding of my degree of success against effort ensures I meticulously record my visits, including start and finishing times and even evaluate and record my high tide participations. This draws a better statistical analysis and although I'd continue in a similar vein throughout 2018 one dynamic would come into play this year that would alter proceedings, not only for this year but forever.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> February 2018 the first cannon netting session since 2004 was undertaken. It was of great success, capturing 190 Oystercatchers of which 150 were applied with coded colour rings (five were retraps and the old wasp rings replaced). Additional mist-netting sessions in September and October and second cannon-netting programme in November would swell this figure further by 69.



With so many new and easily identifiable birds now present over any future high tide visits brought about a dilemma in the context of writing this report. Of course fully supportive of the project I along with others from the Dawlish Warren recording group would monitor and record our observations of these throughout the remainder of the year. But in the context of prior annual comparability I have omitted any such readings of these 219 individuals. Although have not totally neglected my findings and have incorporated them within a subsection under Oystercatchers.

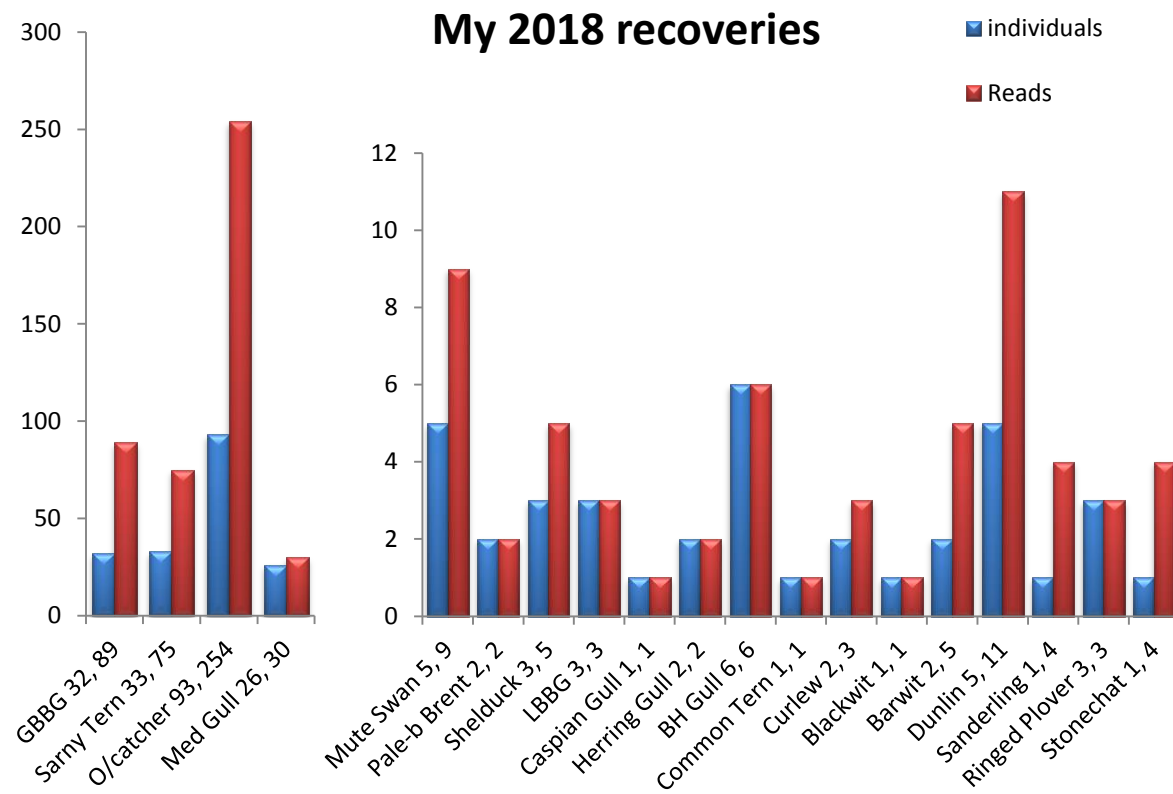
So how did I fare? In light of the seismic changes this year I'd look back on 2018 with mixed results. A year that saw me make 153 visits, present over 128 varying degrees of high tides and clocking up over 720 hours attendance. For context, these figures were markedly down on 2017 and significantly more so in comparison to 2016. Just to reiterate, these results allowing for comparability to previous years, these figures have deliberately excluded the colour-ringed Oystercatchers caught in 2018. The outcome, I'd make **504** reads, in doing so positively identify **223** marked individuals, 125 of these being new. These figures alone I deem impressive although comparisons with corresponding years denotes that despite my declining annual attendance my recovery productivity continues to improve.

Highlights were numerous. Mediterranean Gull recoveries were astonishing; the numbers gathered far exceeding expectations. Whilst my continued hard work in monitoring the Sandwich Terns also during this same period yielded my best ever annual return. As for surprises, two stand out. My first ever positive passerine read was long overdue, that of a Stonechat. But best of all and without doubt read of the year finding a first winter Caspian Gull.

On the flip side, Great Black-backed Gull recoveries continue to drop although my greatest disappointment was being unable to make a Roseate Tern read, my first such omission in the last

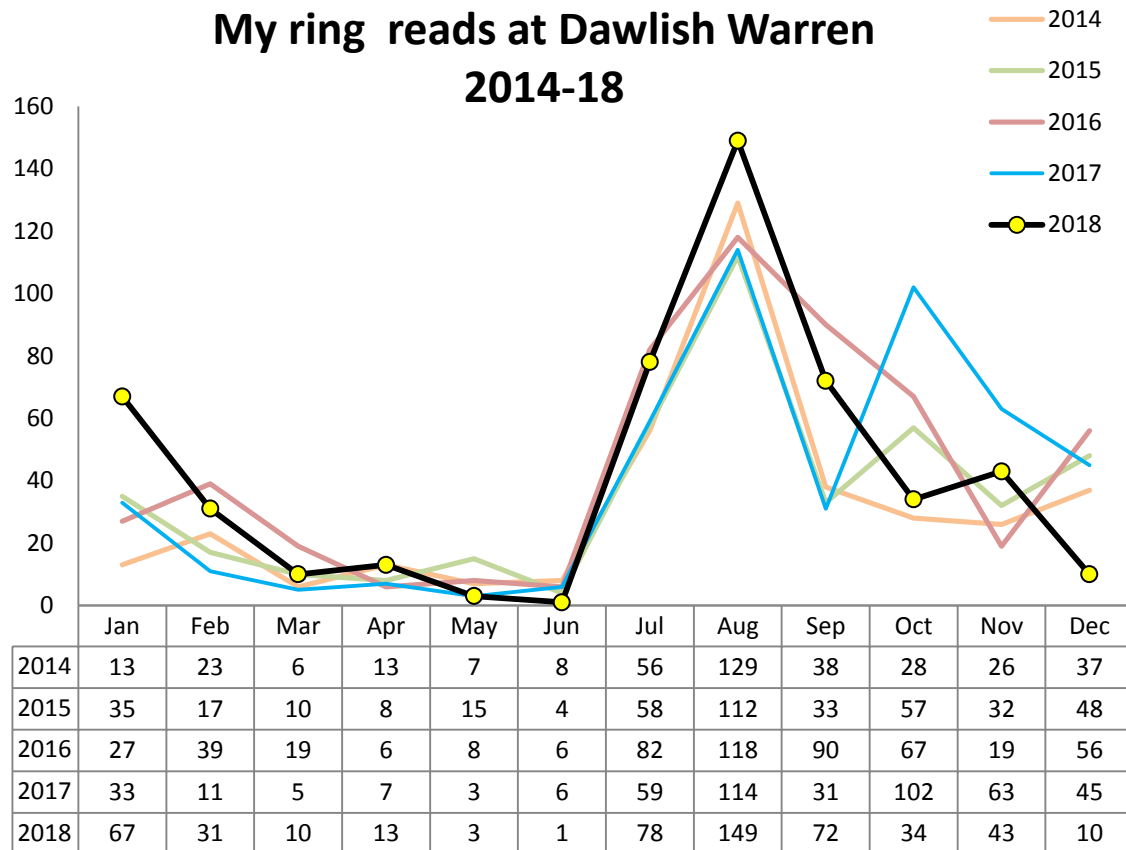
four years. This is probably the first time in over 20 years I'd not record one within the tern roost during the late summer period and now sadly reflective of their recent decline onsite.

Here are my results for 2018 broadly summarized.



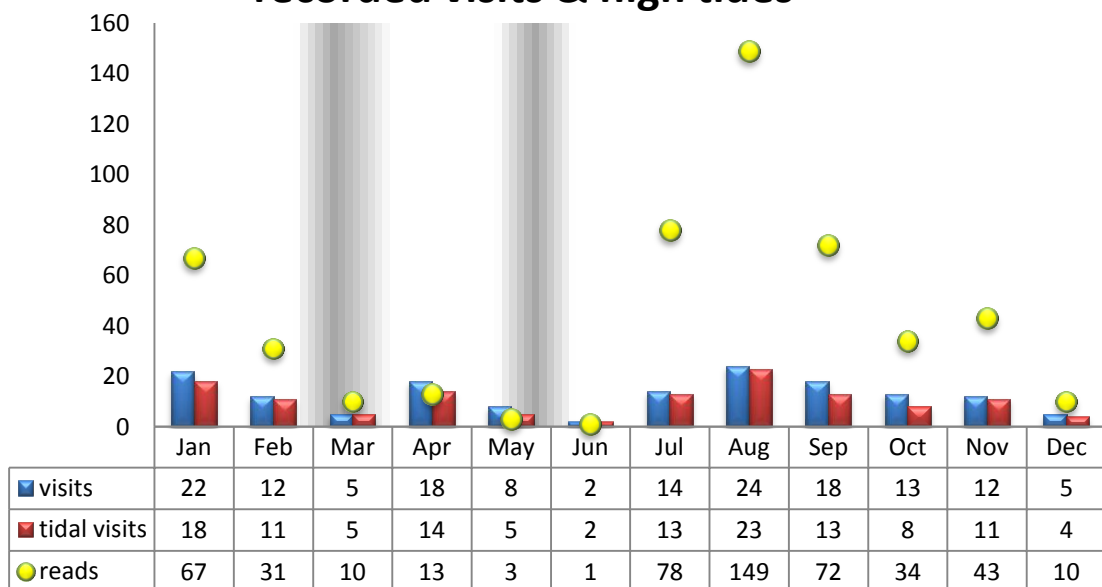
The chart below uses a standardised approach I've used every year, one that plots my reads from 2018 against previous years. Looking at it it's undeniable yet unsurprisingly significant in the overall annual conformity to previous years. The late summer period was once again highly productive, the month of August as expected a period of great opportunity and unheralded success.

## My ring reads at Dawlish Warren 2014-18



Taking the same data from 2018 yet plotting them against visits and high tide visitations is shown below. The area's marked in grey during late February through to mid-March and mid-May have been added, as during these two periods I'd be away guiding in Thailand and Armenia.

## 2018 recorded visits & high tides

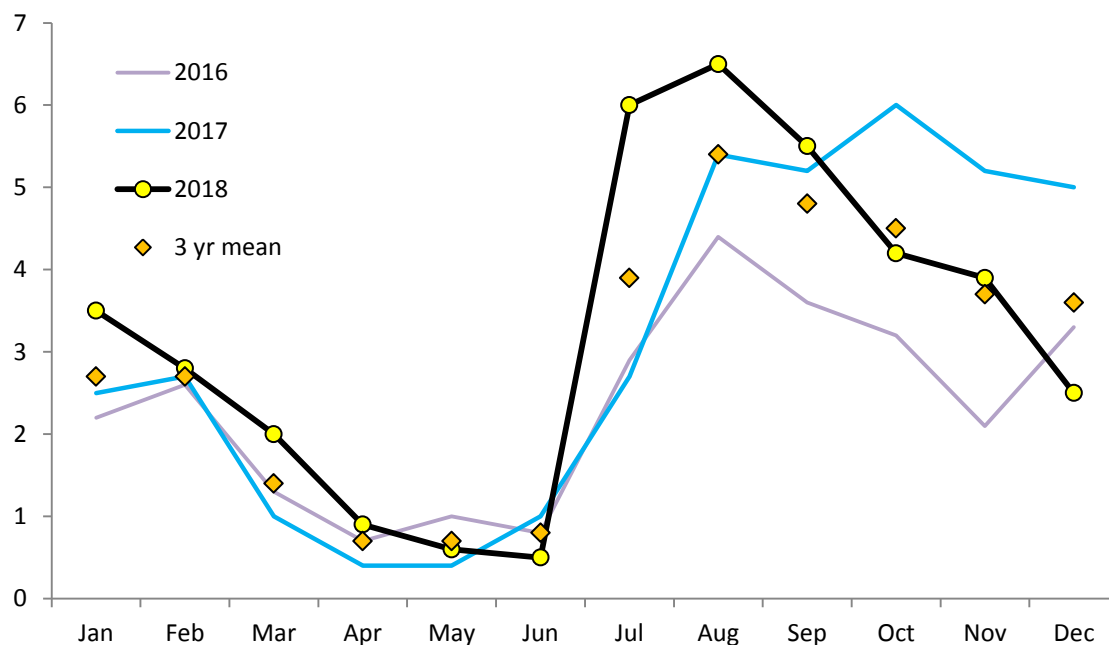


Read productivity also intrigues me. The late summer period receives my greatest tidal coverage, rightly so. The figures back this up, but are August and July the most productive statistically? By that I mean in comparison to tidal visitations. I of course know the answer but it is likewise a useful exercise to plot reads against monthly tidal visits to gauge a better understanding of my productivity *i.e. a mean average of reads per tidal visit each month.*

Here's a table to show my results over the last three years.

		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
2018	H/T visits	19	11	5	14	5	2	13	23	13	8	11	4
	productivity	3.5	2.8	2.0	0.9	0.6	0.5	6.0	6.5	5.5	4.2	3.9	2.5
2017	H/T visits	13	4	5	16	8	6	22	21	6	17	12	9
	productivity	2.5	2.7	1.0	0.4	0.4	1.0	2.7	5.4	5.2	6.0	5.2	5.0
2016	H/T visits	12	15	15	9	8	7	28	27	25	21	9	17
	productivity	2.2	2.6	1.3	0.7	1.0	0.8	2.9	4.4	3.6	3.2	2.1	3.3
Mean Average		2.7	2.7	1.4	0.7	0.7	0.8	3.9	5.4	4.8	4.5	3.7	3.6

By using the same data but plotting by way of a chart gives a better visual representation of my productivity results over the last three years, incorporating a three year mean average. The overall uniformity quantifies a level of consistency to my own productivity (effort & tidal visitations) each month. What is also patently obvious, if unsurprising are the results virtually mirror the fluctuations and rhythm of the main chart on the previous page.



It also indicates that reads over the calendar year vary more or less seasonally. During the first winter period averaging just under three reads per visit and dropping significantly from March



through to June. This coincides with our wintering Oystercatchers departing. July and August sees a significant upsurge, this accountable to post breeding dispersal. Oystercatchers begin to reappear and build in number, whilst Sandwich Tern and small gull numbers also swell and are scrutinized for marked individuals. Over the late autumn and second winter period Oystercatcher reads primarily dominate although occasionally supplemented with Great Black-backed Gull reads.

One final observation from the chart shows 2018's monthly results generally exceed the three year mean average.

## Oystercatchers

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**Individuals identified during 2018:** 93. A breakdown of these reads are as follows- colour-coded= 7, wasp ringed= 33, metal ringed only= 53 (*this excluding the colour-coded locally ringed individuals applied during 2018*).

Comparisons: 2017= 76 and 2016= 83. This year's increase was due to identifying 17 metal marked birds from the February 2018 catch (see new individuals). By factoring these out, plus the additional nine newly recorded individuals recorded this year it would once again show that our now ageing collection of marked birds gradually continues to inevitably wane.

**Number of positive field reads made in 2018:** 254 (*again excluding the 2018 locally ringed colour-coded individuals*). My best ever annual accumulation and on reflection a great return based on both my reduced attendance and greater still my time and involvement drawn away from this by monitoring and accumulating colour-coded reads from the vastly successful catches of 2018.

**New individuals recorded during 2018:** 26- two were foreign colour ringed single sightings, one from Holland, the other from Iceland (see photo below) seen in March and October, these certainly passage birds.



Oystercatcher, Icelandic ringed TY, Dawlish Warren, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2018, Lee Collins

**Longevity:** locally ringed birds play a pivotal role in this respect. Our oldest were three ringed onsite back in 1989, although two unsuccessful attempts when noting white wasp blank, wide, wide couldn't confirm if this were a bird from 1983. A breakdown of others at least 14 years or older were as follows- 1990= 4, 1992= 3, 1994= 2, 1997= 8, 1999= 2 (these Icelandic and Lincolnshire ringed), 2000= 19, 2002= 1 (Welsh ringed), 2004= 20.





33 different birds were positively identified over the entirety of the year, this compares well to the previous year's results of 37. This figure dropped to 26 over the autumn or second winter period, although three additional birds previously harbouring wasp rings but now colour-coded also remain.



### **Cannon and mist netting onsite during 2018**

**Cannon netting-** 4 February (present) and 12 November

**Mist netting-** 29 September (present) and 29 October

**[Click here for more details](#)**

**Individuals identified during 2018: 201:-** 144 of the 150 colour-ringed individuals from February's catch: 8 of 12 from the September catch: 4 of 8 from the October catch and 45 of 49 from November's catch.

**Reads made:** 1,100+

The 4<sup>th</sup> February 2018 would be a hugely significant date, it being the first onsite attempt to ring waders here since 2004. Expectations were high and with valuable prior insight and contributions from key locals including myself on roosting behaviour patterns it was envisioned a significant sample would be caught by cannon netting.





This was my first experience of such a venture and a real eye-opener. My designated role for the day was to take in hand images of each colour ringed bird, [see here](#), although under close supervision was allowed to ring one individual.

All told, 190 birds were caught and with a large and efficient processing team assembled 150 of these were applied with a new blue coded ring plus an additional yellow uncoded ring above this. Time restraints would dictate the remaining forty were applied with just a metal ring. It was inevitable that within such a large catch many of the pre-existing marked birds would be caught. Given the size of the haul recapturing five was a figure I'd deem lower than anticipated, at just 2.6% of the catch although based on longevity these individuals were important controls. With multiple onsite prior reads of each my role would be broadened to convey their known histories. The oldest, now fitted with a colour-coded ring U6 was ringed here at Dawlish Warren in September 1989, the others also ringed here were two from November 2000 and two from the last catch in September 2004.

This report has purposely made no mention about these 150 newly marked individuals or additional 69 caught thereafter. My rationale behind this of ensuring a like for like comparison to previous years. But in this subsection I now wish to focus my attention on primarily the 150 newly applied colour coded individuals.

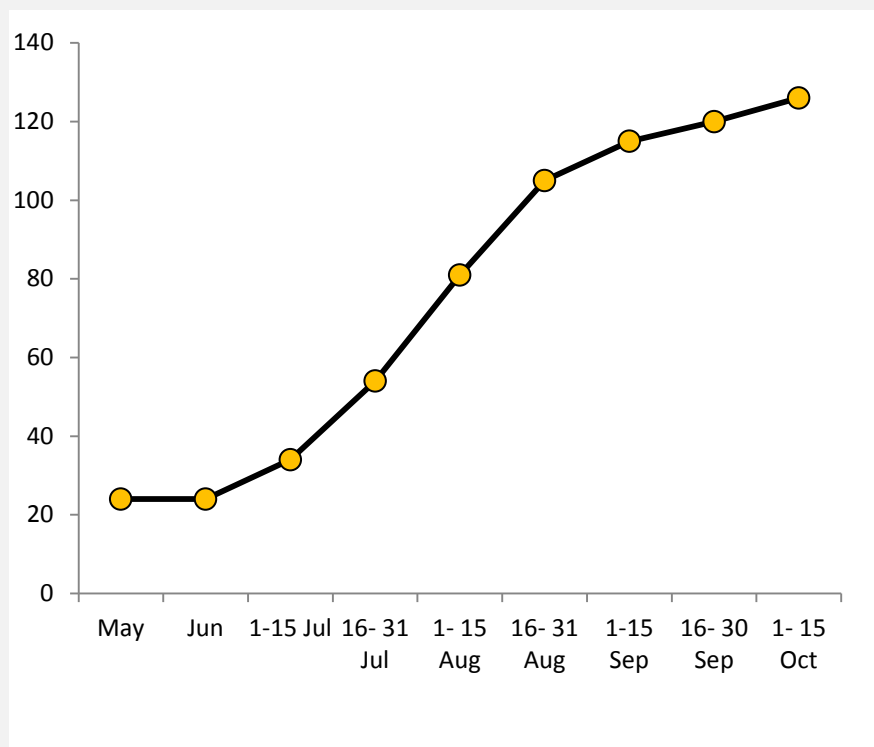
Acquiring reads of any of these marked birds onsite, most frequently noted during high tide roost gatherings are now a very straight-forward affair. Their very readability would ensure others, namely Ivan, Kevin, Alan and Dave who collectively make up the rest of the recording group onsite were all keen and willing to be equally involved in acquiring reads thereafter. Whilst in broader terms further sightings of migratory or breeding individuals far, far away were keenly anticipated and the resulting sightings from the summer period of 2018 can be found [here](#)

Of course the schemes coordinators have plans far loftier than mine but during 2018 my own objectives were focused around several goals, notably- evaluating the individuals that over

summered (c.25): monitoring re-arrivals from July onwards: to be able to evaluate some degree of survival rate based around reads acquired over the second winter period.

**Re-arrivals-** Visitations from July onwards resulted in my customary high onsite attendance. One of my core objectives during July and August was to observe the return and build-up of Oystercatchers. Keen to discover not just how many of these marked birds would return but also each first resighting.

Below is a chart that documents my findings. It demonstrates a stead build up throughout July (failed breeders?) and predominantly during August, although new second winter resightings continued into October. All told I'd note a total of 102 of what I assumed to be migratory individuals returning to wintering quarters. The gathering of such data is not unique. Several decades ago similar monitoring return assessments were undertaken. I don't have direct access to these earlier results but with changing times the pressures on the estuary have led to a greatly reduced wintering population. Therefore current information such as this is invaluable and I know the key collaborators for the project who no doubt have a greater assessment of records will be using the data in a similar vein.



Monitoring thereafter would obviously continue, the only drawback the issue of volume. With a four figure assemblage of wintering individuals present such numbers clearly poses monitoring difficulties when looking for marked individuals. Roost gatherings are often dense, therefore obscure many marked birds, leading to dozens frequently going unobserved. But on assessing my results of resightings throughout the period of September through to the end of the year was in many ways interesting. All told I'd find 182 of the 219 colour-ringed individuals onsite, a figure of 83.1%. Within this total 123 of the 150 ringed in February, or 82.5%. A large percentage return rate but given the nature of their longevity does this show a 17% mortality rate? Maybe, maybe not for I can't rule out others having gone unobserved or indeed using other sites around the Exe such as Eastdon fields or Oak Meadow Golf Course? Maybe some venture a little further. This was certainly demonstrated upon me making two visits to view The Salty on the Teign Estuary. Within a gathering of about 200 birds one colour-ringed bird (3H) was observed along with a Norwegian marked bird also.

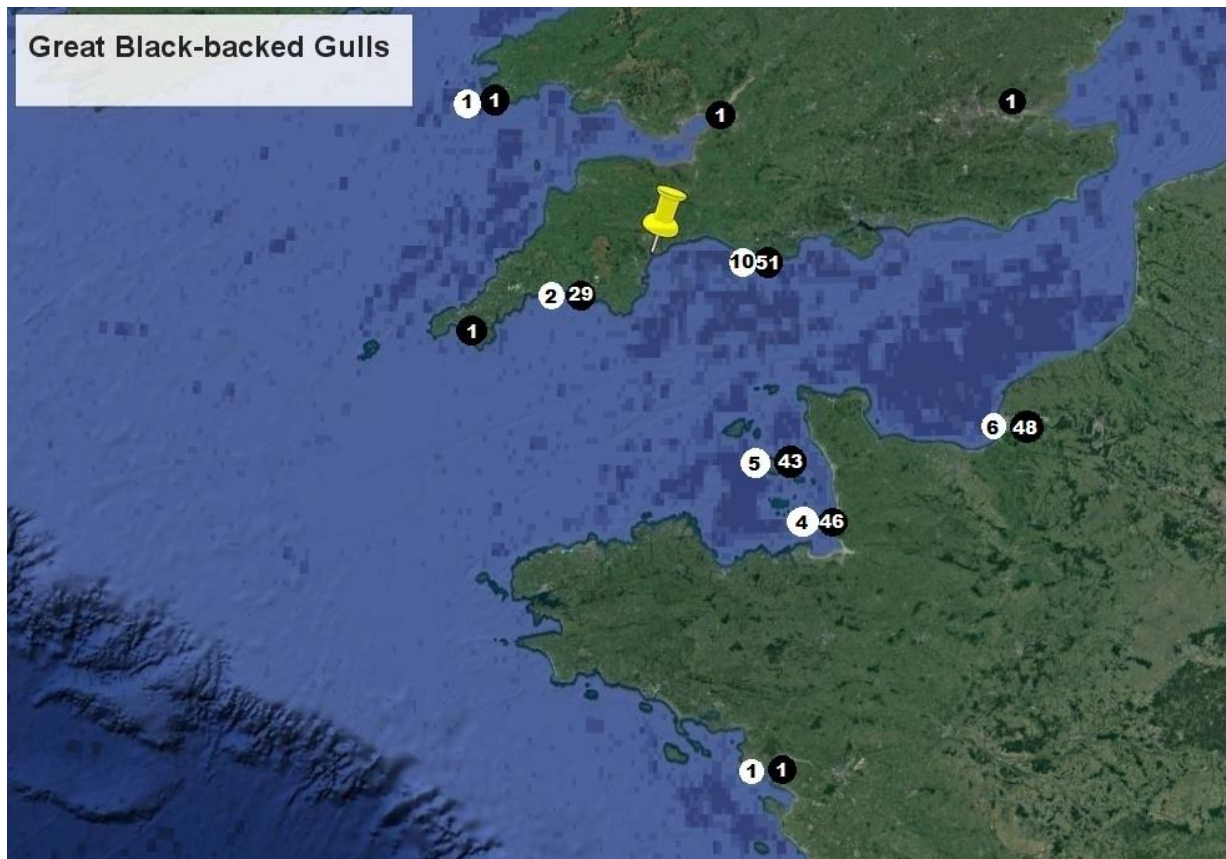
In finalizing this subsection it's worth mentioning that if anybody sees one of these clearly marked birds, be it at Dawlish Warren, or around the Exe Estuary, in fact anywhere else such information is warmly welcomed. If you are fortunate to see one or several please submit your findings to- [exeoystercatchers@gmail.com](mailto:exeoystercatchers@gmail.com) along with the date seen, location, maybe size of flock if relevant and any behaviour noted i.e. roosting, feeding. Join in!

## Great Black-backed Gull

**Individuals identified during 2018:** 32 (42 in 2017 and 54 in 2016)

**Number of positive field reads made in 2018:** 86

**Where they are ringed from:** white dot= 2018 only, black dot= all (2009-2018)







**Site fidelity/ multi-year accounts:** 19 individuals, this constitutes about 63% (if we exclude the two juveniles ringed in 2018) having been seen here also over previous years.

What of multi-year site fidelity? I've now a sizeable dataset of records spanning the last six years. During this period I have observed 237 individuals and made 653 positive reads and based on this wealth of reference material believe I can categorise site fidelity into three behavioural traits-

- Autumn dispersal- based on volume alone this the most numerous. In the majority of instances these relate to individuals that are recorded either once or maybe just a handful of occasions per annum. These either weather driven in or maybe a regular passage stopover. This I am unable to ascertain. Therefore ties to the site due to the overall low annual observational rates are deemed relevant yet low.

Yellow OJ4 is a prime example of this. It being ringed on the Channel Islands in 2009, noted just once here at Dawlish Warren in 2018. I've an additional twelve pre-2018 resightings of this bird, spanning seven different years. The dates observed all between the months of August and October.

- Wintering site fidelity- Here we see a very strong bias towards our eastern clinal individuals. Norwegian ringed birds account for just 6% of the marked birds I've noted onsite, although statistically these actually account for a large majority of such resightings. I've discussed this behavioural trait in prior reports. It highlighting known multi-year breeding site fidelity in Norway accompanied by a clearly defined wintering association here at Dawlish Warren.

Therefore, this clearly shows a more structured behaviour pattern and thus a far greater degree of localised site fidelity.

- All year round site fidelity- this is the most unusual onsite and borne out by the fact this relates to just one individual, P:87B (see below, under most recorded). Such behaviour is more associated in breeding or territorial adults, whereas it is theorised that immatures or sub-adults lack this trait and display an overall tendency to roam widely.

**Most recorded:** white P:87B. This bird was ringed as a pullus in Portland Harbour in 2015 and during 2018 continued to be regularly recorded, myself accounting for 25 of the 28 resightings of it this year alone. This one individual, now a fourth calendar bird continues to display a strong affiliation to site, although does foray east, intermittently seen on the Axe Estuary.

By the years ends we've now recorded its presence 97 times onsite, making it by far our most recorded marked bird ever seen. Over the last three consecutive years it has shown incredible fidelity to the area. What is likewise equally fascinating is that statistically it accounts for about a quarter of all my marked Great Black-backed Gull recoveries per annum over the last three years (2016= 25.5%, 2017= 23.9% and 2018= 28.1%).

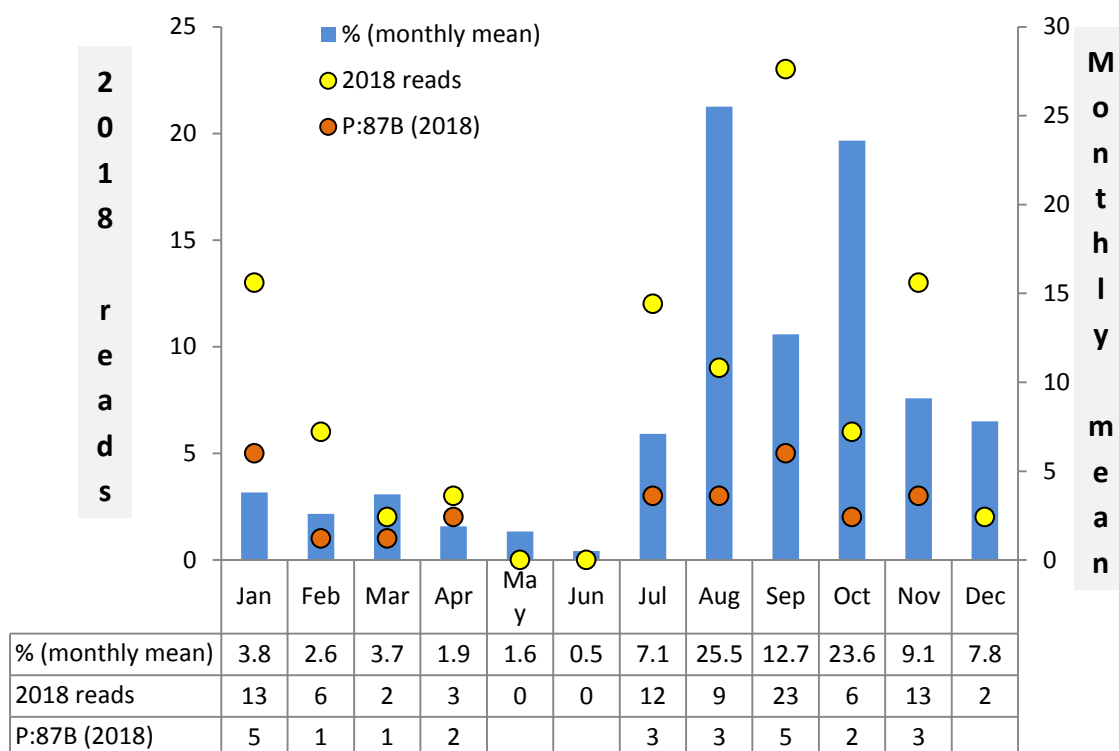


*Great Black-backed Gull, P:87B, Dawlish Warren, 20 September 2018, Lee Collins*

The next chart draws together several bits of key information. It not only highlighting a breakdown of my reads over 2018, these denoted as yellow dots (reads of P:87B also included as an orange dot). Taking this a step further I've plotted a second set of statistics, depicted as blue columns. This a percentage breakdown of the core set of data accumulated during 2009-2018, based on 661 reads.

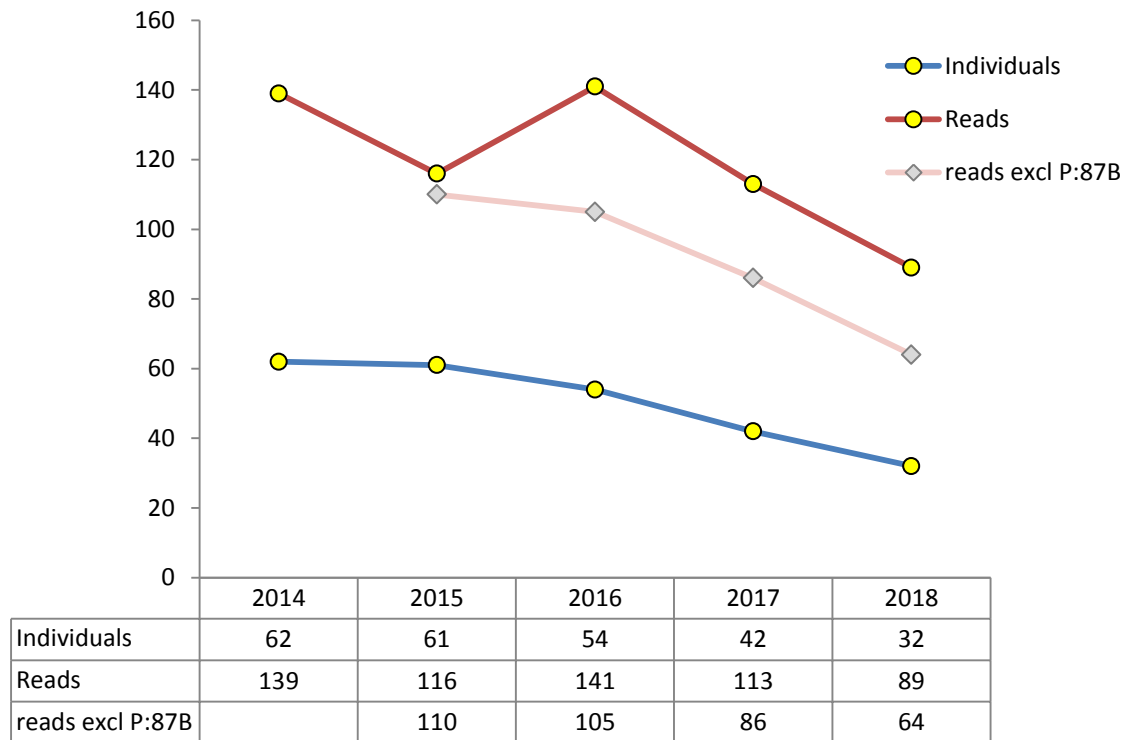
What is clear to deduce from this is that I see a far greater account of marked birds during the autumn period.

Other variables must also be borne in mind, two in particular. Onsite attendance is of course one, for without being here recoveries will go unobserved. Another, which also heavily influences matters, is the weather. Unsettled conditions certainly play there part. This will often induce birds to amass in far greater numbers here, drawn in from offshore to seek temporary shelter. It may also be theorised that these temporary influxes may also centre upon feeding opportunities, especially given bouts of the severest of weather. Shellfish casualties such as Otter or Razor shells can literally litter the beach and thus draw far greater numbers of larger gulls to feed upon them as the tide later ebbs away and they become exposed



Even before sitting down to analyse my account of this species this year I knew the figures were markedly down. With this in mind the chart depicted below was generated to compare and also evaluate 2018's results of both- (a) marked individuals (blue) and (b) overall reads (red) plotted against similar data held over the proceeding four year period.





The reads data although accurate is likewise perhaps misrepresentational. So to counteract this I have added a third dataset, illustrated as a grey icon. This also represents observational reads, although excludes sightings of P:87B. Its high observational rate over the last three years essentially distorts my dataset so significantly by a margin of about 25%.

These findings not only reaffirmed my initial thoughts about 2018 but furthermore underlines a more disturbingly short-term downtrend. It's clear I'm witnessing less marked individuals, as well as gaining less reads annually.

## Mediterranean Gull

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**Individuals identified during 2018:** an exceptional 26 (for context 2 in 2017: 2008-2017=24)

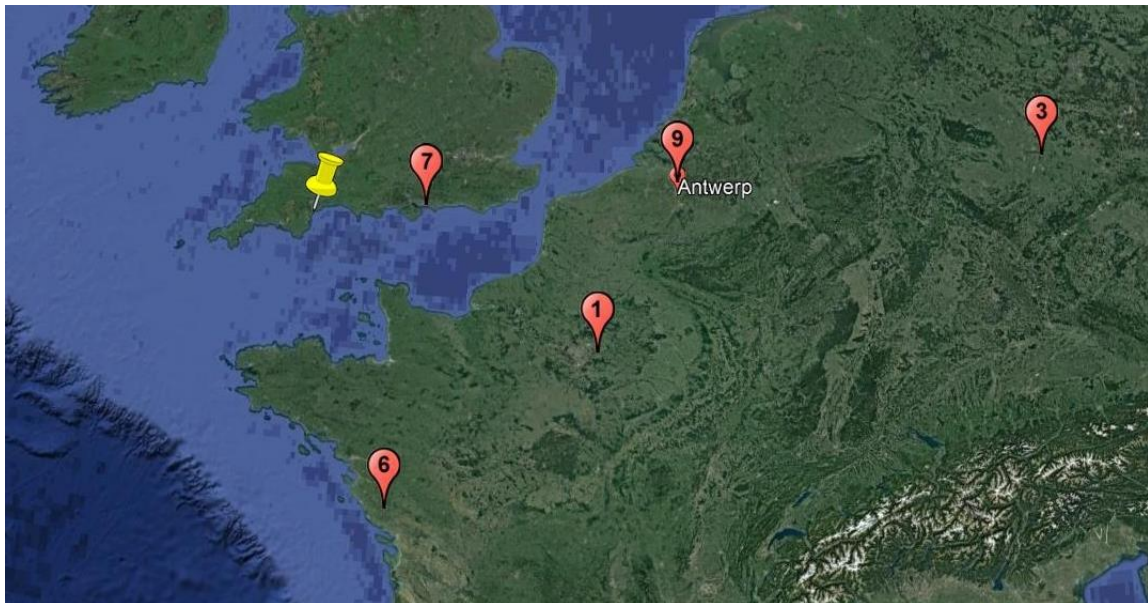
**Number of positive field reads made in 2018:** 30 (cf. 2 in 2017 & 4 in 2016)

**Timing:** 13<sup>th</sup> July- 17<sup>th</sup> August (=25 tidal visits)



*Mediterranean Gull, (2L48), juvenile, Dawlish Warren, 25 July 2018, Lee Collins*

**Details:** from England= **7** (all juveniles from a new scheme), France= **7**, Belgium= **9**, German= **3**



Recoveries show a strong bias towards birds ringed to our east. Their dispersal from breeding colonies obviously point to a large movement west. Yet the six onsite recoveries from Vendee, France do not follow this same westerly dispersal. Three of these were juveniles so categorically shows these at least headed north rather than west!

**Ageing:** juveniles= 13, first summers= 4, second summers= 3 and adults= 6



*Mediterranean Gull, Dawlish Warren, 24 July 2018, Lee Collins*

2018 will go on record for being an outstanding year for this species. Post breeding dispersal from mid-July through to mid-August saw very large numbers pass all along the south Devon coastline. Here at Dawlish Warren we'd also experience this spectacle. Observations of either passage bound birds or drop-ins generated several large daily counts, peaking on the 28<sup>th</sup> July when at least 96 were present, a site record count.

My first marked bird was found on the 13<sup>th</sup> July, interestingly my only individual this year with a multi-year account of site fidelity (it seen over four different years) and my last on the 17<sup>th</sup> August. During the intervening period it was unusual to observe so many drawn to the light and close scrutiny of each found several marked individuals, with the 25<sup>th</sup> July and 15<sup>th</sup> August particularly bountiful noting nine and six respectively. Based on the high degree of marked individuals being just single one day sightings this allows us to summarise a higher percentage turnover.





*Mediterranean Gull, juvenile, Dawlish Warren, 15 August 2018, Lee Collins*

I've pictured two yellow colour-coded ringed juveniles above, these both starting with '2L'. These were part of a new scheme from Langstone Harbour, Hampshire being 172kms away to our east. This year they'd mark 120 juveniles of which we'd note nine onsite, myself seeing seven. These may seem less significant to other foreign ringed individuals, yet were in fact our first UK ringed birds. What's even more impressive was that statistically we'd recorded 7.5% of this schemes marked birds some 172kms away.

To give my 2018 late summer recovery results some degree of context I'd just two the previous year or an even more telling stat identified 24 between 2008 and 2017. Therefore over this four week period I had more than doubled my collection of marked birds.

## Sandwich Tern

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**Individuals identified during 2018:** 33 (*my best ever autumn accumulation*)

**Number of positive field reads made in 2018:** 75

**Timings:** one on 15<sup>th</sup> Apr, the rest between 18<sup>th</sup> Jul and 21<sup>st</sup> Sep.

**Rings:** 23= colour-coded, 10= metal ringed only

**Details of where ringed:** England= 7, Scotland= 3, Wales= 6, Ireland= 3, Holland= 14



**Multi-year onsite observations:** = 9 individuals or 39% when assessing just adults. This percentage ratio although down slightly on previous years remains significantly high enough to reinforce the importance of the site during post breeding dispersal. One individual has been recorded over 5 differing years, another over four. It's perhaps worth reiterating to those unfamiliar with Dawlish Warren that this species doesn't breed onsite or indeed in Devon, therefore multi-year observations highlights some degree of post breeding dispersal behaviour.

**Marked juveniles:** 10. This my best ever annual return. Seven were colour coded ringed (six from breeding colonies in Holland, the other from Wales, a passage migrant mist net capture) while more interestingly three metal ringed birds from the UK. These held great interest to me, as historically practically all the immatures noted onsite have been Dutch. Results confirm they were from south coast colonies, with two from Cockleshell Cheirnier, Normandy Marsh, Hants the other c.50km further east at Tern Island, West Sussex.





*Sandwich Tern, red KDB, Dawlish Warren, 7<sup>th</sup> August 2018, Lee Collins*

**Duration of stay:** 20 were noted on just a single date, indicating that 13 were seen more than once. Three individuals stand out as lingering, with red KAH, an adult noted on five dates over a 16 day period. While two juveniles would stay even longer, white H1S noted over a 32 day period and orange 60V over 23. These lengthy over-stays although interesting aren't unique cases, as this has been witnessed annually over the last five years, in most instances being juveniles.



*Sandwich Tern, juvenile, Dawlish Warren, 11 August 2018, Lee Collins*



## Brent Goose

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**Individuals identified during 2018: 2**

**Number of positive field reads made in 2018: 2**

Both individuals were colour-coded Pale-bellied Brent. Both were seen in early May hence passage birds, with neither lingering, each present for just one day. Pale-bellied Brent from my rather limited experience have a tendency to generate a lot of resightings. This not only demonstrating strong affiliations to known wintering quarters but also frequently used migratory stop-over sites. Such information is undoubtedly invaluable in the context of research although none of the six I've recorded onsite since my first back in 2008 have demonstrated such behavioural traits or at least been recorded over differing years.

As for the recovery details both were of interest. The first seen on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May would constitute my oldest recovery of a Pale-bellied, it ringed in Iceland back in 2009.

The second on the 5<sup>th</sup> May was ringed in Dublin, Ireland in 2014. This individual is a very well documented bird with over 180 resightings and known to annually winter around Normandy, France. Following hot on the heels of my sighting its next observation was made the following day just a few miles upriver at Bowling Green Marsh. What was more significant resulted two days later. It seen on the Gann Estuary, Wales the following day and the day after at Kilough Harbour, Ireland. With over six years' experience of ring reading in which I've amassed hundreds of estuarine based recoveries my personal involvement of an individual detailing its short-term migratory movement of this nature is both unique and fascinating.



## Mute Swan

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**Individuals identified during 2018: 5**

**Number of positive field reads made in 2018: 9**

Recoveries onsite are in fact relatively scarce, their tendency to spend the majority of the time well away from the confines of the hide testament to the paucity of recovery records. Pre-2018 I'd identified just four individuals and therefore noting five this year represents a quantifiable success.

My first, found on the Main Pond in January surprisingly constituted only my first ever multi-year account for this species. A read of the metal ring confirming it to have been ringed in Abbotsbury in 2009 and also recorded here back in 2013, now minus the yellow coded ring.

Of the remaining four each was noted administered with a large colour-coded ring. One individual, unsurprisingly another Abbotsbury bird ringed in 2015 showed a particular preference to site as it was noted on five occasions from April through to November, although would wander the length of the Exe, as also noted on Exeter Canal during this same period.

The remaining three were all single day observations and all found within quick succession during late September through to early October. Each would be ringed in 2017, although from three different localities (Abbotsbury Swannery, Yeovil Country Park and Stover Country Park).

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## Lesser Black-backed Gull

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**Individuals identified during 2018: 3**

**Number of positive field reads made in 2018: 3**

On review a productive year in which all three had something noteworthy.

My first, an adult seen in January would be my first recovery for this month in question. Ringed in 2011 in the Channel Islands it had a rich history, with 48 resightings around Guernsey, plus additional winter observations in December 2012 in both Portugal and Spain and in January 2017 again in Spain. My record would constitute its first UK mainland recovery and based on previous winter observations suggest a particularly early migratory return and assumed overshoot en route back to the Channel Islands.

My second was again an adult, this seen in April no doubt on passage. This was again my first recovery for this month in question. Upon finding it I was drawn by the particular dark upperwing colouration, clearly evident it wasn't a *graellsii*. It was to be an *intermedius*, ringed at Mandal, Vest-Adger, **Norway** in 2009 as a pullus. A bird that had over the intervening nine year period just four documented recoveries, all from Norway. This would be my first official *intermedius* recovery although two previous birds ringed in Germany and Denmark in years gone by may need re-examining to clarify their taxon.

The third, found in August, fits more in line with previous recoveries. A time of movement and in this case of a juvenile, just my second ever. Ringed as a pullus just 43 days prior in Cardiff its south-westerly passage movement indicative of birds heading towards warmer wintering quarters

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## Herring Gull

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**Individuals identified during 2018: 2**

**Number of positive field reads made in 2018: 2**

Despite their onsite abundance recoveries on the contrary are rather scarce. Unlike Greater Black-backed Gulls that roost conveniently on Finger Point we've no such structured roost behaviour for this species and therefore finding a marked bird is a very much an ad hoc affair.

Finding two within this calendar year matches expectations and much like most of my previous sixteen recoveries both were UK ringed. The first, a third winter found in March was ringed in Portland Harbour, Dorset in 2015. The second, another fourth calendar year bird noted in June, this ringed as a pullus in Flat Holm Island in the Bristol Channel.

## **Caspian Gull**

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The 17<sup>th</sup> January will forever be fondly remembered for a very long time on two accounts. It would centre around one individual found roosting amongst a gathering of Great Black-backed Gulls on Finger Point. Here's a rather distant image of the bird in question.

This first winter Caspian Gull was adorned with a yellow coded ring and mindful of the enormity of the situation great pains were taken to ensure a 100% confirmation of the read. The circumstances were certainly not helped by the 300 yard gap between myself, based in the hide and the bird yet armed with my trusty Swarovski on full zoom (x70) this was achievable.

Caspian Gulls remain a very scarce and highly sought after species in Devon, so from this perspective alone was welcomed but by being ringed and most importantly of all being read elevated matters significantly. This bird had been ringed as a pullus in Grabendorfer See, Germany on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2017 and our observation its first recovery.



*Caspian Gull, Dawlish Warren 17<sup>th</sup> January 2018, Lee Collins*

This sighting would not only constitute my best ring read of the year, but vie along with a Canadian-ringed Ringed Plover found in 2016 as my most noteworthy recovery all told in the five or so years I've been doing these studies.





It had an additional benefit, the significance not lost on me. I'd made a similar read back in October 2017; this of another yellow ringed bird, again the read confirmed yet the bird was not dwelt upon. It was within a gathering of over 300 Great Black-backed Gulls and partially out of sight and assumed to have been a Great Black-backed Gull. But the colour of the ring and code would not match any recognised schemes for this species, instead indicating it to be from a Caspian Gull project. Rather ruefully at the time I felt I couldn't claim it based on purely a read alone. Although my January sighting would see me re-evaluate matters. Despite not identifying the individual at the time the read alone would confirm I'd inadvertently overlooked my first marked Caspian Gull.

## Black-headed Gull

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**Individuals identified during 2018: 6**

**Number of positive field reads made in 2018: 6**

**Timings:** mid- July to mid- August

A relatively productive year, doubling my results from 2017, although down on numbers during 2014-16. As expected all my reads occurred within the late summer period and all Bight based observations rather than the more accustomed pre-2017 beach recharge gatherings so prevalent before this.

A somewhat mixed but interesting array of individuals. Only two were applied with colour-coded rings (**Lithuanian** and **German**), the other four a harder proposition being purely metal ringed. Accounts of multi-year sightings continues, relevant in three cases, including both colour-coded individuals and one metal ringed bird (**Danish**), two now noted over three differing years.

Of the six found just two would be British ringed, both new for me. A juvenile from Pagham Harbour and six year old bird from Norfolk. Otherwise the remaining four as expected had an eastern clinal bias, with birds marked in Lithuania, Denmark, Germany and **Finland**. The latter most pleasing of all in being my first ever Finnish ringed recovery.

## **Common Tern**

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### **Individuals positively identified during 2018: 1**

Finding a marked bird onsite is relatively easy, I'd estimate I see at least a dozen each autumn yet all are metal ringed and therein lies the challenge.

With just four pre-2018 positive recoveries it shows I've had little success in attaining a positive outcome, therefore any successful read is highly coveted.

During mid-August three attempts were made, with mixed results. One, of a juvenile lead to a positive outcome, it ringed in Abbotsbury, Dorset. A second, also a juvenile was also from the same breeding colony yet unable to conclusively identify to a particular individual based on a partial read. Marked juveniles have frequently intrigued me, where had they come from? Well I now know that some at least make the short 59km journey across Lyme Bay.

The third bird was a British ringed adult and unfortunately proved unsuccessful. Although frustrating, I personally find acquiring these reads incredibly challenging and is just one example showing that reading rings, especially metal ones can and often does fail to gain a successful outcome.

## **Black-tailed Godwit**

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### **Individuals identified during 2018: 1**

Encountered on a particularly foul day in January, within what I assume to be a displaced flock that usually winter further up river. It was marked as is customary with this species on the tibia with non-coded colour rings. Finding the scheme was achieved using an International Wader Study Group PDF file and traced to an old French scheme. This bird an old individual, ringed in October 2001 at Moriban, Brittany.

## **Bar-tailed Godwit**

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### **Individuals identified during 2018: 2**

The first was colour-ringed and initially found on the 1 June, just 16 days after being ringed at Moeze, France. The timing of its arrival during mid-summer was rather bizarre as was its then duration of stay with an additional nine further sightings over a period of 99 days, until last recorded on the 8 September.



*Bar-tailed Godwit, Dawlish Warren, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2018, Lee Collins*

My second was found over the high tide on the 22 September, a handsome bird in full breeding plumage. This didn't have any colour rings, just a metal ring, which in fact proved easier to read than anticipated.

It was a German marked individual, ringed as an adult the previous autumn in Friedrichskoog, Schleswig-Holstein.

## Ringed Plover

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**Individuals identified during 2018:** 3

**Timing:** all in August

My first this year was recorded on the 1<sup>st</sup> August, a juvenile being colour-ringed from Fastensee, Germany. It was ringed 56 days before my observation, the site 1067 kms away and unsurprisingly my account was its first resighting.

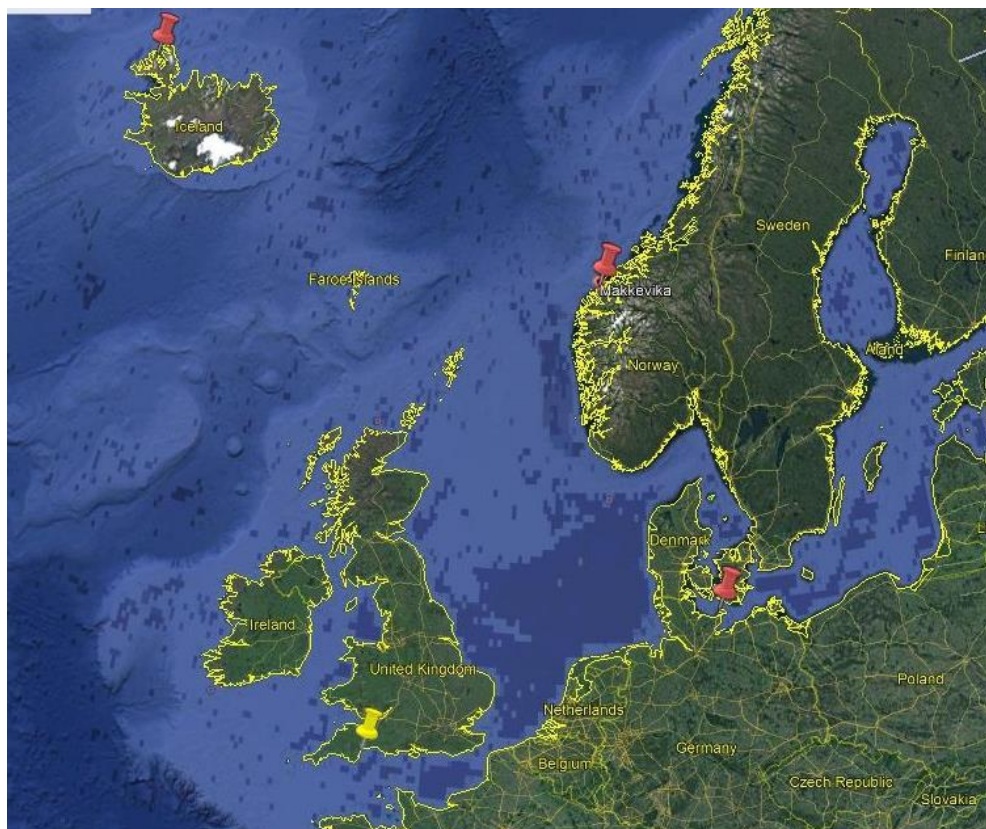
The second followed shortly thereafter, seen on the 7<sup>th</sup>. This bird was also colour-ringed but administered in Flatir, Iceland to an adult female in 2011 whilst incubating. Its life history details an amazing account of breeding site fidelity, noted practically annually around the same vicinity in northwest Iceland. Over the prevailing seven years additional sightings away from its breeding territory are limited to just one observation, this in August 2016 in Portugal.





*Ringed Plover, Dawlish Warren, 7<sup>th</sup> August 2018, Lee Collins*

My third bird was discovered on the 29<sup>th</sup>, this had a coded yellow flag. This immediately pointed towards it being Norwegian ringed (at Makkevika), a scheme from experience that I know well as have seen five such marked birds before. This individual was ringed in 2016 as a juvenile, yet over the 732 days since the rings administered had never been recorded elsewhere.



This now brings the total of marked birds positively identified at Dawlish Warren to twenty, myself accounting for the last sixteen of these between 2013 and 2018.

## Dunlin

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**Individuals identified during 2018: 5**

**Number of positive field reads made in 2018: 11**

A very productive year, January being particularly fruitful. Finding any colour-coded ringed bird remains a challenge, furthermore making a read is likewise somewhat testing.

All were colour-coded ringed birds, migratory **Polish** marked *alpinas* (Fennoscandia/ Siberian breeders) from Ujście Wisły accounting for four of our wintering individuals. It's widely documented that this species displays a strong degree of wintering site fidelity and I would surmise each of these individuals winters annually, three of whom proven to do so with multi-winter observations.



*Dunlin (S55), 6 January 2018, Dawlish Warren, Lee Collins*

My fifth individual, most probably a *schinzii* was noted in mid-September. This coded orange flagged bird ringed just two days prior and 216kms away in Ynyslas, Wales. It representing one of only two noted from this scheme here onsite, the other recorded but not seen by myself in August earlier this year.



## Sanderling

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**Individuals identified during 2018: 1**

**Number of positive field reads made in 2018: 4**

An overall downbeat year, with both spring and autumn passage numbers significantly low. Finding any colour marked individual(s) remain a personal favourite of mine and my 25<sup>th</sup> was found on the morning of 12<sup>th</sup> August. It was rather bizarrely discovered whilst seawatching from the seawall. A momentary lull during atrocious conditions had me scan the beach only to discover this bird within a flock of about 20 Sanderlings. It would stay at five days, last seen on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

Details forthcoming stated it was ringed in **Mauritania**, making this my eighth from this scheme. Caught and ringed as an adult whilst in wintering quarters in February 2017 I can only surmise that it had undergone two mammoth 14,000km round trips to breeding grounds in Greenland and yet had gone unobserved as my accounts of its stay here would constitute its first resighting.

## Stonechat

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My first ever passerine recovery. This was first recorded onsite on the 11<sup>th</sup> January by Alan Keatley, who made a partial read from photos.



I'd first record it four weeks later on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February, gaining a full read and note its presence several times until last seen on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Shortly after this last date I'd tour Thailand and during my absence a spell of cold weather (the beast from the east) either saw the bird seek pastures new or perish.

It was ringed as a nestling at Mansands, some 27kms away on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 2017.