

With This Ring.....

.....it's possible to get a lot of details about a bird. The ring in question being one attached to the bird's leg, either at the nest, or by trapping, and following up the code inscribed on it can tell you much about where the bird originated or where, if not a nestling, it was first ringed, and, often, what its movements were prior to the sighting.

In 2017, there were reports of 36 ringed birds, and the rings were readable in many cases, though not all were followed up for background information. The majority were gulls, which generally have large coloured plastic rings, suitable for bigger legs. This, coupled with the fact that gulls can sometimes be seen at obligingly close range, makes it easier to read the code information. In the case of plastic colour rings, if the details are fed into a user-friendly website (it must be: even I can understand it!), a response will come back with the background. The website is <http://www.cr-birding.org/colourprojects>.

As most of the sightings were of gulls, I'll deal with these first. Black-headed Gulls lead the way, and, perhaps surprisingly, all but one of the birds seen originated on the Continent or Scandinavia. Of the big gulls, three out of the five sightings of Lesser Black-backs were UK birds, all the Herring Gulls had been ringed in England, and the Caspian Gull had a Continental ring. Looking at these in detail:

Black-headed Gull:

The non-UK birds were

Ring No. **JAJ5** (Redcar Tarn 11/1/17 to 14/2/17) Ringed Oslo, Norway, 2016

Ring No. **J1K4** (Redcar Tarn 10/2/17 to 4/3/17) Ringed Oslo, 2016



Injured bird J9M4, rescued by Brian Sumner.



X14C also seen at Ogden Reservoir.

Ring No. **J9M4** (Ogden Reservoir 2/8/17) Ringed Stavanger, Norway

Ring No. **X14C** (Ogden Reservoir 1/11/17) No details

In addition, a Norwegian bird was seen at Harold Park Lake (Low Moor) on 12/12/17. This had also been seen in 2016, and had apparently returned to Norway in the interim. One ringed in Saxony, SE Germany was at Ogden Reservoir on 22/1/17, having been seen there earlier between 25/11 and 23/12/16.

The only local contender was a bird with a small BTO metal ring 36714 (read with much difficulty) at Redcar Tarn on 3/7/17. It had been raised no further away than Upper Barden Reservoir, where it had been ringed as a fledgling in the colony there on 29/6/2003, and at 14 years old, it was still seeing off the other Black-headed for its share of bread.

Lesser Black-backed Gull:

The information on these birds indicates how far-travelled they apparently are.

Ring No. **W1NK** (Fairweather Green, Bradford 10/2/17) Ringed as a nestling at Walney Island, Cumbria in July, 2004, but in the intervening 13 years had been recorded only in Wiltshire in 2004 and Gloucestershire in 2006. During its brief stay in Yorkshire, it was also seen at nearby Brown Royd on February 12.

Ring No. **OT1:C** (Redcar Tarn 11/6/17 to 23/6/17) Ringed as a nestling at Horse Isle, Ardrossan, Scotland on 25/6/16. A month before our sighting it was luxuriating in Spain at A Coruna, Galicia.

Ring No. **J475H** (Redcar Tarn 2/7/17 to 6/8/17) Ringed at Bergen, Norway on 14/8/16. The previous 2017 sighting was at Agadir, Morocco on January 4, despite which it elected to spend over a month at Redcar Tarn.

Ring No. **JAU87** (Redcar Tarn 30/5/17 to 6/6/17) Another Norwegian bird, ringed in the nest at Terncholmen



Lesser Black-backed Gulls OT1:C and JAU87 at Redcar Tarn.

on 18/7/16. Both the Norway birds were of the race *L. f. intermedius*, coinciding with an influx of the more readily identified adults and advanced immature birds around this period.

Ring No. **001:F** (Redcar Tarn 12/6/17 to 20/7/17) Another long-staying bird, ringed in the nest at Inchcolm, Firth of Forth on 5/7/16. The local ringer commented that they get very few subsequent reports of birds ringed at this site.

As can be seen, the birds in their 2nd calendar year, being non-breeders, are more inclined to stay around: that and the abundant supply of Mother's Pride (other brands are available!) at the site.

Herring Gull: Most of the birds seen had been ringed at or near landfill sites, so their precise origins are unknown, though it is probable it was the UK.

Ring No. **GV 32556** (BTO metal ring) (Redcar Tarn 2/2/17 to 6/2/17) One of four Yorkshire-ringed birds and another one to stretch the observer's optics and elderly eyes to breaking point, it had been ringed near Whitby on 17/6/16.

Ring No. **Y747** (Lister Park, Bradford 4 and 5/3/17, and Redcar Tarn 28/4/17) Ringed near York on 7/10/16. Subsequently seen at Hartlepool Headland on June 21

Ring No. **7D3B** (Listerhills, Bradford 29/6/17) Another bird ringed near York: on 1/5/15.

Ring No. **Y:249** (Redcar Tarn 14/3/17) The third York bird, having been ringed there on 26/2/16.

Ring No. **J5KT** (Redcar Tarn 18/3/17) Ringed at Pitsea, Essex on 15/11/14



Herring Gull with metal ring GV 32556

Caspian Gull: A rare bird in the area, with only 12 records, all in recent years, this was the first to confirm its credentials by means of a ring.

Ring No. **X215** (Redcar Tarn 22/10/17) The bird never came to ground, but it was (just) possible to read the ring on a photo of the close-flying bird. It was ringed at the nest at Grabensdorfer See, Brandenburg, Germany on 6/6/16. Remarkably, this wasn't the bird's first excursion to Yorkshire, as it was seen on July 29, 2016 (within a few weeks of fledging) at Ingbirchworth near Penistone. And to maintain the BOG connection, the finder then was former Group stalwart, Mick Cunningham.

Passerines: As if reading plastic rings wasn't difficult enough, the background to two garden visitors in Queensbury was established by managing to make out the small metal leg-rings.

Blackbird: A female present between 19/12/16 and 13/3/17, had been ringed at Saapi (a small island off the west coast of Finland) on 2/9/15.

Brambling: a bird with ring no. **14083761** was seen from 2/2/17 to 13/3/17. It had been ringed in Belgium.

Barnacle Goose: A colour-ringed bird at Warley Moor Reservoir on 16/5/17 originated from Svalbard, Norway, although the ring had apparently been fitted as it wintered on the Solway.

Due to distance and conditions, it won't always be possible to get all the required details from a ring, and Little Ringed Plover, Common Gull and several Yellow-legged Gulls fell into this category. In addition, ringed Mute Swans were seen at Yeadon Tarn and some Bradford parks, but the details weren't followed up, though it is reasonable to assume they were of local background. But, the message has to be if you persevere and follow the details up, it's possible to open up a lot of information on a bird which might otherwise have been thought to be mundane.

And finally.....for those of you who've managed to stay the course and are still awake, a proper photograph taken by a proper photographer of a ringed Osprey in The Gambia in January this year, one of the rewards of tearing yourself away from the dubious pleasures of trying to sort out Siffling from Singing Cisticolas! It turned out to have been ringed at the nest near Ardfarn, Argyll on 10/7/13.

This record is attributable to Keith Allen. The other observers, who persevered with less exotic species in less exotic places, were Mick Cunningham, Ian Hargreaves, Keith Moir, Martyn Priestley, Nigel Priestley, Denise Shields and Brian Sumner. Thanks are due to them all.

Keith Moir.



Osprey (with ring)

photo: Keith Allen



Does the early bird catch the caterpillar?

The time that birds decide to breed has a strong impact upon the likely success of raising their young to independence. Pairs of birds will generally time egg laying to maximise the availability of food for their chicks. However, one of the strongest impacts of climate change so far has been to alter the timing of spring. In response to milder temperatures, flowers and insects are all appearing earlier than they used to. Songbirds struggling to match their timing to the changing climate could be facing population declines.