

The BTO Magazine for Ringers and Nest Recorders



LIFECYCLE

SUMMER 2023 ■ ISSUE 12

FUNDING YOUR FIELDWORK ■

DUNNOCK NEST FINDING ■

50 YEARS AT TRESWELL WOOD

REDSHANK Nest-finding tips



Birds
Science
People

Editorial

ISSUE 12 SUMMER 2023



Welcome to the summer edition of *LifeCycle*. As spring has morphed into summer, and the breeding season is drawing to a close, we hope you have been able to get out and about, participating in your ringing and nest-recording activities without too much disruption this year. Whilst Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza is still present in our seabird colonies, fewer ringing or access restrictions in place will hopefully have allowed more seabird projects to be run and we hope that those of you who did make it to your seabird sites found healthy populations.

In this edition of *LifeCycle*, we celebrate 50 years of monitoring at Treswell Wood in Nottinghamshire and provide the information you will need to find Dunnock and Redshank nests next season. On page 8 we introduce a new duck-ringing project that uses an unusual, and perhaps unexpected, collaborative approach. There is also the first of what we hope will be a new series of articles from postgraduate students talking about their projects that involve ringing or nest recording – please do get in touch if you would like to share the project you are working on in a future edition. This edition also contains an article providing advice and guidance on accessing funding to help alleviate some of the costs of your fieldwork.

It has been lovely for various members of the Ringing & Nest Recording Team to be able to catch up with some of you at the conferences and events that have been held in person again over the past few months. Thank you to the organisers of the Scottish, Irish, Welsh and north-east England conferences for putting on such inspiring events and to everyone who attended, joined us at The Nunnery for our 90th anniversary celebrations or who visited the ringing demonstration at the Global BirdFair.

We would love to hear from you if you have any feedback on the magazine, or would like to contribute to a future edition, so do get in touch!

Ruth Walker & Lee Barber

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LIFECYCLE

THE BTO MAGAZINE FOR RINGERS AND NEST RECORDERS

The Ringing and Nest Record schemes are funded by a partnership of the BTO and the JNCC on behalf of the statutory nature conservation bodies (Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, NatureScot and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland). Ringing is also funded by The National Parks and Wildlife Service (Ireland) and the ringers themselves. The BTO supports ringing and nest recording for scientific purposes and is licensed by the statutory nature conservation bodies to permit bird ringing and some aspects of nest recording. All activities described are undertaken with appropriate licences and following codes of conduct designed to ensure the welfare of birds and their nests is not adversely affected.

CONTACT US

The British Trust for Ornithology is a charity dedicated to researching birds. For membership details please contact: membership@bto.org

British Trust for Ornithology, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU Tel: (01842) 750050
 Website: www.bto.org Email: ringing@bto.org,
nrs@bto.org, ces@bto.org, ras@bto.org
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Lee Barber – email: nrs@bto.org

Ruth Walker – email: ruth.walker@bto.org

Editorial board: Ruth Walker, Lee Barber, Ros Green, Peter Kirmond, Mark Grantham, Justin Walker and Dave Leech.

Layout, design, imagesetting and typesetting: Ruth Walker and Mike Toms.

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NEWS FROM RINGING & NEST RECORDING

MAXIMISING YOUR RINGING

Could you run a Constant Effort Site (CES), Garden CES or Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) scheme project? They are easy to do, provide great structure to your ringing and maximise the value of the data you gather during ringing sessions in the breeding season. CES monitors 24 common songbirds from May to August, using mist nets placed in the same place for the same length of time during 12 sessions, with the aim of catching 200–300 birds a season (c. 20 birds a session or more). Netting duration and start and end time can be decided by you. Garden CES uses similar methodology, but bait can be used, and the desired minimum catch total is lower (c. 100 birds a season). Each RAS project focuses on a single species. The aim is to catch as many adults in a defined area as possible, then re-encounter at least 30–50 ringed individuals each breeding season. Ideally, all projects should run for at least five years; some funding is available for standard CES and RAS projects. For more info see: www.bto.org/ces or www.bto.org/ras and contact Lee Barber at ringing.projects@bto.org to discuss potential projects.

CONTRIBUTING TO ARTICLES

Are you a postgraduate student whose studies feature ringing or nest recording? Does your ringing or nesting group have a project or story you would like to share? Do you have any novel tips for catching or finding a particular species that others could benefit from? If the answer to any of these questions is yes and you would like to write or contribute to an article in a future edition, we would love to hear from you. Please contact Ruth Walker: ruth.walker@bto.org

GRANTS FOR NEW RINGERS

For many years, thanks to donations from generous individuals wanting to support newer ringers, we have been able to offer grants of up to

£200 to T- or C-permit holders who are not currently in paid work, or are on a low income, to enable them to continue ringing. The funds have supported numerous ringers, mostly with the purchase of nets and ringing equipment, but are now running low. If anyone would like to make a donation to enable the fund to continue, please contact Ruth Walker: ruth.walker@bto.org

NEW BTO STRATEGY

At the beginning of May BTO launched its new strategy, setting out how the organisation is going to drive positive change for birds and people. Our long-term partnership between volunteer observers and professional staff has afforded us a deep understanding of birds in a changing world. Against a backdrop of climate change and biodiversity loss, we need to do more with our wealth of data, knowledge and expertise. Remaining rooted in science, we will be more solution-focused and more assertive in our recommendations, empowering more people from across society in our work and fostering a strong sense of belonging for all. Find out more about what the new strategy will deliver at: strategy.bto.org

PAPER OR DIGITAL

If you would like to change how you receive *LifeCycle* (or *Ringing & Migration* if you receive that) you can do so via your 'My BTO' account on the BTO website. Once logged into 'My BTO' (using the same login details as for DemOn and other BTO surveys), find the 'My Subscriptions' section on the left-hand side of the page and click on 'Ringing Journals and Magazines'. You will then be able to specify whether you wish to receive the publications as a digital copy only or both digitally and on paper.

SOCIAL MEDIA

When posting about ringing or nest recording on social media, especially



BTO strategy animation still: Will Rose

during the continued outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in wild birds, please remember to contextualise posts to avoid concerned members of the public misinterpreting images. Adding text along the lines of 'All birds monitored/handled/ringed under BTO licence following strict avian influenza guidelines' to posts, or in your bio, should help to avoid concerns being raised. The BTO's Social Media Guidelines for ringers and nest recorders has more information about good practice when using social media to promote the schemes: www.bto.org/social-media-ringing-guidance

BTO PROMISES AND POLICIES

A new webpage shares the BTO's values and what anyone connecting with the BTO can expect from us. Respect and integrity are at the heart of these promises and we expect them to be fulfilled by anyone working for or on behalf of BTO (this includes anyone undertaking BTO surveys, including participants in the Ringing and Nest Record schemes). It is also a practical resource where you can find all of our policies, including: Safeguarding; Compliments, Comments and Complaints; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; and Sustainability. To view our Promises and Policies visit: www.bto.org/about-bto/promises-and-policies

50 million and counting

The BTO Ringing Scheme passed a bit of a milestone in autumn 2022. Since its founding in 1909, thousands of ringers (we're now up to permit number 7095) have collectively ringed over 50 million birds! We crunched some numbers and, give or take a few birds, worked out that the 50-millionth bird to be ringed by the BTO Ringing Scheme was RY06806. Lucy Mitchell takes up the story.



Blue Tit, Greenfinch, by Dawn Baimer; Great Tit, by David Tipling / BTO; Blackbird, by Lee Barber; Swallow, Edmund Fellowes / BTO

The five most-ringed species are Blue Tit (4,922,652), Great Tit (2,509,546), Greenfinch (2,398,797), Swallow (2,259,177) and Blackbird (2,246,478).

The bird was an adult Redwing, one of two I caught that day and the only Redwings I've caught since ringing here. The site is a small patch of wet-meadow-type habitat on a farm, about four miles inland of the north coast of Scotland, close to Thurso.

I only moved here in October 2021 and had waited to see what the weather and bird life was like before setting up some nets. Through the first winter and spring here I saw Short-eared Owls, Hen Harriers and lots of thrushes and finches. The clincher was when I saw Stonechats feeding young just 50 metres from my house: then I knew I needed to get ringing.

The patch of wet meadow sits within a cropped field, often full of beef cattle and sheep during the spring and summer months. I set up two nets next to some Alder trees and close to some hawthorn which appeared to be natural attractants to the farm's large Greenfinch and Goldfinch populations. I caught these, along with Reed Buntings and Meadow Pipits, in large numbers until late October, when the weather turned and our winter visitors appeared. I started to see large numbers of Fieldfares and continental Blackbirds with their dusty

grey flanks piling over the hill that lies to the north of my house, presumably having hit the coast and moved inland. From here the mix of birds I was catching changed quickly.

Then on the 29th of October I caught two Redwings – one of which turns out to be the milestone bird – 50 million! These wonderful birds fly thousands of miles to escape the winter on their breeding grounds and catching them, probably quite soon after arrival, really helps you to appreciate the wonder of migration.

REDWING RECORDS

Almost 500,000 Redwings have been ringed since 1909, with the best year being 2019, when 20,915 were ringed; perhaps once word of the legendary 'Latvian lure' spread!

The Highland region has an interesting split in Redwing recoveries. Of the 16 foreign-ringed Redwings found in Highland, 13 have originated in Iceland (of the *coburni* race), with others from Finland, Norway and Belgium. Of birds ringed in Highland, 18 have been found abroad, including three in each of France, Spain and Iceland and even one in Italy.



The 50-millionth bird to be ringed, by Lucy Mitchell



Dunnock nest in Gorse.

Dunnock nest finding

Dunnocks are the quintessential 'little brown jobs' of the bird world. This secretive, skulking bird can easily be overlooked, but its often complex breeding habits makes this a fascinating study species. Dunnocks can be monogamous, form polyandrous or polygamous trios or even polygynandrous quartets! In this article, Mark Dadds, Jack Daw, Rob Hubble, Mark Lawrence and Stella Tracey share their tips and experiences of finding the nests of this Amber-listed passerine.

WHERE TO LOOK

Dunnocks nest in a variety of habitats including gardens, parkland, woodland, open field hedgerows, heather moorland (up to 500–700 m altitude) and scrub; as long as there is suitable cover, the majority of habitats can be used. Garden birds almost always use evergreen shrubs, hedges or small dense trees and, in all cases, the denser the foliage the better. Moorland birds tend to use bramble and European Gorse. Gorse is evergreen and is used earlier in the season whereas bramble is not normally used until the leaves are well advanced. In both cases, however, the vegetation needs to be fairly dense.

In both garden and moorland habitats there is a distinct preference for shrubs that are part of a larger colony of vegetation, so dense garden-shrub borders or swathes of Gorse or bramble on the moor. Another feature of moorland sites is the presence of Bracken, i.e. last year's dead Bracken that grew up through the shrubs making them even denser and providing extra structure.

Woodlands can also be suitable for Dunnock as most have well-vegetated edges with brambles, Gorse and Blackthorn.

Dunnocks will be present and breeding within any woodland habitat where there is some thick low vegetation.

Nests tend to be near the top of the shrub or hedge but still well hidden by a dense top layer of foliage. Although they can nest up to four metres, they are not usually very high off the ground and they may even be on the ground. Nests can be located quite far into the vegetation, depending on what they are situated in. They are easy enough to find in Gorse, but bramble can be difficult, especially during the latter part of the season.

WHEN TO LOOK

As with most species, the weather in late winter and early spring can influence the timing of breeding. Some males will start to sing, indicating that they are on a territory, in February and breeding can begin as early as mid-March, although the majority of first nesting attempts will occur during April and May. Dunnocks are double-, occasionally triple-brooded and second or third breeding attempts can occur as late as August or September if the weather is suitable.

BONUS NESTS

Dunnock nesting sites are also preferred by several other species, meaning cold searching will often reveal other nests. Linnet, Yellowhammer, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Whitethroat, Lesser Redpoll, Robin, Song Thrush and Blackbird can all be located while searching for Dunnock, and vice versa.



Dunnock chicks showing their bright orange mouths.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Dunnock nests are often quite large, albeit with a small cup. Nests are usually made of a platform of loose twigs which is then packed with moss. The nest cup can be lined with hair, grass, a few feathers or just moss. A telltale dribble of moss where it wouldn't naturally be is often a clue to the precise location of the nest.

Dunnock nests are quite distinctive, although at the early stages of nest building can be confused with Blackbird or Song Thrush nests, but it quickly becomes evident that a smaller bird is involved when an outline of the cup becomes visible. The sky-blue eggs in a nest of that size and structure in an evergreen shrub would imply Dunnock but if Lesser Redpolls are around, look out for the white sheep's wool with which that species often lines its nest.

Nests are normally well supported in vegetation or attached to bramble or twigs. Old nests can be found during winter months when leaves are gone, and the vegetation has died back, and they can remain in situ for several years. Dunnocks often have one infertile egg left in the nest after fledging and this can still be visible in empty winter nests. A brood of four chicks or more will very often flatten the nest before fledging.

NRS CODE OF CONDUCT

Locating and observing nests should not jeopardise their safety. All observers must exercise a sense of responsibility, always putting the bird's interests first to avoid accidental damage, desertion or attracting predators to the nest. The NRS Code of Conduct provides more information on how to monitor nests safely: www.bto.org/nrs-coc

HOW TO LOOK

For most species, study behaviour is helpful and can save time. For instance, calls used when the young have already fledged are generally more insistent and louder than when you are too near an incubating bird. Males start to sing early (February/March) and usually have a few favoured song posts within about 50 metres of each other close to suitable nest sites. It is usually better to watch for some potential nest activity rather than go tapping or searching straight away. Watch for an individual or a pair nearby, a bird(s) visiting particular areas of vegetation with material (or food later on) or mating or wing-fluttering behaviour.

Watch or listen for clear changes in behaviour; for example, less singing or a high-pitched alarm call. The females are very secretive and often approach and leave a nest low to the ground using all available cover, so she may be incubating before you realise it. If a female is seen going into the nest shrub, she will often enter well below or above the actual nest then move up, down or sideways once inside. As she can also leave very carefully, other parts of the shrub from where she emerged may need to be investigated. When young are in the nest, the peeping call of the adults can give away a likely area. The piercing alarm call can give clues to the status of the nest – if it is particularly loud or insistent it may indicate that the young are out of the nest, especially if both birds are alarming.

Once a nest shrub has been identified, use a stick or pole to lightly tap around the area that seems most likely, but be alert to the slightest sound or movement as they are just as sneaky when leaving the nest as when they arrive. Care must be taken when eggs are being laid, or when fresh, as birds can desert nests when they have been found at this stage. Desertion is more common when the first nests are being produced, allowing them enough time to have a replacement brood. Pairs with later nests containing fresh eggs tend to be more tolerant of visits to the nests as they are running out of time to produce another nesting attempt.

Dunnock chicks can be prone to fledging prematurely once they reach the feathers large (FL) stage, so great care should be taken if approaching a nest in the latter

stages of the nesting attempt. If young have already fledged a nest, this can easily be identified by the feather sheath material and droppings in the cup; the young will also have flattened the nest cup. The young will generally be close by, and the adults will be alarming.

Female Dunnocks are fairly site-faithful so once a nest has been located, it is worth keeping an eye on the same piece of vegetation later in the season or indeed in following seasons. A second or third brood would normally use a new nest but in the same vicinity, often no more than a metre away. On occasion, nests can be reused if the nest is predated at the egg stage.

RINGING PULLI

Ideally, Dunnock pulli should be ringed at around five to seven days old, when still in pin (IP). When removing pulli from the nest, note which way they are facing and replace them to match. Adults generally approach from only a couple of directions and the young will be positioned to face the direction of approach. Chicks ringed when at feathers small (FS) stage will be harder to replace in the nest.

UNUSUAL OBSERVATION

Mark Dadds recounts what is thought to be a very unusual occurrence in relation to Dunnock nests. ‘On one occasion, a known nest I revisited at the egg incubation stage initially appeared to be empty. There were in fact four eggs that had been covered over with the nest lining. In my experience with passerines, I only expect to see this in tit nests. The covered eggs were warm and subsequently at least two of them hatched. So maybe it’s worth checking apparently empty nests a little more closely.’

Dunnock: nest-recording profile

Resident. Often commonest in big gardens, churchyards and parks, rural or urban, where hedges, shrubberies or other low cover with lawns or open ground; in farm hedgerows (especially both sides of lanes), scrub, heaths, commons, woodland edges, clearings; also rocky islands, bracken slopes, heather moorland to 500–700 m. May be solitary (monogamous), but mating just as often complex, with polyandrous or polygamous trios and polygynandrous quartets regular. Nesting groups of 5–6 also occur, involving 2–3 males.

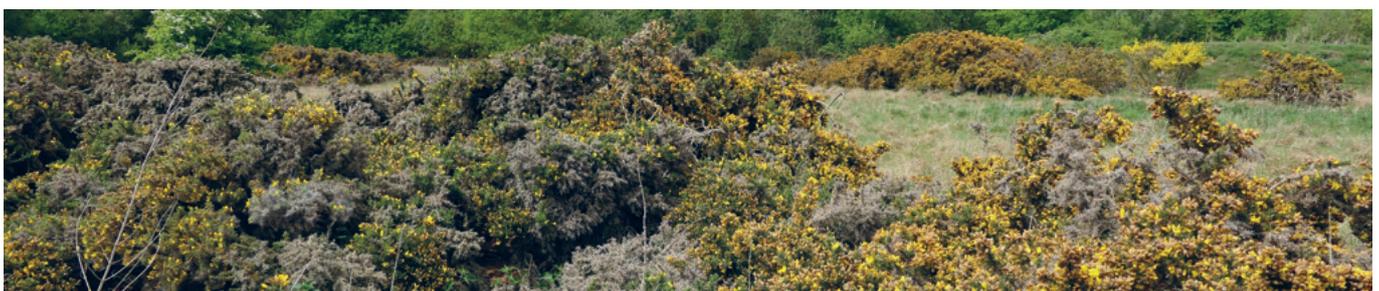
Site: At 15–150 cm (0–4 m) in almost any bush, hedge, small tree or climber, or in dense tangle of brambles, nettles and dead bracken or brashings; sometimes in old nest of other bird (e.g. thrush), low tree cavity or side of bank, even on ground.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
E												
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Nest: Substantial cup of moss, roots, grass, on foundation of twigs; lined moss, wool, hair, sometimes feathers.

Eggs: Bright blue. Laid daily; incubation from last (or day after).

Broods: 2 (3), **Eggs:** 4–5 (3–6), **Incubation:** 11–12 (–17) days, **Hatching to fledging:** 12 (11–17) days.



Text adapted from BTO's A Field Guide to Monitoring Nests. Dunnock eggs, by Mike Toms; Dunnock, by Paul Hillion / BTO

Dunnock nesting habitat, by Mike Toms



The team picking up after a catch, by Heather Warrender

The team picking up after a successful Wigeon catch.

Duck ringing in Britain and Ireland

The capture of duck species for bird ringing, whether that be a dawn cannon-net catch of Wigeon or checking duck traps, is always a thrill. Duck ringing in Britain and Ireland has quite a history and much of the BTO's duck-ringing totals come from years of intensive trapping and ringing by the duck-ringing network led by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT). Kane Brides, Heather Warrender and Robin Owen explain how collaborative approaches are being used to expand the monitoring of duck populations.

Sir Peter Scott, the founder of WWT (originally known as the Wildfowl Trust) was an avid wildfowler who later turned his hand to the capture of wildfowl species for further study, leading to thousands of ducks being ringed over the years. The number of ducks being ringed has reduced over the last decade and, with changes to our wintering duck populations, it is now more important than ever to be collecting data to help inform the demographic drivers of these population declines.

So why are fewer ducks being ringed today? Firstly, there are fewer ducks wintering in Britain and Ireland than there once were, with the so-called 'short stopping' phenomenon now seeing birds wintering further east than they traditionally used to, closer to their breeding grounds. Duck decoys (large, netted, funnel-like traps), once used to provide food and to capture ducks for ringing, have mostly fallen into disrepair or been removed, and WWT ringing activities have been scaled back due to reprioritising of work areas. On

average, approximately 3,000 ducks are now ringed by BTO ringers annually, compared to 7,000 in the 1980s.

Given the decline in duck-ringing effort, we must explore new ways to increase annual ringing totals and to also include biometric data collection, all while being mindful of additional threats posed, such as by Avian Influenza. Project Penelope, an initiative launched during the winter of 2021, is a collaboration between ringers, wildfowlers and scientists working on Wigeon. The project, led by the Waterfowlers' Network, links teams working in Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Britain and Ireland, and builds upon previous work to improve our knowledge of annual migration, site fidelity and survival. Metal and colour rings – and in some cases GPS tags – have been funded by the Wildlife Habitat Charitable Trust, the Danish Hunters' Fund for Nature, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland.

In Britain, over 40 ringers from the Highlands of Scotland to Kent

are contributing to the study. In some areas, such as on the Ribble Estuary in Lancashire, ringers and wildfowlers are attending cannon-net catches together. The project is a great example of two communities coming together for the further study of a species, building bridges and working collaboratively. To date over 900 Wigeon have been colour-marked as part of Project Penelope and resightings of these birds have been received not only in Britain, but also from the Netherlands and Belarus (only the 11th record). The project organisers are keen to increase the number of birds marked, particularly in the south-east of England and in Ireland. Any ringers interested in getting involved with the project should contact Kane Brides: kanebrides@gmail.com

THE AMERICAN WAY

Perhaps there is something to be learnt about how other countries ring and study ducks! In America, duck-banding effort is championed by wildfowlers who actively catch, ring and release

several thousand ducks each year. Such banding projects are seen as long-standing cooperative research projects between wildfowl biologists, managers of wildfowl populations and wildfowlers themselves. In return, considerable information is gathered to help us understand in greater detail wildfowl populations, hunter behaviour, age and sex classes, species-specific survival, harvest rate, crippling loss (the number of birds killed but not retrieved) and the origin of the harvest. All these data help set season and harvest bag limits more effectively, ensuring healthy duck populations for the future.

Wildfowling, whether we agree with it or not, will continue, but how do we ensure that numbers taken remain sustainable and don't have population-scale impacts? Perhaps it is time for such a scheme in Europe, where ringing data are contributing to and informing annual harvest limits?

A WILDFOWLER PERSPECTIVE

'When I was contacted in June 2021 by a local reserve warden and asked to help with the ringing of some 400 Barnacle Geese, I was not really sure what to expect. Being someone who has spent most winters for the last 20 years hunting migratory wildfowl alone on the saltmarsh, I was apprehensive on how I would be looked upon. Little did I know how much common ground I and the other members at the catch shared. Briefing done and the tricky job of corralling the birds into pens complete, the fun and hard work began. These types of days should be advertised as team-building courses! The morning flew past. Before long the last of the caught geese were having their biometrics taken, before being released, awaiting the sightings to roll in. Looking around the group, I saw smiles and a real sense of achievement collecting scientific data and in a proactive way. I left the day wanting more.

Into the winter months some of our ringed Barnacle Geese had moved away. Then it happened, snippets of



Colour-ringed Wigeon, by Scott Petrek

Wigeon marked as part of Project Penelope will have either a blue ring with two yellow characters or a green ring with two white characters, as well as a metal ring.

sightings were recorded and shared within the group. Photos of rings seen, dots plotted on maps, lines drawn, movement, habits, a picture, a story of our Barnies! I've always been aware of bird movements, studying feeding areas and flight lines but this, on a national scale, plotted in single-bird detail was to me, next level! Bird ringing, fieldwork, science being used for the betterment of all species, not just wildfowl. I was hooked and keen to find out more.

It was not until I'd got involved that I realised what ringing can achieve and the information it can bring about. Not only should wildfowlers be encouraged to report rings from harvested birds, but to work with ringers in collaboration to increase the number of birds ringed. Project Penelope is a great example of a changing outlook in the shooting world and is leading the way.

Negative press would have us believe working together for a better future for all our native and migratory species is totally off limits. My experience has proved to me we can, and really should work together at every opportunity. Trust and friendships have formed and the willingness to pass on expertise has

bowled me over. The result has been joining the BTO officially and I'm proud to say I'm now a trainee ringer. I haven't ended wildfowling yet, but I definitely reach for the pliers more often than not given the chance.'

Robin Owen

THE FUTURE ...

Wildfowlers often have access to sites frequented by duck species, sites that perhaps may otherwise be unavailable, and they not only can help with site access but can also assist with receiving and baiting sites prior to catching. These opportunities and collaborations could be a way of increasing future duck-ringing activities and should be thought about in future duck-ringing programmes. If you are interested in collaborating with a local wildfowling group, please get in touch with Heather (heather.warrener@basc.org) to explore options further.

For more information on the colour-marking schemes used for Project Penelope, or to report sightings, please visit: waterbirdcolourmarking.org



Kittiwake nests in Pyramiden, Svalbard, by Stephanie Harris

Kittiwakes nest on the window ledges of abandoned buildings in Pyramiden, Svalbard. The birds moved in as the humans started to vacate the town in the mid-1990s. Since then, hundreds of Kittiwakes return to Pyramiden each year to breed.

Kittiwakes with personality

My non-birdy partner tells new people that my job title is ‘professional kittywinkle botherer’. Although I object to hearing my PhD journey reduced to this highly inaccurate description, I appreciate that, from the outside looking in, my project does contain an element of the absurd. My name is Fionnuala McCully and I wrote this article to set the record straight, but I also hope that it adequately celebrates the importance of bird ringing in behavioural research.

SEGULS WITH ‘PERSONALITY’

I am a member of the Seabird Ecology Group at the University of Liverpool (SEGUL) which is dedicated to the study and conservation of seabirds around the world. We understand the immense value of bird ringing to scientific research and many SEGUL members are actively involved in monitoring schemes on both a national and an international level. My project involves ringing Arctic-dwelling Kittiwakes at our field site in Pyramiden, Svalbard.

Every summer, this eerie, former-Soviet ghost town plays host to hundreds of breeding Kittiwakes which nest on the abandoned buildings. Here, under the leadership of our principal investigator Dr Samantha Patrick and with support from the Norwegian Polar Institute, SEGUL investigates how the Kittiwakes’ ‘personalities’ influence their interactions with the world around them. But what is animal personality and what role does bird ringing play in this research?

In ecology, the term ‘personality’ describes how individual animals differ in their behaviour. For example, they may vary in their response to threats or willingness to

explore new opportunities. Bolder animals might engage in risky behaviours (like foraging in predator-dense areas), while shyer individuals are more likely to play it safe. In seabirds, an explosion of studies has revealed that personality impacts a huge range of factors including foraging strategy, mate choice, reproductive success ... the list goes on.

But here’s the catch; in order to investigate the significance of personality, you must be able to tell individuals apart. Multiple tests are required to assess consistency of results and we often need multiple years of data to discover how a bird’s personality influences its life. As Kittiwakes spend most of their time at sea, we have to identify the birds every time they return to land to breed.

So, thank goodness for bird ringing. It is invaluable to our research because it allows us to keep tabs on the same individuals year upon year. Once the birds are back on land, we catch them and record their identity. We can then repeatedly test their personality and reliably monitor factors like breeding success and partnership duration.

THE DEATH OF 'THE PLAN'

This is where my project comes in. I think it is fair to label my PhD field season as 'hard won'. At the beginning, in October 2019, I had a well-defined, meticulously organised plan. 'The Plan' was that my PhD would centre around data which I would collect from Pyramiden in 2020 and 2021. During two intensive field seasons of ringing and tagging I would investigate if birds of varying personality type differed in their parental-care strategy. 'The Plan' was beautiful ... and yet COVID-19 showed it an absolute lack of respect.

In true PhD tradition, I adapted 'The Plan' to account for circumstances beyond my control. I cannot in good conscience recommend planning an Arctic field season during a pandemic, but I eventually arrived in Svalbard in June 2021. Over nine days we caught 260 Kittiwakes, 147 of which were unringed. 2021 saw record numbers of breeding pairs and birds processed. This was excellent news for me, as COVID-induced time constraints meant that 2021 would be my only field season.

RINGING IN THE CHANGES

It soon became apparent that the long-term information gathered through bird ringing was key to the (impending) success of my PhD. Apart from tackling

my original questions on the influence of personality on parental-care behaviour, another opportunity revealed itself as I combed through the data. As well as personality information, our ringing efforts also revealed which birds were partnered together across the years. It was delightful to look back through our records and see ringed birds returning to breed on the same nest, with the same partner, every year. It was even more fascinating to encounter a 'divorce', i.e. when two ringed birds that were previously mates aligned with new partners in the subsequent season. This made me wonder: what is causing these divorces? Maybe a clash of personality, poor breeding success or both? I hope to address this question in my thesis, which is currently a work in progress. One thing is certain, without sustained ringing efforts to confirm who is who, these patterns would have gone unseen.

As I enter the final stages of my PhD, I can reflect on what a privilege it was to conduct fieldwork during this restricted time and to survey birds in this remarkable (if somewhat spooky) place. I may never return to Pyramiden, so should you ever find yourself in an abandoned Soviet mining colony at 78° north, be sure to wave at the Kittiwakes on my behalf, especially if they're wearing a ring.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr Samantha Patrick, all SEGUL members and the Norwegian Polar Institute for their invaluable support. We appreciate funding from the Natural Environment Research Council Adapting to the Challenges of a Changing Environment Doctoral Training Partnership and the Norwegian Research Council's Arctic Field Grant.

How do you measure a Kittiwake's personality?

Because the Pyramiden Kittiwakes nest on buildings, they can be accessed from below. We use 'novel object tests' to measure each bird's personality. We attach an object (Butch, the plastic penguin) to the end of a pole, present it to each bird for one minute and film its response to the 'intruder'. Bolder birds will be less perturbed by Butch and will not budge from their nest. In contrast, shyer birds will react more strongly, e.g. by standing up. We then catch each bird and match their novel object test to their ring number. We also mark their heads so we can tell parents apart when they are incubating!

Analysing the personality videos in tandem with our ringing effort allows us to determine each Kittiwake's boldness level and monitor how this affects them throughout their lives.



Kittiwakes with marked heads, by Stephanie Harris; Kittiwake with 'Butch', by Fionnuala McCully



TWIG with John McMeeking, by John Clark

John McMeeking (front, sitting) and the Treswell Wood Integrated Population Monitoring Group.

Treswell Wood: the first 50 years

Treswell Wood was the first large woodland reserve of the Nottinghamshire Trust for Nature Conservation, now Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (NWT). John McMeeking was heavily involved in the purchase negotiations for the 48-hectare wood and immediately began a programme of ringing. This article, written by John Clark and Chris du Feu, with contributions by Paul Eady and Joe Smith, charts the 50-year history of monitoring in the wood.

John's first visit to Treswell Wood was on 16 December 1972 with the aim of 'recording what was there'. He hoped that, eventually, there 'might be a paper in it'. John, however, had plans beyond just ringing – breeding-territory recording and nest-box installation. Common Birds Census (CBC) began in 1973 and by 1978 John had explored the wood sufficiently to select 'standard sites' for constant-effort work. These seven sites spread around the wood were, and still are, each netted for five hours five times throughout the year. This operation forms the basis of the ringing in the wood and gives year-to-year comparable data. In 1979 a nest-box programme began to complete the integrated population monitoring. About 200 boxes throughout the wood are monitored weekly during the breeding season.

Birds do not exist in isolation, so any study of them must include things that interact with them. John therefore encouraged recording of other things: weather, habitat management, other species and anything else which might be relevant.

The first paper from the group came in 1991: 'Does constant effort netting

measure juvenile abundance?' This gave hard evidence to support an underlying assumption of CES methodology, then in its infancy. The paper was subsequently presented at a conference of the US Fish & Wildlife Service evaluating the US nascent constant-effort monitoring system MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship).

DATA SHARING

John realised that the strength of the work lay in systematic recording and thorough curation of the data. He was keen that the data be made available for research. The group lacked sufficient expertise in scientific analysis but have worked with several universities leading to published papers, student dissertations and (very importantly) have been able to introduce students to ringing. Computerisation of all the data (ringing, nest recording, CBC, habitat and species records) back to the start of the project has played an important part in enabling this co-operation. The data, and an extensive library of fixed-point pictures of the wood as well as ageing and sexing pictures are now held 'in the cloud'.

REFERENCES

- Peach, W. *et al.* (1995) Site tenacity and survival rates of Wrens *Troglodytes troglodytes* and Treecreepers *Certhia familiaris* in a Nottinghamshire wood. *Ibis* 137, 497–507.
- du Feu, C. & McMeeking, J. (1991) Does constant effort netting measure juvenile abundance? *Ringing & Migration* 12, 118–123.

The Treswell Wood Ringing Group, was registered with the Ringing Unit in 1997 and shortly became an Integrated Population Monitoring Group (TWIG) in order to include the vital CBC territory recorders. In 1995 the first newsletter was produced; TWITTER (Treswell Wood Information To Tell Every Recorder). The newsletter is still produced every 10 weeks, coinciding with the completion of a cycle of standard site visits, and is circulated digitally.

CBC SURVEYS

The national BTO-led CBC scheme ran between 1962 and 2000. This was superseded by the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) in order to capture a wider geographical representation of bird numbers. However, greater coverage comes at the cost of less-intensive monitoring per site. Therefore, the CBC was continued at Treswell to provide a more detailed, fine-grained representation of abundance and diversity within the confines of the wood. Such detail allows the effects of local-scale woodland management on bird communities to be monitored. The CBC relies on a team of volunteers to record all observations of birds, using standard codes for behaviour (e.g. singing), while walking predetermined routes through specific areas of the wood at least eight times during the spring and summer. Each volunteer's maps are collated and converted to territory maps using the standard CBC rules.

This process, which has been running since 1973, has resulted in data for over 40 species of bird. Sadly (although importantly) some of our CBC territory records reflect national trends. For example, the wood supported around eight Turtle Dove territories in the mid to late 1970s, dwindling through the 1980s with the last observation being recorded in 2003. The CBC data allow us to monitor bird populations in relation to local management practices, such as the amount and age of coppice, and to compare trends observed in the woodland with regional and national trends. For example, the Mistle Thrush population has increased over time in Treswell Wood but declined regionally, while Whitethroat has increased regionally,



John McMeeking in his younger years, photograph courtesy of TWIG

but remains somewhat occasional within the wood. The data are also used by university students as an exemplar of the value of long-term data sets in addressing questions about population fluctuations and the impacts of environmental change on populations and ecological communities.

SPECIES CHANGES

Over the 50 years we have seen many changes in species composition with similar pictures painted by ringing, CBC and casual observations. Most changes are largely explained by regional changes. We have lost Nightingales and Willow Tits but seen colonisation by Nuthatches, Sparrowhawks and Buzzards. Dunnock and Song Thrush have declined, whereas Great Spotted Woodpecker has increased. One puzzling exception is the Marsh Tit. Our population became extinct during the hard winter of 1978/79, eventually recovered and now is at least stable, unlike the falling national population. To understand more about the species, we are using PIT tags to record visits to feeding stations at opposite ends of the wood and hope to use tag readers on their nest boxes.

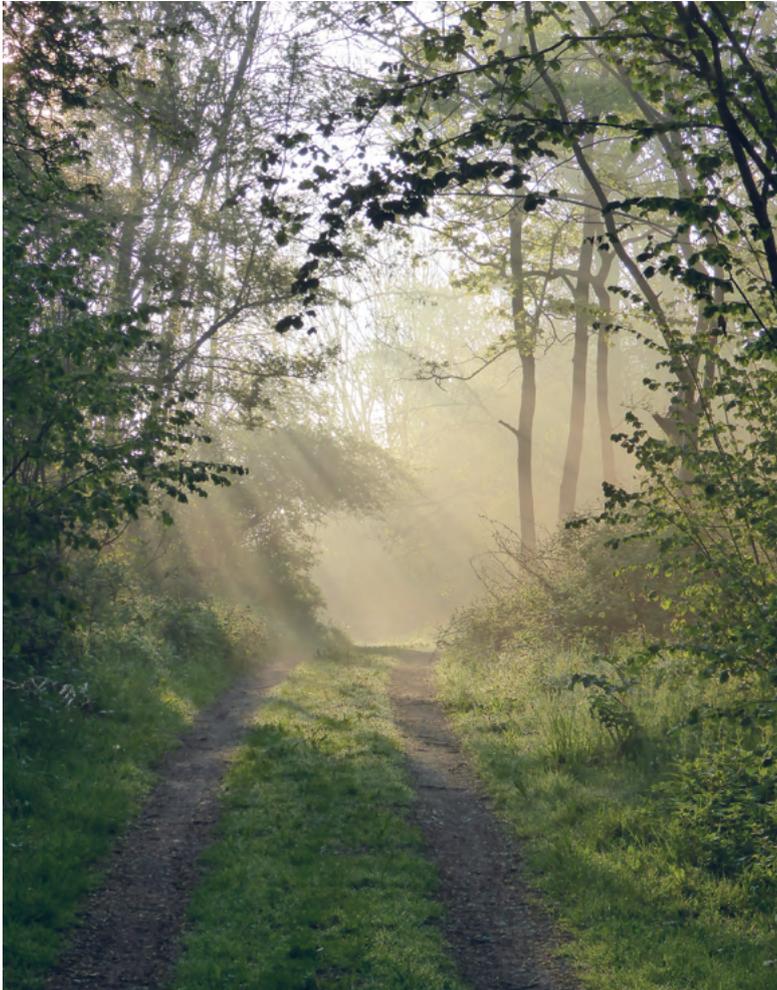
Typically, we record around 2,500 bird encounters annually, about half of which are recaptures. Through this high recapture rate

TWIG

We have a diverse group of people including some younger ringers who are vital for the future of the Ringing Scheme. Our newest recruit has just completed his degree and has started a career in environmental consultancy. He writes:

'I first started ringing at Treswell Wood in July 2022 having never done any ringing before. From my first visit I was made welcome by all the members of the group. Everyone is very friendly, very knowledgeable about the ringing they do, and it is very evident that they really care for the birds of Treswell Wood. From the start I saw how much everyone enjoys sharing their knowledge, skills, and expertise. I feel that with each visit to the wood my understanding, knowledge and skills are improving. As I carry on learning, I hope that in time I will be able to train and encourage other new ringers. Ringing has allowed me the privilege to see these birds much more closely than would otherwise be possible, while also contributing towards the BTO's national monitoring work.'

Treswell Wood, by John Clark



More about the group and the current issue of TWITTER can be found on our website at: www.treswellwoodipmg.org

we handle many birds of known age. This is very helpful in improving our own ageing of problem species. The advent of digital photography has made this much simpler, and we now have multiple pictures of the same birds in juvenile and adult plumages. We have contributed to the understanding of ageing of Great Spotted Woodpeckers and are building a library of photographs of Treecreeper and Robin wings. The strength of the long-term systematic data set was shown in our analysis of Wren and Treecreeper survival. Wrens suffer high mortality in cold winters but, after the massive effects of winter are removed, the data showed that there is density dependence. For Treecreepers, even with far fewer individuals caught, the analysis revealed it is the combination of cold and wet winter conditions which is the problem (Peach *et al.* 1995).

NESTING

The nest records from 1979 onwards reveal an advancement of about 10 days in the laying date to the present day. There has been a huge increase in Stock Dove nests in large boxes, with a single nest being recorded in 1979, increasing to 30 nests in 2022. To complement the tit nest recording we started frass recording for Ken Smith’s project examining the timing of tit nesting and the caterpillar crop on which they depend. (‘Frass’ is the name used for caterpillar droppings and the mass of frass collected is a proxy measure for caterpillar abundance.) At present it seems that tit behaviour is sufficiently plastic to cope with the changing timing of seasons. We have also seen how the caterpillar crop on Ash (the dominant tree in the wood) is very poor indeed compared to that on Oak.

However, not everything goes to plan. We have tried various designs of Treecreeper nest boxes without success. A five-year trial of nest boxes for Nuthatches (higher and with larger holes than our standard small box) was successful for Great Tits, and we ended it when a Nuthatch nested in one of the smaller, low boxes. Little Owl boxes put up in the hope of attracting them from the adjacent farmland also attracted Great Tits who nearly filled the large boxes with nesting material.

WHERE NOW?

The canopy of Treswell Wood is dominated by Ash, and most mature trees are now infected with Ash dieback. Very few saplings survive beyond three or four years. As other tree species fill the gaps left by dying Ash, it will be interesting to see how this affects the species using the wood. Our comprehensive recording, including fixed-point photography, will help to document this.

The NWT has bought four hectares of farmland adjacent to the wood: The Assart. We are already doing CBC surveys of the area and have started ringing activity perhaps to extend our year-round constant-effort scheme. We are also surveying the tree growth annually. Without Ash dieback, the area would now be undesirable Ash monoculture. Instead, we have a pleasingly developing diverse woodland.

RIN: Looking forward

In the last edition of *LifeCycle* (Issue 11, pages 30–34), we introduced you to the new Chair and members of the Ringing Committee (RIN). Previous RIN papers have explained the governance and function of RIN (RIN:APR21:ITEM6; RIN:OCT21:ITEM5) so the Committee thought now would be a good time to talk about its future plans. In this article, RIN member Peter Kirmond presents the results of discussions held during the February 2023 meeting.



Looking out to sea, by Katherine Booth Jones

The Ringing Scheme operates as part of the wider BTO/JNCC Partnership, which includes other core surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey and the Wetland Bird Survey, and developments to the Scheme's aims and processes are managed via regular meetings between these two organisations. JNCC represents the Country Agencies (SNCBs) in these discussions and the SNCB Licensing Teams also meet with BTO directly four times each year. RIN is a non-executive subcommittee of the BTO Board, meaning it has no formal power to make decisions but rather provides an extremely useful 'view from the volunteers' that staff are then able to feed into internal discussions and those held with the government bodies.

BTO takes recommendations from RIN very seriously and, if they are affordable and in the best interests of the Ringing Scheme, is likely to implement them. Likewise, many changes or improvements being proposed by BTO are discussed by RIN first and are often modified or even shelved if thought to be unacceptable to ringers. The 'sweet spots' which we aim to focus on are the things which make the Scheme more robust and valuable from a BTO and conservation perspective and, at

the same time, will make ringers' lives better and more interesting.

First, we are addressing the running of the Committee itself. The twin pandemics (COVID-19 and now HPAI) along with continuing BTO staffing issues and workload overload have, amongst many other things, led to RIN meeting delays, the delayed appearance of agendas and papers before meetings and further delays to the publication of minutes following them. As many people know, this has led to the resignation of several ringer-elected RIN members, which has been deeply regrettable. At its delayed autumn 2022 meeting (held in February 2023!) a major item on the agenda was how to fix this and get RIN back on track; here's what we have come up with so far.

We will aim to fix meeting dates at the start of each year but, given that availability and workloads change, we accept the potential for staff or RIN member absence or short-notice agenda changes. Once dates are set, only in exceptional circumstances will the date be changed. We will also aim to return to having some meetings in person (rather than virtually).

Potential agenda items can be proposed by ringers, RIN members or staff but the ultimate decision on the

agenda sits with the RIN Chair and the Head of Scheme. The target is to circulate the RIN agenda and papers a fortnight in advance of a meeting and this will continue to be the aim, but a meeting will not be postponed if dissemination of papers is delayed. We will consider calls from RIN (or ringers via RIN members) to drop items from a meeting's agenda if papers are late, but the decision sits with the RIN Chair and the Head of Scheme, depending on the item's urgency from a Ringing Scheme perspective. Any postponed items will automatically be added to the next meeting's agenda.

We will aim to disseminate minutes more rapidly following meetings and are experimenting with methods that will allow RIN to help staff with their production. Separately, a log has been set up for RIN members to remind them of actions agreed and encourage their progression between meetings, which is when the majority of work should be taking place.

We hope these changes will improve the efficiency by which RIN can feed into discussions and allow staff to get on with implementing changes and improvements that will benefit everyone.



Redshank nesting habitat, by Stephen Inglis / BTO

Redshank nesting habitat.

Redshank nest finding

Redshank is a common breeder in Britain & Ireland. Declines in the breeding population and breeding range mean it is Amber-listed in the UK and Red-listed in Ireland as a Bird of Conservation Concern. In this article, BTO Wader Project Officer Paul Noyes, GWCT's Lizzie Grayshon and RSPB's Stephen Inglis share their tips for finding Redshank nests.

Redshank nests can be found in a variety of habitats including saltmarsh, water meadow, damp marshland, rushy field, rough pasture and grass moorland up to 500 m above sea level, as well as on shingle near water, dunes and flooded gravel pits. Redshanks return to their breeding grounds in March, and raise a single brood each year. Eggs are laid from mid April to early June, with hatching from early May and throughout June; chicks will all have fledged by early August.

Redshank nests are usually found in a prominent grass tussock or tuft, but they can weave a grass canopy above their eggs, making the nest very difficult to see from above. Early April can be an ideal time to start searching for breeding territories as Redshanks can be very detectable while displaying. Their preferred nest locations are also more visible in April before the surrounding vegetation grows too much.

Redshank nests can be tricky to find, partly because birds don't return directly back to them, but instead land nearby and walk in, making watching them back more difficult. Birds will generally flush when a surveyor gets within 50–200 m of the

nest, which can help identify the location; however, birds may rise silently off fresh eggs so observers will need to be vigilant.

The following two case studies, from experienced Redshank nest finders in two very different parts of the UK, provide more information on techniques for finding nests.

CASE STUDY 1 – HAMPSHIRE

The Avon Valley in Hampshire is a linear water meadow system, home to many specialist species including breeding Lapwings and Redshanks. For the last eight years I have been working for GWCT on several different projects with farmers, land managers and gamekeepers in the catchment, all with the principal aim of increasing breeding wader numbers and breeding success. Through the EU LIFE Waders for Real project and the Avon Valley Farmer Cluster we have seen increases in both Lapwing and Redshank numbers and improvements in breeding success.

Initially Lapwings were our primary species of interest, as they are relatively easy to study as far as waders go, and a great species through which to engage the local farmers and community. We have now

moved on to working with Redshanks after seeing an increase in Redshank pairs from 19 to 35 over five years; we would like to know more about this increase and how to sustain this population.

To investigate the ecology of this species further we have spent a large amount of time studying our population, including nest monitoring, colour ringing of chicks, and tracking adults using GPS tags.

Monitoring Redshank nests takes quite a bit of time and patience to pin them down, while not causing unnecessary disturbance to breeding birds. We begin our breeding wader surveys in late March, visiting sites every two weeks, and key sites once a week. During these early surveys we identify the main Redshank territories; these are often quite reliable year on year, but differences in water levels can play a big part in changing these.

Once territories are identified you can start thinking about nest finding. You need a good vantage point to see over the field where you are not causing any disturbance to the breeding birds. Redshanks will often fly around making a lot of noise, but when they are coming in to their nest, they will be extremely quiet and easy to miss. From my observations they will often land silently 10–15 m from the nest location and walk in. They have a little telltale sign, when going onto the nest – they push their wings back and tilt their body forward as they enter, then disappear onto the nest. Once you are confident of the spot, take a bearing of the direction, or use a solid feature in the background (like a tree or building), and walk in a direct line to the nest area. It can be helpful to try and find an obvious landmark close to the nest (like a dead dock stem, or flowering dandelions), as foreshortening often means the nest can be further away than you think.

Redshanks will often nest inside rushy tussocks, or in mainly grass fields in slightly denser patches of grass or sedge. Redshanks will spiral the grass over the top of the nest, making them almost invisible when looking directly down at them, and this is why you need to be extremely cautious when looking for Redshank nests.

We monitor our nests with temperature loggers, about the size of a 20-pence piece

that can be placed in the bottom of the nest cup and provide 20 days of temperature readings every 15 minutes. These can be used alongside field signs to give an indication of the cause of failure of the nest if not successful. We aim to revisit each of our nests at or around the predicted hatch date to ring the chicks.

Nest monitoring allows us to get a better idea of our population size and breeding success. It also provides an important engagement tool for the stakeholders involved in the project.
Lizzie Grayshon, Wetlands Ecologist and Lower Avon Valley Farmer Cluster Facilitator, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

CASE STUDY 2 – SCOTLAND

I started monitoring wader nests in south-west Scotland in 2016 when I found my first Lapwing nests plus singles of Oystercatcher, Curlew, Common Sandpiper and (due to beginner's luck) Snipe. As a newbie, my success rate per hour of search effort was low, but it was a great way to learn more about these species. A pair of Redshanks was also present at my site, but I had no luck finding their nest despite several periods of watching them feeding at the edge of a loch which I thought they must have been nesting close to (and no matter how many times I read the Redshank account in *A Field Guide to Monitoring Nests ...*).



Redshank eggs are a creamy to buff colour, sometimes pale green, variably spotted and blotched dark brown or red-brown. Laid at 1.5- to 2-day intervals.

WADER HUB

BTO has developed a webpage and guidance documents to support local groups and individuals with breeding wader monitoring (www.bto.org/wader-hub). This includes a document on Wader Nest Monitoring Guidance, which outlines a basic code of conduct, nest-finding methods, and what to record when monitoring nests. If you are a wader 'nester' or are interested in learning more about monitoring breeding waders, please visit the Wader Hub to access these materials.

Redshank nests are often hidden in a grassy tussock with a grass canopy, making them very difficult to see from above.



Hidden Redshank nest, by Lizzie Grayshon

NRS CODE OF CONDUCT
 Locating and observing nests should not jeopardise their safety. All observers must exercise a sense of responsibility, always putting the bird's interests first to avoid accidental damage, desertion or attracting predators to the nest. The NRS Code of Conduct provides more information on how to monitor nests safely – www.bto.org/nrs-coc, and a Wader Nest Monitoring Code of Conduct is available in the Wader Nest Monitoring Guidance on the Wader Hub (www.bto.org/wader-hub).

In 2017, the pair were once again present and, expecting a rerun of 2016, I kept a close eye on them to see if I could see something which might give the game away. On 5 June, I had been watching a bird feeding on the edge of the loch when it flew up the bank and apparently disappeared into an area of tussocky grass which was slightly out of my sight line. I gave it a few minutes before leaving my concealed spot and approaching the area. After about 30 minutes, and at 150 m range, the bird flew out of the same area and back down to the loch. Had it been feeding in there or had it been sitting on a nest? I tried to get as close to the spot I had seen it fly from and then started searching tussocks. A few tussocks in and there the nest was, well concealed by a tent of vegetation only around 25 m from the edge of the loch! On subsequent visits to the nest, the incubating bird would sit more tightly and I was fortunate that one of my routine visits, on the 20 June, coincided with the chicks having just hatched. I followed the brood's fate over the next five weeks and a single juvenile fledged by 24 July. The pair were seen again in 2019 but in 2020 and 2021 only a single adult was recorded. In 2022 no Redshanks returned to breed at this site.

Through my time volunteering at RSPB, I have encountered breeding Redshanks at two other sites in East Ayrshire/South Lanarkshire where they are associated with rivers. At one site, I've found two nests by chance while looking for Curlew nests on a lowland raised bog; exceptional luck considering the density of breeding pairs is around one per km². For both nests, the incubating bird flew up about one to two metres in front of me while I was walking through the area and both were found at around one week of incubation and 350–400 m from the adult feeding areas.

At the other site, where Lapwing, Oystercatcher and Curlew nests are relatively easy to find along inbye fields in a river valley, I've been unable to find any Redshank nests despite around 10 pairs being associated with 3 km of the river. Early in the season the pairs are conspicuous as they feed along the river but they are very quiet once nesting commences and I've yet to work out how far away from the river they are nesting. Once broods are on the go, they become easier to find. I suspect I would need to devote much more time to each pair to be able to work out what they are doing.

On the Outer Hebridean machair, where Redshanks breed at higher densities, I've been fortunate to monitor six nests. The flat nature of the site there made nest finding much easier, since birds could easily be watched from vantage points. This meant I could watch them walking back onto nests after they had come off to mob passing gulls.

For me, monitoring Redshank nests has been quite a challenge compared to other wader species, such as Lapwing and Curlew, but it has been very rewarding as I've had to try to get to know how they behave at different sites. Through the observation required to find and monitor nests I've gained a better (but far from complete) understanding of how they use their breeding habitats. And of course, Redshanks have earned a place in my heart – I hope that one day they will return to the site where I found my first nest back in 2017. **Stephen Inglis, Airds Moss & Powharnal Project Officer, RSPB**

Obituary



ANDREW RAMSAY 1947–2022

Andrew was brought up in Roslin near Edinburgh where he met Bob Smith, a keen BTO member. Bob trained Andrew and while still at school he got his permit having ringed just 150 birds!

In 1966 he went to Aberdeen University and was soon training other would-be ringers. He was always looking for ways to extend his ringing experiences and in 1969 he organised a trip to the Isle of Canna with fellow students to count the seabirds for Operation Seafarer. However, he was also armed with large numbers of

rings, including free rings for Manx Shearwaters. The trip was a great success and 54 years later the work continues with the Canna RG, making it probably the longest-running, continuous seabird monitoring project conducted by volunteers anywhere in the world.

After leaving university he became a teacher. After a short spell in Fort William, he moved to Orkney in 1975. Here he began ringing on a phenomenal scale, got many locals involved, some of whom he trained to become ringers, and helped set up the Orkney RG.

Andrew left Orkney in 1981 and relocated to Easter Ross in the Highlands, where he got involved with the Highland RG and also established his own ringing sites and nest box schemes. He always carried a ring for any bird he came across, on any occasion. It was just that they were often all loose – in his lucky dip bag! Once again, his infectious enthusiasm helped him attract many willing

volunteer helpers. If they showed an aptitude for ringing, he would do all he could to encourage them to work towards getting a permit.

He was always interested in seabirds. This led him to set up a project monitoring and ringing Manx Shearwaters on the Isle of Rum which he began in 1994. Then in 2003 he set up another project ringing and colour ringing skuas on Handa. Once again helpers were drafted in and, with his encouragement, several went on to become keen ringers themselves.

At his peak Andrew was ringing over 5,000 birds a year. Many Siskin ringers will recall getting controls from his garden at Courthill, Kildary. We estimated he probably ringed around 200,000 birds in his long career. These generated vast numbers of recoveries, but his greatest legacy will be the number of new permit holders that he encouraged to join the Ringing Scheme.

This obituary was prepared by Bob Swann

Introducing the revamped BirdFacts

Ringers and nest recorders will be aware of the valuable contribution that the data they collect continue to make to our understanding of birds and their changing populations. In addition to their use in important research, the information collected by ringers and nest recorders also provides much of the basic natural-history knowledge of Britain and Ireland's birds. As well as contributing information on movements and productivity, your data address commonly asked questions about how long different species live, how many eggs they lay and how long chicks remain in the nest.

Much of this core information has been made available on the BTO website through the Online Ringing

and Nest Recording Report, as well as through BTO's BirdFacts pages. The latter have just undergone a major overhaul, delivering the information in a more accessible manner, and providing more opportunities for visitors to interact with the material. Interaction has been made possible thanks to the BTO Trends Explorer, which enables users to explore trend information over different periods of time or for different regions.

The new look BirdFacts (www.bto.org/birdfacts) provides robust and up-to-date information on status, distribution, biology and trends, all thanks to data collected by volunteers, of whom ringers and nest recorders play a significant role. Building on the work

Curlew

Numenius arquata (Linnaeus, 1758) CURLEW
Family: Charadriiformes > Scolopacidae

Survey data have documented the decline in breeding Curlew populations across Britain & Ireland, prompting research and conservation efforts to support the species.

Curlew have always been scarce as a breeding species in lowland landscapes and have strongholds in the uplands of England, Scotland and Wales. The bird's evasive building call, echoing above the heather moorlands and upland-edge grazing, is a well-loved feature indicating the health of these important habitats.

In winter the population moves to the coasts and its adjacent farmland, where it is joined by large numbers of migrants from Fennoscandia. The Wetland Bird Survey records the two most important sites for Curlew as The Wash and Morecambe Bay, demonstrating its wide winter distribution.



Select a topic for more facts and statistics about the Curlew



done by Rob Robinson, Simon Gillings has worked with other BTO staff to deliver this expanded and improved resource.



Mist nets funded by a grant, by Alex Phillips

These mist nets, being used on a CES at Attenborough Nature Reserve in Nottinghamshire, were funded by a grant from East Midlands Airport.

Funding your fieldwork

Bird ringing is certainly an expensive enterprise. Rings are not cheap; nets, nest boxes and equipment often need replacing, and with new techniques such as thermal imaging, ringers are often dipping deeper into their own pockets to support their ringing activities. There is, however, another way of financially supporting your research, as Alex Phillips explains.

Grant funding is available to support ringing activities – you just need to know where to look and how to approach the application process. Over the past six years at South Notts Ringing Group (SNRG), grants have paid for our supplementary winter feeding, new nest boxes and nets, and even a thermal imager. Before you start, it can be tempting to apply for everything and anything, but you should have a single project in mind as funders very rarely cover the running costs of an organisation. If you have never applied for a grant previously, then start small. Identify a project that you think might be attractive to a funder and carefully build your case for support.

IDENTIFYING SOURCES OF FUNDING

There are several free resources available to help you track down funding to support your ringing activities. My Funding Central is an online search engine that allows you to search for funding in your area. There is no cost to small groups or individuals for this

service and you can filter your search to a specific region. It is worth searching for potential grants on a county or regional level if your ringing group covers multiple counties. This way you can cast your net wide enough to find funding that might be appropriate for your project.

Not all sources of funding might be available via online search engines though. Parish, Borough and County Councils often have small pots of money available to support local environmental improvements. It is often worth approaching these organisations directly to see if funding is available. Many local councillors are often provided with a small pot of money to support local community activities and they can often be approached directly to see if they are willing to support your group financially.

Supermarkets, such as Tesco (other supermarkets are available), have their own community grants schemes. Many have staff that are Community Champions who will be able to guide

you through the process, so it is worth asking next time you are doing your weekly shop. A community grant from Tesco provided SNRG with a thermal imager.

It is also worth remembering that the BTO has various grants that can be applied for by ringers, including the Young Bird Observatory Volunteers programme and seabird ringing grants. There is also funding available to reduce the cost of rings, equipment and ringing permits for ringers operating CES or RAS projects.

FUNDERS' GUIDANCE

All funders have their own guidance; always read it carefully as it will outline what they are prepared to fund and, more importantly, unwilling to fund. Carefully consider whether you will meet the funder's criteria. This might include:

- annual income of your group.
- location – some funders only fund in specific postcodes.
- the legal status of your group – some funders only accept

applications from Registered Charities.

- total cost of project – is it too big or even too small for the funder?

Sometimes, organisations have no subjective criteria or objectives. Or the objectives they do have are so broad it is hard to determine what they want to fund. To find out if it is worth writing an application to them you must do a little research. In such cases I look on the funder's website and in their annual reports to determine whether the project matches the funder's objectives.

TELLING YOUR STORY

You need to convince the funder that your project is going to make a difference and have a good chance of success. That means showing them that it matches their objectives or criteria.

Outline:

- What your ringing groups does, its background and the experience of the group.
- The need that you are addressing – for example, supplementary winter-feeding benefits Red-listed species that have declined in the county.
- The impact of the project – how will it make an impact? For example, ringing allows us to monitor population trends in those Red-listed species benefiting from supplementary winter feeding.
- How is your project different – is there another angle you could approach? For instance, is there an educational angle you could use to sell your project to a funder? Could your project engage the public in any way?
- Value for money – is there anyone else supporting the project financially? Is it a small project with a big impact?

Don't be vague. Be clear and specific about what you're going to do and answer all the questions they may ask. If required, remember to include all relevant documents with

your application, these often include accounts or your group's constitution. But always remember that your audience may know nothing about the Ringing Scheme or the scientific benefits of ringing. Try and keep such descriptions in lay terms.

BUDGET

Consider your budget carefully and ensure it meets the funder's guidance. If you under-cost, then the project may not be viable and funders rarely top up grants. If your project is over a longer period, then it is advisable to factor in inflation in your costs if the funder will allow it. Cost your budget in a spreadsheet and ensure that other group members have had sight of the budget. On large-scale projects it is quite easy to forget to cost something and this will lessen the risk.

It is always worth mentioning to the funder any match-funding the project may have already received or has been pledged. Many funders will see this as a way of leveraging their funding. If you are able, it is also worth indicating any in-kind funding that the project may receive. This could be volunteer time or donations of materials.

Some funders will award you with the grant but require proof of spend before they give you the money – so consider whether you have the capital available and if this is a viable option. Large funding grants will pay their funds against specific milestones or deliverables, so consider this when establishing your budget. What will you need and when?

UNSUCCESSFUL GRANTS

Look at any feedback the grant funder sent you. Treat it as if it is fair and accurate, even if it feels like it isn't. Is there someone that could help you improve any of the areas for future bids? If you think the fund was a good fit, look for their rules about how long you need to wait before applying again. Sometimes you can apply straight away, sometimes you must wait a year or longer.



Puffin, by Ruth Walker

The BTO offers seabird grants to ringers and ringing groups.

WHEN YOUR APPLICATION IS SUCCESSFUL

As soon as you've received a notification of a successful application, check the grant conditions. If there are things they need you to provide, send them right away. If you can't send them right away, send them an update on when they can expect them.

Many funders will want you to credit them for their grant (in publicity etc.), so confirm with the funder how they would like this to happen. More importantly, make sure everyone involved in the project has this information.

Make sure you think about monitoring and evaluation early on – are you required to produce a report or collect participant data? If you are required to produce a report, build these reporting dates into your plan to ensure you hit those deadlines. If they don't ask for reports, make your own deadline to produce a report shortly after the end of the project. Such reports can be used when seeking new funding as evidence of successful project delivery.

Finally, how will you fund more activities once the grant has ended? It's never too soon to start thinking about this. Good luck with your applications.

USEFUL LINKS

- www.myfundingcentral.co.uk
- www.fundingforall.org.uk
- www.getgrants.org.uk

Using your data

This feature highlights some of the scientific papers that have been produced using the data that you collect through the Ringing Scheme or the Nest Record Scheme.



Swift, by Philip Croft / BTO;
Kittiwake, by Richard Jackson / BTO;
Juvenile Goldfinch, by Philip Croft / BTO

INVESTIGATING SWIFT DECLINES

Data collected by bird ringers and nest recorders were used alongside weather information and data from the Rothamsted Insect Survey to try to identify the drivers behind declines in Swifts. The study explored how breeding success and survival have changed over time in relation to weather conditions and changes in the availability of aphids. The study found that adult survival rates were relatively stable but survival rates for juvenile birds have fallen, and nest failure rates have increased since the mid-1970s; however, there was no link between these parameters and declines in aphid biomass seen over parts of England during the same time period. Results did find a strong connection between increased rainfall and smaller brood sizes, higher levels of nest failure and lower first-year survival rates, presumably due to reduced food availability. The study concluded that one of the drivers behind Swift declines is therefore reduced juvenile survival rates linked to wetter summers in the UK. Further work is needed to assess the impact of the loss of breeding sites due to home improvements and to examine factors away from the breeding grounds.

Finch, T. *et al.* (2023) Demography of Common Swifts (*Apus apus*) breeding in the UK associated with local weather but not aphid biomass. *Ibis* 165, 420–435.

IMPACTS OF HARNESES ON KITTIWAKES

With more and more researchers using biologging devices to gather data on the movements and behaviour of the birds they study, it is vital that any impacts of such devices and their attachment methods are investigated and reported, both for animal-welfare reasons and to help other researchers make informed decisions about the materials or methods they use. This study reported on two independent trials of harnesses used on Kittiwakes; one carried out in Norway and one in the UK. The harnesses were constructed from Teflon ribbon and deployed on breeding adults using two different attachment methods: leg-loop and thoracic cross-strap harnesses. The birds were subsequently recaptured and harness fit and the condition of the birds were checked. The study found varying degrees of impacts from the harnesses, including abrasion and small lesions where the device or harness was sitting. The impacts were more severe on the birds fitted with a thoracic harness, but feather abrasion was also seen on birds fitted with leg-loop harnesses. The study recommended that thoracic harnesses should not be used on Kittiwakes in future but that leg-loop harnesses could be considered if different materials or designs were used, and impacts monitored and reported.

Clewley, G.D. *et al.* (2021) Acute impacts from Teflon harnesses used to fit biologging devices to Black-legged Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla*. *Ringing & Migration* 36, 69–77.

INVESTIGATING JUVENILE DISPERSAL

How far birds move is an important question in ecology, but a tricky one to answer. Obviously, birds move as they go about their daily lives and can cover vast distances as they migrate. But how far do young birds move, on average, from the nest in which they hatch to where they eventually settle to breed? And do adult birds often move nesting sites between years? Knowing these answers help us understand how ranges might expand in response to climate change, for example, or whether losses on one site (through predation or disease, say) can be offset by high productivity on another nearby. Individual studies cannot provide answers because they usually cover a limited area, so recoveries of ringed birds (mostly by members of the public) are about the only way to answer this. Guillermo Fandos and colleagues summarised over 600,000 ring recoveries from the Euring Databank, separating out the different types of movement, to quantify average dispersal for 234 species. They found young birds moved further than adults, and that longer-distance dispersal was more common than expected. These data will be invaluable in future research that predicts how bird populations might respond to changing environmental conditions, leading to better, more informed decision-making.

Fandos, G. *et al.* (2023) Standardised empirical dispersal kernels emphasise the pervasiveness of long-distance dispersal in European birds. *Journal of Animal Ecology* 92, 158–170.

Noticeboard

AUSTRALIAN BANDING OPPORTUNITIES

Ornithological Technical Services under the auspices of the Australian Bird & Bat Banding Scheme will be running several long-range banding expeditions into the Western Australian Outback in 2024. The programme will follow our 2023 expedition, where three BTO ringers joined us, processing 66 species including seabirds, raptors, passerines, and non-passerines. Beginning in Perth, we focus on the wetlands and offshore islands, where species banded included Little Shearwater, waterfowl and the typical regional passerines. We then move to our arid country long-term monitoring sites that include dry scrub, seasonal wetlands, and intertidal mangrove habitats. Here we will encounter many mangrove endemics including the Dusky Gerygone. If you are interested in joining us or learning more about these expeditions, contact Bill Rutherford at admin@ots.org.au. We look forward to hearing from you.

POTTER TRAPS FOR SALE

Two sizes (12" & 16"), also Chardonneret and other traps on request. Please contact John Mawer on 01652 628583 or via email johnrmawer@hotmail.com



CONTACTS

Nest Record Scheme: nrs@bto.org
 Ringing Scheme: ringing@bto.org
 Constant Effort Sites: ces@bto.org
 Retrapping Adults for Survival: ras@bto.org
 Colour ringing: colour.ringing@bto.org
 Ringing data submissions: ringing.data@bto.org
 Licensing: ringing.licensing@bto.org
 Schedule 1: ringing.schedule1@bto.org
 Ringing sales: sales@bto.org

RINGING COMMITTEE

RIN supervises the operation and development of the Ringing and Nest Record Schemes. RIN meets twice a year, usually in spring and autumn. Agendas, non-confidential papers, minutes and members' contact details are available on the ringers-only pages of the BTO website (www.bto.org/rin). Members are happy to receive correspondence throughout the year, either directly or via rin@bto.org

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Lucy Wright – (Chair) – Cambridgeshire
 Louise Clewley – Lancashire
 Richard du Feu – Lancashire
 Helen Franklin – Warwickshire
 Peter Kirmond – Gloucestershire
 Jim Lennon – Nottinghamshire
 Stephen Vickers – Norfolk
 Roger Walsh – Norfolk

Alex Phillips – C-permit representative – Derbyshire
 Hayley Land – T-permit representative – North Yorkshire

LICENSING CALENDAR

Jan-Mar – individual ringing permit renewal
 Feb – ringing groups renewal
 28 Feb – deadline for ringing data from previous year
 31 Mar – unrenewed permits expire
 May – ring refunds / rebates paid
 31 Dec – deadline for receipt of Schedule 1 renewals / Special Methods reports / colour ringing reports and renewals

THE 2023/24 WINTER RINGING PROJECT VISIT PERIODS

Visit	First Date		Last Date
1	Saturday 4 November	to	Friday 17 November
2	Saturday 18 November	to	Friday 1 December
3	Saturday 2 December	to	Friday 15 December
4	Saturday 16 December	to	Friday 29 December
5	Saturday 30 December	to	Friday 12 January
6	Saturday 13 January	to	Friday 26 January
7	Saturday 27 January	to	Friday 9 February
8	Saturday 10 February	to	Friday 23 February

For more information about the Winter Ringing project, see: www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bird-ringing-scheme/ringing-surveys/winter-ringing-project

Monitoring priorities: Swift

The eagerly anticipated scream of the Swift signals the return of one of our most fleeting of summer visitors. Sadly, this much-loved species is now Red-listed in both the UK and Irish Birds of Conservation Concern reports. What can you do to help?



Swifts, by Philip Croft / BTO

CURRENT KNOWLEDGE

Swifts populations have only been monitored by BTO since the inception of BBS in 1994. Since then, they have undergone a steep decline in numbers (-60% since 1995), leading to them being Red-listed in the recent updates to both the UK and Irish Birds of Conservation Concern lists.

The drivers of the decline are not clear (see p.22), as monitoring the number of breeding pairs is complicated by difficulties in locating occupied nests, the number of non-breeding birds present in the summer, and the vast distances the species will travel to forage. It is possible, however, that a reduction in nest sites, caused by modern building design and refurbishment of old buildings, may be partly to blame.

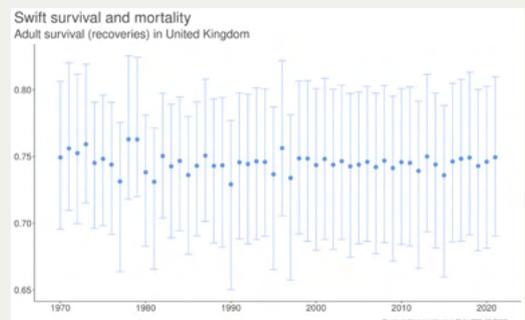
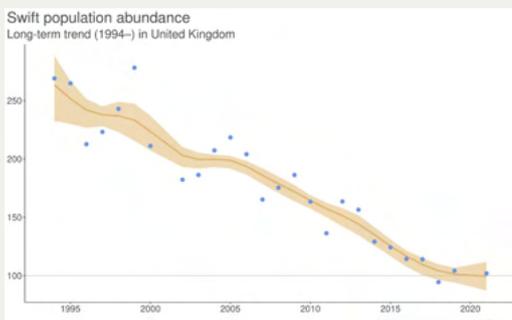
HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Start a RAS project

Although Swift is a target species for RAS, there is currently only one active project for this species and more projects would help improve the quality of the survival trend. For a Swift RAS to be successful, it would ideally need to be carried out at a colony holding at least 25 breeding pairs. Adults are prone to desertion if they are removed from a nest before chicks are old enough to be ringed (once their eyes are open and their feathers are up to two thirds grown (FM)), so visits should be timed carefully by monitoring nesting attempts. Once the chicks are old enough to be ringed, adults can safely be caught in mist nets placed in front of their nest holes.

Install and monitor a nest box

As one possible cause of population decline is a reduction in nesting locations, installing artificial nest sites, such as integrated Swift bricks or external nest boxes, could help restore some breeding spaces. The nest box should be a cavity box, with an oblong or half-moon-shaped entrance located near the floor. Boxes should be sited under eaves, or inside a loft with just the entrance hole visible externally, ideally five metres above the ground. Natural Swift nests can be difficult to access, making monitoring for NRS tricky; however, artificial boxes can be monitored with care. An even easier option is to place a nest camera inside prior to the start of the breeding season, allowing data to be gathered throughout the breeding attempt.



Graphs shown are taken from the BirdTrends report (www.bto.org/birdtrends), where results from the Ringing Scheme and Nest Record Scheme are published annually, alongside census data. Swift image, by Philip Croft / BTO.