

Communicating your ringing and nest monitoring activities

Nest monitoring volunteer, by Mike Toms / BTO

SOCIAL MEDIA, RINGING AND NEST MONITORING

Social media is a useful way to increase engagement with ringing and nest monitoring activities, promoting the valuable contribution that these studies make to our understanding of why bird populations change. It can, however, be a volatile environment, featuring polarised views and targeted trolling of individuals and organisations.

WHY IS SOCIAL MEDIA USEFUL?

We want our staff and volunteers to be passionate voices for ornithology, both on and offline. Social media allows us to interact with others in a cheap, fast, and informal way. It gives us the opportunity to share our research and the benefits of active participation in science on an international scale. Alongside this, BTO and our volunteers share and promote research and work by other organisations and individuals. This increased interest and awareness within the public will aid global conservation efforts and raise the profile of science and the evidence base that it delivers. Social media can also help us to break down barriers to participation in surveys, and in birdwatching more generally, so has an important role to play with respect to inclusivity.

By using social media to share your ringing and nest monitoring activities, you are helping BTO and yourself/your group to communicate our messages to a broader audience. It is, however, important that we all follow the same guidelines to ensure the messaging around the BTO's and your ringing and nest monitoring work is consistent, and best represents the valuable contribution being made. The way we present ourselves on social media can have an enormous impact on how people perceive BTO and its members and volunteers, so it is important that we do this well. To help us all achieve this we have developed some guidance, which we hope you will find useful. We need to be aware of the pitfalls of using social media as well as the opportunities.

By following these basic principles, you can help to maximise the value of your communications and minimise the likelihood of negative impacts on your reputation, or that of BTO.

- 1. BE OPEN, HONEST AND TRANSPARENT:** If you are talking about BTO or related issues, identifying that you are a volunteer and using your real name improves transparency.
- 2. RESPECT THE LAW:** Respect copyright, fair use, and disclosure laws.
- 3. RESPECT OTHERS:** Do not use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenities, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace. Think about reactions before you post.
- 4. RESPECT PRIVACY:** Do not provide another person's confidential or other proprietary information.
- 5. DON'T PICK FIGHTS:** You are under no obligation to address misrepresentations about ringing or nest monitoring made by other social media users. The best course of action is to inform BTO's Social Media Team (socialmedia@bto.org), but if you do wish to respond personally, always do so with respect, stick to the facts and identify your relationship with BTO. (see also principle 7).
- 6. PROVIDE CONTEXT:** Ensure that you provide enough content in your social media posts to help readers understand the context behind them, e.g. name the survey you are collecting data for/purpose of the work.
- 7. PAUSE BEFORE YOU POST:** It is always good to pause before you post, giving you time to check that your wording and spelling is correct, and to reflect on how what you are posting might be viewed or misinterpreted, particularly by people with no experience of ringing or nest monitoring activities. Ask yourself why you are posting the material in the first place, and what message you want to convey.
- 8. ASK BTO QUESTIONS:** If you are unsure about something that you are planning to post, such as a photograph of a ringing or nest monitoring activity, do drop a line to socialmedia@bto.org and we'll do our best to help you.

- 9. PERSONALLY ACCOUNTABLE:** Be aware that what you publish will become public information and that ultimately you have sole responsibility for what you post to your blog or publish in any form of online social media. If your actions result in damage to BTO's reputation then it is possible that staff may apply sanctions.
- 10. IMAGE RIGHTS:** Ensure you have the permission of anyone featured to show them on social media; this is particularly important if posting images of young people.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

While the written word is usually an effective means to get across the message that you intended, this is not always the case with photographs. Being open and transparent about our activities demonstrates that we have nothing to hide, and photographs of ringing and nest monitoring have an important role to play in this process, noting that at all times the capture of images should not impact on the welfare of the bird(s) involved.

When we use images, we need to be mindful that some people who view them may not understand the context involved, and may be concerned about the welfare of any birds pictured; poorly posed photographs may also be used by those seeking to spread misinformation. It is essential to contextualise images through accompanying text, and to pay close attention to how the image may come across. The following notes might be helpful when considering the purpose of posting a photograph.

- Photographs capture a brief moment in time, during which a bird may close its eyes to blink or a feather may become briefly misplaced. While it is clear to those present that this is a momentary event and that there is no welfare issue to address, those seeing the image in isolation will not have the benefit of this knowledge, so it is important to select images carefully to avoid generating incorrect assumptions.
- Photographs of ringing and nest monitoring activities (e.g. ring fitting, tagging, taking biometrics) can also be extremely valuable for educational purposes but it is vital to ensure that the bird does not look overly manipulated or crowded by ringers. Be aware that it is extremely difficult to capture an image of a bird in a mist net that does not look in some way restricted, so particular care should be taken with image selection here.
- Images of birds in the hand can be educational, and are also useful to illustrate talks and articles that enable people to identify birds. Remember that the grip used should be one approved for the species in the guidance provided to ringers, and the bird should be posed as naturally and calmly as possible. Waders and any other species identified explicitly in the Ringing Scheme guidance must never be held by the legs. We appreciate that capture of a rarity is exciting and can be informative, and guidance for rare birds is the same as for common ones; there is no issue with a photograph being taken as long as bird welfare is not compromised.
- In the case of images of birds and people, it is understandable to want a photographic record of unusual or exciting captures featuring both ringer and bird. If this can be achieved quickly and does not have any welfare impact then there is no reason to restrict the practice. We need to be aware, however, that such shots could be compared to the types of photographs taken by fishermen or hunters, where a person poses with their 'catch'. Such comparisons devalue the important work being delivered by our volunteers and, as such, we do ask that no photograph open to this interpretation be published in any format that could be made public.
- Images of eggs and nests have an educational role, but it is important that they do not significantly prolong visits to avoid impacting on bird welfare. Nest photographs should be supported by accompanying text that contextualises the photograph e.g. mention the Nest Record Scheme and/or link to the website. If you are sharing an image of a nest accessed under a Schedule 1 licence, then ensure you reference that the nest was visited under licence in the text that accompanies the image. Photographs of nests of rare breeding birds should be avoided as the educational value is limited and the potential for reputational damage is increased, as should any images that could be used to determine the geographic location of sensitive species.
- All the above considerations also apply to videos, which bring the additional complexity of movement and audio recordings. Think about how the footage might be interpreted; for example, the head turning display of a Kingfisher might be assumed by some viewers to be stress-related.

RESPONDING TO CONCERNS

If anyone has a concern about a social media post or an image that accompanies it, then they should direct this concern to our Social Media Team, who can be reached at socialmedia@bto.org. They will examine the material and, if thought necessary, will contact the person who made the post to discuss the concern. We see this as a useful way of improving the effectiveness of social media use and minimising any potential impact that a poor photograph or post might have. Where a post or accompanying image is thought by the Social Media Team to involve a breach of the Ringing Scheme licensing system, or to be particularly damaging to the reputation of our ringing and nest monitoring activities, then it will be passed across to staff in the Ringing & Nest Recording Team for consideration of further action.