

The BTO Magazine for Ringers and Nest Recorders



LIFECYCLE

AUTUMN 2024 ■ ISSUE 13

MONITORING KESTRELS ■

CES MYTH BUSTING ■

GOOSANDER TRACKING

STONECHATS

Nest-finding tips



Editorial

ISSUE 13 AUTUMN 2024



Welcome to the autumn edition of *LifeCycle*. As the autumn evenings start to draw in, we hope you enjoyed any fieldwork you were able to undertake during the breeding season and are looking forward to any you have planned during the autumn and winter. As the data from the breeding season start to come in, early indications suggest the cold and wet weather in the spring seems to have badly affected productivity this year, but we will have to wait until the results are produced next year to know the full impact of the unseasonable conditions. We do know that the weather left some wetland CES sites underwater for much of the season, but hopefully most will have been able to operate as normal!

In this edition of *LifeCycle* we introduce you to projects monitoring Stonechats in the New Forest (page 4) and Goosanders in Scotland (page 24). We bring you all you need to know about monitoring Kestrels (page 16) and highlight some unusual Rock Pipit nest sites (page 10). If you've ever had any questions about the properties of different types of mist nets, the article on page 22 is for you. Have you ever considered doing a CES but are not sure if it's the right survey for you? Our myth-busting article on page 7 might help dispel a few assumptions. And turn to page 20 to find out what happened when a Little Ringed Plover pair decided to breed in a working quarry.

We are delighted that there are once again opportunities for staff from the team to meet with some of you at ringing and nest-recording conferences and meetings this autumn and we are very much looking forward to seeing those of you who are attending. Finally, a huge thank you to all the contributors to this edition. If you have any feedback on the magazine, or would like to contribute to a future edition, please do get in touch!

Ruth Walker & Lee Barber

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LIFECYCLE

THE BTO MAGAZINE FOR RINGERS AND NEST RECORDERS

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NEWS FROM RINGING & NEST RECORDING

RINGERS' BURSARY FUND

In the last *LifeCycle*, we noted that the Ringers' Bursary Fund was running low. We received a number of incredibly generous donations in response, so are pleased to say we are able to continue offering grants of up to £200 to new T- or C-permit holders who are not currently in paid work, or are on a low income, to enable them to continue ringing. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the following for their contributions: Richard Chadwick (personal donation), Chris & Denise Lamsdell (from money raised through Merlin Ringing Supplies from the sale of the new Svensson guide) and another donor who donated anonymously.

Additionally, a donation was received in the name of Steve Moon, from the sale of some of his books. Steve, the former warden of Kenfig NNR, sadly died a few years ago but had a keen interest in encouraging and training ringers during his lifetime.

INTRODUCING JOE MORRIS, ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

I'm really pleased to have joined the Ringing and Nest Recording Team as the new Engagement Manager. This is a big change for me, as for the past few years I have been working with homeless people and in community safety in different parts of the country, with local authorities and charities. Having returned from a break travelling in South America, where I was able to visit some amazing reserves and see some incredible wildlife, I decided I needed a career change to something I was increasingly passionate about.

When the opportunity arose to come and work for the BTO, I jumped at it, and the first few months have been fantastic (although I miss my 10-minute-walk commute!). Competing with colleagues for the highest year list has been an interesting experience! Spotting a Long-tailed Duck on our team away day was definitely a highlight, as

RINGING GROUP REPORTS

As well as having a large collection of books and journals, the BTO library also holds copies of ringing group reports. Thank you to those ringing groups that regularly send us hard copy or digital versions of their reports. If any other ringing groups would like to supply copies of their reports to the library, we would be very pleased to receive them.

Hard copies can be sent to BTO Library, The Nunnery, Thetford, IP24 2PU while digital copies can be emailed to: library@bto.org

RINGING HUB

The ringers-only pages have been the home of ringer-restricted content for many years. These pages have now been replaced by the Ringing Hub, a section of the main BTO website that is only accessible to ringers with a current BTO ringing permit when logged into My BTO. Once logged in, the Ringing Hub is accessed via

well as Waxwings at the University of East Anglia campus at the start of the year. Beginning ringing has been fascinating, and there's a lot to learn, but what better place to be to learn it! I hope to do a lot more nest recording in future years too.

I'm beginning to investigate some of the things we can do to make life easier for ringers and nest recorders, and ways we can provide support for everything else that might not be covered under the technical aspects of the work. While my background involves working with volunteers in the charitable sector, I'm new to the world of ringing and nest recording and am very keen to take advantage of the huge body of knowledge held by ringers and nest recorders. So, if anyone has any thoughts on initiatives that would help encourage participation in ringing and nest recording, or developments that would plug gaps in the support provided to

the button on the Ringing Scheme homepage that used to take you to the ringers-only pages.

The Ringing Hub is where you will now find all the up-to-date, restricted ringing content including the online Ringing Guidance, the species pages, all ringing forms relating to permits, endorsements, Special Methods, colour ringing and so on, RIN papers and minutes, insurance information, old editions of *Ringers' Bulletin* / *Ringling News* and the *Trapping Guide*.

NRS WEB PAGES

The Nest Record Scheme webpages have seen a recent update as we work to improve the guidance and resources available to nest recorders. The first phase of the online NRS handbook brings together guidance on nest-finding techniques, nest-recording equipment and making the most of your nest finding, among other topics.

Visit www.bto.org/nrs-guidance-and-training



Joe Morris, by Ruth Walker

new participants, please do drop me a line at joe.morris@bto.org

Huge thanks in advance for your feedback!



Stonechat is a partial migrant, with many birds remaining here year round. Their wintering range now covers 80% of the UK and their breeding range is expanding eastwards from its western strongholds.

New Forest Stonechats

Many people who know **Ellie Ness** know that during the breeding season she disappears at every opportunity into the New Forest in Hampshire to monitor Stonechats. Until 2021, they were a species she knew very little about, having never found a Stonechat nest and never paid much attention to them. Ellie is now running a Stonechat RAS project, colour ringing adults, finding a large number of nests and spending all her free time out on the heathland monitoring them.

This project formed slowly over the last three years. I have gone from finding 18 nests in my first year to over 100 in each of the past two seasons. As I built confidence and knowledge of the species through nest monitoring, I realised I could get a lot more data and really link the whole picture of the population together by monitoring the adults as well. I emailed BTO in 2022 with RAS and colour ringing applications, both of which were approved. 2023 was the first official season of the RAS and I colour ringed the first cohort of breeding adults, as well as continuing my usual nest finding and monitoring.

WHY STONECHATS?

It is more by chance than design that I have ended up working on this species. When I moved to Hampshire I got in contact with Tony Davis, who had run a BTO nest-finding course I had attended back when I was 16, which is one of the main reasons I am so interested in nest finding now. Tony and the rest of the group were immediately welcoming and helped me find sites and gave me nesting advice and support. The

first day I met with him, he told me some tips for finding Stonechat nests, so the next day I went out to a site he suggested. I was determined to watch a female back to the nest and through more luck than skill, managed to find my first ever Stonechat nest. That year (2021) I had a lot to learn but at the end of the season I had started to figure out their nesting behaviour and had found 18 nests which I was very proud of.

For me, Stonechats are a lot of fun to work on. There are many reasons I love studying them:

- Easy to find their territories as the adults shout while sitting on top of obvious perches.
- Low nest-predation rates so there's not too many depressing nest checks.
- Sexually dimorphic so the females are easy to watch back on eggs and makes pairs easier to identify.
- Nest mostly in open habitats so there aren't many things to block line of sight whilst watching back.
- Ground nesting so nests are easy to access.
- Territories are close together so I don't

- have to walk miles to find them.
 - Most importantly, they are just great little birds and are fun to watch.
- All of these things combined make them a brilliant study species.

HOW TO FIND NESTS?

Stonechats are fairly straightforward to find at any stage of nesting. They usually nest on the ground, and at my heathland sites they will be either under a small gorse bush, under dead bracken, under heather, or within a *Molinia* grass tussock, but in other habitats I know they will use nest sites such as bramble or grass.

Building – the females build the nest, so early in the season they can be watched back carrying moss, grass or lining material and you can see which bush or tussock they dive into.

Eggs – the male's behaviour can be a giveaway that the female is on eggs. If you turn up to a territory and the female is nowhere to be seen and the male is sitting on a perch watching over the territory, not doing much apart from occasionally singing, then the female is likely down on eggs. Wait for her to come off – I watch the male whilst waiting as he will often fly immediately over to her when she comes off and accompany her whilst she feeds, so if you see a male suddenly shoot off across the territory, watch him and see if you can spot the female. She comes off normally every 40–60 minutes and she will be off for 10–20 minutes, furiously feeding, doing lots of short flights whilst dropping off perches to catch bugs or flitting up into the air to flycatch. She will have a good preen, give herself a shake, and then fly off back to the nest. When she dives into a bit of suitable nesting habitat and doesn't emerge, visually mark the area in your mind, leave her 10 minutes to settle, and then walk in to the nest to tap her off and find it. The key at this stage is to not take your eyes off her as it takes a second for her to go back on the nest and it's easy to miss. The eggs are a lovely shade of blue with fine red speckling often concentrated in a ring around one end.

Chicks – this stage is the easiest to find if you aren't very experienced with the species, and it requires less patience than

eggs. Adults are very vocal at this stage and will start to alarm when you enter the territory, with them becoming more vocal as the chicks get bigger, giving you your first clue that the pair might have chicks. If you see an adult carrying food, stand back and watch where it goes. When it drops down with food out of sight for a few seconds and then comes out with nothing, or with a faecal sac, then you know it's just visited the nest. Often, watching a couple of feeds before going in gives you the best chance of finding the nest. Again, visually mark the area in your mind before walking in.

General nest-finding tips:

- Pick somewhere to watch that gives you the best view of the whole territory, ideally somewhere with a bit of height and no big bushes or trees blocking the view.
- If the birds are not happy with you (constantly alarming and refusing to go into the nest), then back off and keep backing off until they are happy. Tucking behind a bush or tree so you are harder to see can make the birds less wary.
- Be very careful when approaching nests; the nest could be under a scrap of dead bracken or in the grass so only put your feet in places where you can see the ground and watch every step you take.
- Try not to leave any trail into the nest, cover any marks you leave by scuffing up the vegetation as you leave and take care not to damage the surrounding habitat.



Stonechat eggs, by Ellie Ness

Stonechat chicks, by Ellie Ness



COLOUR RINGING

The colour ringing is mainly for the RAS, but the added benefit is that it means I can easily link the adult birds to my nests and identify pairs, so that I can follow them throughout the season and subsequent years to find out more about pair fidelity, site fidelity, nesting habitat choice of certain pairs, pair breeding success and so on.

Stonechat being colour ringed, by Robbie Phillips



- If you see a bird repeatedly flying back and forth between the same two perches, the nest is likely in the middle of the two but you are too close. This behaviour is a good clue that the bird is close to the nest.
- Be patient – watching back isn't easy but don't give up too soon (I made this mistake many times in my first year).
- Use GPS and mark the nest carefully. I use yellow electrical tape and take pictures of the nest location – nests in uniform habitat can be very hard to find again.
- Get out early season and find territories. One of the most time-consuming parts is finding a pair to watch in the first place, so mapping territories early in the season saves time later on. I map every nest I find to make finding subsequent broods easier.

PULLI RINGING

I metal ring the pulli in every nest I find. I aim to ring them at approximately seven days old, which is about the perfect size for ringing. They can be jumpy if you ring them when they are close to fledging, so time ringing visits carefully.

Last season there were a lot of metal-ringed birds that returned as breeding adults which shows good recruitment of pulli to the breeding population. I have managed to catch a lot of these and it has been really interesting to see who they are; I get excited every time I catch one to see which nest they are from! As a group, we operate in a distinct area of the New Forest so I'll never get long-distance recruitment movements, but this year I've had a couple of birds from 4.3 km and 4.8 km away, which was interesting to see the movement between the

sites. Some of my own birds stay very local, with one breeding male caught 63 m from where he was ringed as a pullus last year.

RAS AND COLOUR RINGING

The Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) scheme seemed a brilliant way of combining the adult data with all of my nest data, whilst hopefully also providing useful survival data for the BTO, so last year I started colour ringing adults. The Stonechats have high nesting productivity; out of 104 Stonechat nests I found in 2022, only 15 were definitely predated and the outcome was unknown for another five. With so many juveniles successfully fledging, I wanted to learn more about the adult survival as the site should be overrun with Stonechats with their levels of breeding success. Looking at previous Stonechat RAS data from other projects, their survival isn't very high, and I wanted to see if the same proved true for my pairs.

I caught some birds early in the season (late March–early April) when they were just pairing up, which was very successful. Short periods of playing song worked well and this was the time of year they were easiest to target. I avoid targeting pairs when they are incubating, but when they have chicks and are feeding a lot it's a good time to try. It's always a challenge targeting specific birds as you have to really understand that individual's behaviour to be able to catch them. I use two spring traps baited with mealworms, so the traps have to be put in the right place to work.

Stonechats often have favourite perches to feed from, so placing the traps within line of sight of these perches works well. Often the males and females will have different perches, so you really have to target the trap location to the particular bird you want to catch. It's not always easy, and I've had a lot of frustrating sessions trying to catch a particular bird, but when you do manage to catch them, it is quite satisfying. Every bird caught is so important to the project as each one I manage to colour ring will add to the sample size and improve the quality of the survival data.

I'm excited to see how many birds I will get returning to my sites in future and to learn more about their pair and site fidelity.



Standard CES covers four habitat types. In 2023, 41% of projects were carried out in dry scrub, 26% in wet scrub, 22% in reedbed and 11% in woodland. A trial of CES in garden habitats is currently being carried out.

CES myth busting

For many ringers and ringing groups, Constant Effort Sites ringing has been a staple part of the breeding season routine for many years. For others, it is either something they have never considered or have dismissed as an option. There are likely to be many reasons for this, but one of them may be a misconception about the survey methodology and perceived restrictions around CES protocols. In this article, the CES Organiser, **Lee Barber**, and **Ruth Walker** try to bust a few myths about CES.

The Constant Effort Sites (CES) scheme began in 1983 and was the first national, standardised ringing programme to be launched by BTO. The scheme operates during the breeding season (May to August inclusive) and provides valuable data on adult abundance, productivity and adult survival rates for 24 common songbird species. The number of people taking part in the scheme peaked in 2000, when 143 submissions were received. Sadly, the Foot and Mouth crisis in 2001 resulted in the loss of many sites and the number of annual submissions didn't climb back to pre-Foot and Mouth levels until the mid-2010s. Then, enter Covid-19 and the number of active projects once again dropped dramatically. Although numbers are climbing again, there are still far fewer than we would like there to be. So, what are the common misconceptions about CES that prevent people from signing up?

I DON'T HAVE A SUITABLE SITE

CES currently covers four main habitats: dry scrub, wet scrub, reedbed and deciduous woodland. Whilst your site should predominantly comprise one of

these habitats, it doesn't have to be made up exclusively of just the one. CES works best in habitats that can be managed to minimise vegetation changes, but we know this may not always be under your control. It is important to ensure that vegetation height next to the nets is kept broadly the same so that it does not impact on catches over time.

I DON'T CATCH ENOUGH BIRDS

You should aim to catch at least 200 individuals (adults or juveniles) in a season, but ideally 300, using mist nets. This equates to an average of 17 birds per session (if you manage all 12 sessions) so isn't too onerous. This also means that your site does not have to be massive or incorporate too many nets. You can use as many nets as you want, but you only need to use as many as it takes to catch 200 birds per season.

As the core tenet of CES is consistency, you must use the same number and length of nets (and the same physical nets), positioned in the same location for each session, both within and between years (although some nets will need replacing

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information about CES, including full instructions and visit dates can be found at: www.bto.org/ces

Woodland net ride, by Lee Barber / BTO



from time to time). You should therefore plan your CES so that it can be operated safely with the smallest team you will ever have available.

I CAN'T START AT DAWN OR RUN IT FOR EIGHT HOURS

You don't have to! You can run your sessions at whatever time suits you and the site you are catching at. If you catch more in an evening, feel free to run your CES in the evening. If you catch most birds between 8 am and 10 am, run your CES at these times. There is no rule on how long a session should last or when it starts or ends, it just needs to be consistent, either within the year (e.g. every session throughout the season starts and finishes at the same time) or between years (e.g. each session 1, 2, 3 etc. starts and finishes at the same time every year). The latter method is used by those ringers who do choose to start ringing at dawn.

I CAN'T DO ALL 12 VISITS IN A SEASON

The CES season starts in late April/early May and runs through to the end of August/beginning of September, with the season dates available online months before the start of the season (so you can plan your holidays!). The season comprises 12 visit periods, each spanning 10 or 11 days, and each visit period includes three weekend days. We all know that life, and the weather, gets in the way of even the best-laid plans, so we expect that not everyone will be able

to undertake all 12 visits every year. This can be addressed statistically using data collected previously at your site, as long as the number of missed visits is small, and they do not fall at the same time in each year. Sites will be included in the analyses if at least four of the first six, and four of the second six, visits are completed. Very occasionally, a whole season has to be missed, possibly due to illness or access issues on site. As with missed visits, the analyses can cope with a single missed year; however, if successive years are missed, the project will need to be re-registered.

I WANT TO RING AT MY SITE MORE THAN ONCE EVERY 10 DAYS

This is absolutely fine! To ensure that CES visits are spaced evenly across the visit periods, there must be at least six days between each CES session. This does not mean that you cannot do other ringing at the site though. Provided you don't ring at the site within the three days prior to a CES visit, you can include extra visits throughout the CES season.

I CAN'T USE SOUND LURES ON A CES SITE

Whilst it is true that you cannot use sound lures during a CES session as they are likely to artificially change the age and species composition of the catch, you are welcome to put the lures on once the session has finished or during other, non-CES, visits to the site.

I DON'T WANT TO RESTRICT HOW MANY NETS I USE ON THE SITE

It is perfectly acceptable to put up additional nets during a CES session if you have the personnel to operate them safely. These nets need to be sufficiently distant from your CES nets as to not impact on the CES catch i.e. catching a bird in an extra net, which would have gone into a CES net if that other net hadn't been there, would affect the CES trends. The length of the additional nets used cannot exceed that of the standard CES nets. Using additional nets might be particularly attractive early in the season when there are fewer juveniles around, but note that birds caught in these additional nets will not count towards your CES totals or rebate.

I WANT TO USE ARTIFICIAL BAIT

This restriction is true. Artificial bait cannot be used on a CES site at any point during the CES season as this can affect the species and age composition of the catch. It can be used on the site outside the CES season though e.g. over winter.

I CAN'T RUN A CES ALONE

There are CES sites that are operated single handed, as they use only the number of nets that a single ringer can operate safely. It is often easier, and it can be more sustainable, to run a CES as part of a Ringing Group or Partnership though. Having a team of ringers available to help reduces the likelihood of missing visits and generally enables you to use more nets (if you want to) than ringing solo.

While some CES data can be used after just one year, survival analyses require at least five years' worth of data. Running a CES as part of a Ringing Group generally means there will be fewer issues with succession if a ringer retires or can no longer take part in the project, resulting in longer-running projects. CES can also be a fantastic tool for training new ringers, providing consistent ringing opportunities throughout the breeding season.

I ALREADY RUN A RAS AT THE SITE

Providing your RAS focuses on a species that we do not produce a CES survival trend for, you can run a CES and a RAS on the same site.

I MONITOR NEST BOXES ON THE SITE

Maintaining and monitoring nest boxes on a site does not preclude you from starting a CES there. In fact, this can provide valuable dispersal information. We do ask that you do not drastically alter the number of boxes present while also operating a CES on the site though, as this could impact the number of birds caught and therefore the trends for your site.

DATA SUBMISSION IS TOO ONEROUS

Entering catch data for CES is no different to entering any other ringing data. The only additional information needed each year is 'effort' data for each session. This just requires you to record the date, the times

your sessions started and ended, and some weather data. With DemOn, you don't even need to send in a separate submission; once you have entered your effort data, we can extract it ourselves!

I CAN'T AFFORD TO RUN A CES

CES ringers automatically receive a rebate of 20p per new bird ringed during CES sessions (birds caught in CES nets only). Together with RAS projects, CES ringers are also eligible to apply for project support on an annual basis. Project support offers up to £100 per project, per year for capital items such as replacement nets or poles.

GARDEN CES

In 2020, to help mitigate the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on ringers, BTO launched a trial of CES in garden habitats. The survey methodology is essentially the same as for standard CES except that you can use artificial bait and the target number of birds to catch per season is lower, at just 100 birds. Garden CES participants don't currently qualify for the CES rebate or for project support. The data from the Garden CES trial are analysed separately from standard CES, so don't currently feed into the annual analyses but, if the data prove to be comparable, the aim is for Gardens to be included as a standard CES habitat in the future.

If anyone has been persuaded that CES might just be for them after all, be that standard CES or Garden CES, we would love to hear from you at ces@bto.org

CASE STUDY

Thetford Forest Ringing Group operate their CES from 06:00 to 08.30 to enable weekday CES sessions. This achieves 200+ birds a season and non-CES ringing often continues afterwards at weekends if the conditions allow.



Cetti's Warbler, by Liz Cutting / BTO

BBS data show that the UK population of Cetti's Warbler increased by 935% between 1995 and 2022.



Rock Pipit, by Philip Croft / BTO

Rock Pipits are primarily associated with coastal locations, although migrants from the Continent can sometimes be seen further inland. They are bigger, and have darker legs, than the similar Meadow Pipit.

Typical and atypical Rock Pipit nests

It's just over 70 years since **John Callion's** dad showed him a Robin nest on a mossy bank, between Camerton and Clifton, close to the River Derwent in West Cumbria. From that day on, he has been intrigued, amazed and fascinated by birds and their nests. In this article John describes some of the more unusual Rock Pipit nesting locations found in Cumbria in recent years.

Over the years, I've mostly been interested in small passerines, though when I was younger and my legs would take me wherever I wanted to go, I spent endless hours on the high Cumbrian fells looking for nesting Dotterel. Fifty years ago, I discovered the BTO and when I found out they were interested in data from nests and, better than that, you could put rings on nestlings' legs, I was delirious – wasn't the BTO just created for me?!

I gained a ringing permit, mostly through Bob Spencer who encouraged me by saying, 'nestling ringing is the most valuable of all the disciplines – it gives known age and exact place of origin'. I took up the challenge of finding open-nesting small passerines, concentrating on Grasshopper and Wood Warblers and Stonechats. Each species presented a different challenge, after all, no bird's nest is meant to be discovered or accessed.

Whilst in the uplands looking for Stonechat and Whinchat, I sought out Wheatears and, on the coast, I was challenged by Rock Pipit. I soon found out that just discovering where Wheatear and Rock Pipits nests were didn't give automatic

access. So, often with limited available time, I stopped my interest in these.

In 2019, with permanently reduced mobility and no longer able to go 'ratching' for nests on my previous scale, I again turned to Rock Pipits close to my home on the coast near Maryport and Workington; many of these territories can be viewed from a parked car and, to my surprise, more than I expected were accessible. This is where this story begins.

According to Ferguson-Lees *et al.* (2011), natural Rock Pipit nest sites are usually in maritime situations, generally very close to the upper tide limits, mostly on rugged coasts or islands, with the nest well hidden in deep vegetation, screened by plants, or in natural cavities which are sometimes human artefacts.

In West Cumbria, Callion (2020) and Mills & Mills (2021) have encountered and described these typical nest sites, together with others, in the ruinous coastal buildings and spoil 'cliffs' relating to the area's post-industrial heritage. Between and including Whitehaven and Silloth Docks, most Rock Pipits nest in brick structures relating to the industrial past (Mills & Mills 2021),

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including harbour walls, and especially between Harrington and Siddick, in the remnant banks of slag, that have cavities eroded by wind and water.

Since 2019, four unusual nest sites have been found, using plastic, wood, stone and metal sheeting. The most extraordinary of these was found by Graham Burr on the open shore near Harrington in 2022. The nest itself was under a plastic bucket lid lodged among the flotsam and jetsam in the highest tide line. When found on 1 June, the nest contained three well-grown chicks which fledged a few days later.

In 2020, newly-fledged chicks were seen being fed on a permanently moored boat in Maryport Harbour. Even though it's not out of the question that the nest may not have been on the boat, it was about 30 m from the harbour wall, and unlikely in the opinion of the observer (JC), that at least three such young chicks would have been able to fly so far at the point of fledging and all be in the same location.

At Workington in 2021, a pair were watched carrying food into a covered outbuilding near the RNLI boat shed on the north side of the harbour; the nest site was under some diagonal metal sheeting about 2 m off the ground.

At Maryport in 2022, after spending a fruitless two days watching food-carrying parents disappearing inside a derelict building, the nest site was eventually found by Peter Blinco on an interior ledge of a graffiti-adorned old fireplace in one of the historic buildings that surround the harbour.

SUMMARY

It seems Cumbrian Rock Pipits began to adapt to nesting in man-made industrial artefacts in the post-industrial age, but in recent years they have taken it further, using moored boats, plastic debris on the open shore and semi-permanent structures as seen at Workington Harbour. Even though they seem to have a specific habitat requirement for nesting, the actual nest site shows levels of flexibility and opportunism that is both unexpected and remarkable.

Rock Pipits have one of the lowest pulli ringing totals of any of our common passerines. In 2022, there were only 20

ringed nationally, so this 'new' opportunity for me to look at them more closely will hopefully allow me to provide additional numerical and scientific data to the BTO.



Natural nest site at Maryport with near-fledged chicks



Nest-site entrance in old fireplace, Maryport Harbour



Nest situated under a plastic bucket lid, Harrington shore



Ringing a Shearwater, by Chris Heward

When ringing larger species, it is often easier and safer for both the bird and the ringers to work in pairs, with one holding the bird while the other fits the ring.

For the love of seabirds

In 2020, BTO launched the #OurLostSeabirds appeal to raise funds to create the next generation of seabird volunteers. Seabird populations are under threat from many pressures but the drivers for these declines are difficult to understand, as key information on survival, productivity and dispersal rates is lacking. **Nina O’Hanlon, Mike Naidu and Liz Humphreys** provide an update on how money from the appeal has been benefiting ringers and improving the chances of us collecting these key data.

WEB RESOURCES

Web pages outlining useful information for someone wanting to start seabird ringing, as well as information for more experienced ringers wishing to set up projects, can be found at: www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bird-ringing-scheme/training-ring/value-seabird-ringing

A series of species pages outlining best-practice guidance for catching and ringing seabirds, including Special Methods considerations, are now available to ringers on the Ringing Hub. Ringers must be logged into My BTO to access these pages.

The three main objectives of #OurLostSeabirds were outlined in the autumn 2022 edition of *LifeCycle*. The first has been successfully accomplished with the delivery of our seabird identification and ecology courses. The second is well under way, with BTO now taking a leading role in the Seabird Monitoring Programme and we will be updating the survey methodology handbook in due course. The third was to increase the number of people involved with seabird ringing. To achieve this, we’re trialling adaptors for ringing pliers to improve the accessibility of seabird ringing to those with small hands or lower grip strength, we’ve released new training materials and ringing guidance to aid the planning and running of seabird ringing trips, and we’ve been offering grants to ringing groups and ringers to support and encourage new seabird ringers.

This grant scheme first ran in 2022, which was a particularly difficult breeding season due to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) affecting many colonies, and resulting in the mortality of tens of thousands of seabirds across Europe (based on conservative estimates). Many

ringing trips which had been months in the planning could not go ahead, and the disappointment and sadness for many ringers was hard to bear. This meant only two ringing groups (in England and Wales) were able to take advantage of the grant scheme in its first year. However, we were able to roll over funding commitments, with the hope that the 2023 season would be easier.

Thanks to the hard work of the Ringing and Nest Recording Team, robust guidelines were drawn up for ringers in 2023, to minimise the risk of HPAI transmission to birds and humans. This meant seabird ringing activities could fully resume, as long as no deceased or diseased birds were observed at the colonies (with exemptions for key scientific research). With great relief, most grant-funded ringing trips went ahead, with the 2022 rolled-over applicants and some new applicants able to get the experience they wanted. Up to 2024, 12 ringing groups and 59 individuals have now benefited from the scheme (at a cost of approximately £20,000 per year). We were overwhelmed by the enthusiastic feedback we received from those who took part:

Waheed Arshad joined the Grampian Ringing Group: *The most memorable part of the ringing trip was the incredible opportunity to train and ring a variety of cliff-nesting seabird species, with so many 'firsts' for adults and pulli: Shag, Razorbill, Guillemot, Kittiwake. The experience was made even more memorable by the warmth within the Grampian Ringing Group. The Trainers were incredibly welcoming and supportive, creating an enriching learning environment. Their passion for seabird conservation was infectious, and their willingness to share expertise and guidance made the entire trip an unforgettable and delightful adventure. Contributing to a long-term project (with the University of Aberdeen and CEH) made the trip particularly worthwhile.*

Fenja Squirrel went out with the Eilean nan Ròn Skua group to northern Scotland: *I have never ringed any seabirds and being a student makes it hard to get these opportunities as they are often far away and expensive. One of the most memorable parts of the ringing trip was meeting such lovely, like-minded people in both the group and the other 'grant scheme girls'. I've made friends for life on this trip and it's so nice to be ringing with other women. When I started ringing it was mainly middle-aged men and now more and more at ringing sessions there are more women than men. It is just so lovely to have role models and be able to teach other young women.*

Many ringing groups highlighted the importance of successional forward planning, and how attracting new people into their team and seabird ringing in general was important for the long-term future of seabird ringing:

Kenny Cramer from the Northants Ringing Group took two individuals new to seabird ringing on their trip to Skokholm in 2022, and captured this perfectly: *I believe it is vitally important to any group to attract (and retain) new trainees. This is the only way to ensure that knowledge and experience is passed on to the next generation of ringers. It also helps to secure continuity, for example, at sites with long-running CES/RAS projects. For our group, the seabird trips are not just about learning new skills, they are also an opportunity to get away from the pressures of 'normal' daily life and experience something truly unique and special. This*



Examining a wing, by Tim Frayling

Training new seabird ringers doesn't just provide new ringing opportunities, but helps ensure the long-term future of projects.

shared experience brings us closer together and helps us create strong connections with other ringing groups, which in turn opens up more opportunities to ring in different locations and situations.

And the best part about taking new people to seabird ringing?

Bruce Taggart from the Looe Island Gull Project took several individuals to ring gulls in 2022, 2023 and 2024: *New people are always enthusiastic and keen to get involved. Often lacking in confidence when they first handle gull chicks, one of the best parts is to watch their confidence grow as they ring more birds.*

At BTO, we are heartened by the support we continue to receive from everyone in the ringing community who shares our passion for these amazing, at-risk birds. We want to wholeheartedly thank everyone who has contributed to the funding, development, running and delivery of the appeal outputs so far, and look forward to continuing to build seabird research capacity into the future.

Participants provided feedback on why they originally applied, with many stating how difficult it can be initially to find seabird ringing opportunities: *Jan Rod joined a team from the Copeland Bird Observatory: I found it difficult to get any ringing experience in Ireland, not to mention seabird experience. Especially at the start of a ringing career, with no network of contacts. This was a great opportunity to get some ringing experience but also to make contact with other ringers, as I love to ring with different people and learn from them.*

RIN: Asking the experts

As part of a wider review of the updated guidance for ringers, **Mark Grantham** explains how the Ringing Committee are helping review guidance and best practice.



Snipe, by Allan Drewitt / BTO

Snipe is a species commonly caught using dazzling techniques.

During our review of the guidance previously in the *Ringers' Manual*, the ringing Licensing Team have taken a step back and reassessed where some areas of this guidance originated. More importantly, we've looked at whether this was based on good science, presumption, ad hoc 'field-testing' (I'll always remember walking up and down the car park at The Nunnery working out how to judge speaker volumes!) or just 'hand-me-downs' from Trainers over the decades.

One aspect we initially considered was advice on best practice for euthanasia. This was an area where the relevant expertise lies outside of ringing, but we were able to liaise with colleagues at RSPCA and UFAW (Universities Federation for Animal Welfare) to be able to signpost ringers to the most comprehensive publicly available advice.

For areas where the expertise and understanding of practicalities may lie within ringing, we had visions of forming a 'welfare panel' within RIN to consider these matters, though the potential for the issues to be both diverse and specialised saw us change

tack slightly. Instead we decided to adopt more focused 'Task & Finish Groups' for each issue, calling on the expertise of outside professionals where needed. A good example of how we see this working was the recent discussions on the guidance around dazzling and use of lights at night:

1. Identification of the issue, whether internally or from external sources (what is the actual impact of light on birds' eyes?)
2. Through initial consultation with an expert in the field, agree whether the concern is sufficiently valid to be progressed (sufficient concern was identified that current guidance is lacking or not based on a scientific approach)
3. A paper is then taken to RIN outlining the background to the issue, the current situation and the proposed questions we'd like to see addressed (RINOCT23_ITEM4C)
4. Staff then draw together a Task & Finish Group, comprising the most suitable RIN member, an expert in the relevant field (professional or academic), representatives from the ringing community and relevant Ringing Scheme staff (Stephen Vickers (RIN), Prof Graham Martin (Emeritus Professor, Avian Sensory Science, University of Birmingham), Tony Cross, Ben Dolan, Mark Grantham, Ellie Leech)
5. The Group considers the expert advice, discusses any concerns and guidance proposals, ensuring that the practical implications are fully considered, and drafts best-practice guidance
6. The draft guidance is presented as a RIN paper, allowing the wider ringing community to comment. Any comments will be considered by RIN and any necessary amendments made (RINMAY24_ITEM4a)
7. Final guidance is published as an update to the online guidance and, where necessary, communicated to ringers via email, eNewsletter or in *LifeCycle*. Any further feedback will be collated by staff, being taken back to RIN where evidence suggests this is required.

As you'll see, we're at Step 7 with the review of using lights at night, with finalised guidance published in Chapter 4 of the online guidance. The process may have been a bit slow, but it was thorough, and we hope that in the future it will continue to be open to input from ringers with experience in the field, in both senses of the word.

Further areas that we have been progressing with Task & Finish Groups include:

- Ringing Swifts at breeding sites (published in the new Swift species factsheet on the species pages of the Ringing Hub)
- Holding birds upside down when ringing/processing (at Step 7 and published in Chapter 5 of the online guidance)
- Use of playback lures in the breeding season (partly addressed by RIN:OCT23_ITEM7 and currently at Step 3)

Ringling Committee (RIN) 2024

RIN meets twice a year, usually in the spring and the autumn. Agendas, non-confidential papers, minutes and members' contact details are available on the Ringing Hub area of the BTO website (www.bto.org/ringing-hub).

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 — Midlothian
 Roger Walsh — Norfolk

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

INTRODUCING YOUR NEW RIN MEMBER



HELEN FRANKLIN

Having had a lifelong interest in natural history and birdwatching, both in the UK and overseas (my husband worked in West Africa and the Middle East for 10 years), I came to ringing quite late in life, having failed to find the time earlier due to family and work commitments until I moved towards retirement. I became a C-permit holder in 2012, and got my A permit at the end of 2017. I have joined colleagues several times to take a ringing team to Malta, Portugal, Cyprus and The Gambia to contribute to their ringing schemes and the Northants Ringing Group has made an annual trip (except for one year due to Covid restrictions) to Skokholm Bird Observatory, which I have joined since 2014. Although I am not a Trainer I enjoy taking part in ringing demonstrations and assisting with the guidance of trainees.

My day job was in administration and finance (often as a legal secretary) and latterly for the RSPB Midlands Office,

where I was Office Manager and PA to the Regional Director between 2000 and 2014. After I retired, I volunteered for several years as the minutes secretary for the Buglife Board. I enjoy computer work and have a basic knowledge of web design (I maintain the content of the Banbury Ornithological Society website) and have enjoyed getting to grips with DemOn, having been part of the early trials, and guided fellow ringers to find their way round the system (and the Manual!). My hope is that by joining the Ringing Committee I can offer what skills I have to assist in any way that's needed. I do not have a huge depth of ornithological or ringing knowledge, but I consider myself something of a process person and recognise that the ringing I do generates data for scientists to use. I would also hope that as I trained relatively recently I still see the ringing world from a newbie's perspective and might be able to assist the BTO to make this journey less confusing.



Kestrel, by Philip Croft / BTO

Kestrel boxes can also attract owls, Jackdaw, Stock Dove, Feral Pigeon and occasionally Mallard as well as squirrels, bees, wasps and hornets - worth bearing in mind if using a net to catch adults!

Keeping an eye on Kestrels

The Kestrel is one of our most recognisable raptors, but population decreases have led to it being listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern Amber List. Although egg- and chick-stage failure rates are very low, the main area of concern likely to be associated with the decline lies with adult and juvenile survival; therefore, more ringing data for both adults and first-year birds would be helpful. **Alan Ball, Jim Lennon, Bob Sheppard and Matt Stevens** explain how to monitor this charismatic species.

Being a cavity nester, and one that readily takes to nest boxes, Kestrels make a good subject for nest-box monitoring projects. Kestrels will nest in all manner of boxes including dual-chambered Barn Owl pole-boxes, tyre boxes and open-fronted boxes. There is a suggestion that Kestrels might be less keen on wide, open-fronted boxes, possibly due to them being more difficult to defend. Boxes can be made from a variety of materials including:

- plywood – birch plywood is ideal; weather and boil-proof (WPB) ply can delaminate quickly; marine ply can split on the edges and will need sealing with two-part sealant
- Correx – a corrugated plastic material which is cheaper, lighter, more durable and easier to manipulate and install
- Stokbord – 100% recycled plastic board that lasts much longer than plywood

Drilling a few small (c. 5-mm diameter) drainage holes into the base of the box is useful. A landing perch can be added to the design, depending on what the box is mounted on and whether there is any need for one.

It is important to add a substrate to the bottom of Kestrel boxes or they may not be used. Some ringers will use 2 cm of wood shavings to line the box, while others use 6-mm pea gravel or granite road chippings as these are too heavy to be blown out of open-fronted boxes in sidewinds. There is some indication that boxes showing signs of previous use are more likely to be used again (though not always by the same pair), so it isn't necessary to clean them out on an annual basis unless they have been used by Jackdaws or squirrels.

LOCATION

Nest boxes can be located on isolated hedgerow trees, poles or buildings and, as with any nest box, should be sited so as to avoid the prevailing weather. This normally means an aspect between NNW through N to SSE, although nearby landscape features may provide shelter for other aspects. Boxes on buildings can be placed on a sheltered external wall or, if placing in an open barn, on an internal wall with the entrance facing the open end of the building (and not too deep into the barn). Wherever the box is located, it needs to have a clear line of sight

OWLS

It is a good idea to provide a nest site for Barn Owls if locating a Kestrel box close to a Barn Owl territory (noting that they will nest alongside Barn Owls in dual-chambered boxes). Tawny Owls will occasionally use open-fronted Kestrel boxes. Using boxes without a lip discourages use by Tawny Owls.

and flightpath in and out of the box. It is worth noting that boxes placed on the edge of a woodland tend to be more attractive to other species, such as squirrels and Jackdaws.

Scots Pine tend to be a reasonably good bet as host trees for Kestrel boxes, as do Ash (though these are probably best now avoided due to Ash Dieback disease) and Oak. Beech trees tend to have a canopy that's a bit too dense to be suitable. Within the tree, open areas are best (i.e. not too much in the way of surrounding vegetation or branches) but having some dead or open/bare branches about a metre beneath or to the side of the nest box provides a good location for young birds to branch onto when it comes time to leave the box. These branches need to be a way away from the box to prevent access by potential predators i.e. a potential perch running straight to the front of the box is not a good idea.

Boxes can also be mounted on either redundant or newly erected telegraph or electricity poles. Farms will sometimes have poles lying around and the farmer may be happy to put one up with their telehandler.

Boxes do not need to be sited too high; between three and five metres is generally fine. Erecting them over the autumn or winter (generally before mid-January) gives a greater likelihood of them being used in the ensuing season; however, they may be occupied quickly if natural nest sites are scarce.

Attaching a box to a tree can be tricky and depends on the box material. Steel carriage bolts ('whirlies') do not damage the tree and provide a strong attachment but can cause issues later if a chainsaw is used on a felled tree. If using a Correx box, a batten can be placed across a tree fork and the box can be held in place with cable ties around the frame.

A back batten allows some growth of the tree over the life of the box, so that the box does not get pushed off the tree as the trunk grows. If using nails to mount boxes on trees, leaving the nail head raised 10–15 mm from the box allows for 'push back' from the tree. Tilting the box slightly forward will keep any dampness to the front where it is more likely to dry out.

CATCHING ADULTS

Although some ringers have had no issues with desertion or failures, adult Kestrels can be quite 'nervous' and it is best not to attempt to capture them at the nest until the eggs are hatched (see Kania 1996). Adults have also been observed to be reluctant to re-enter a nest box with food after being caught (or after an attempt to catch). Adults often kick the odd egg out of the nest scrape if startled when vacating the nest box. This can also be the case if just checking the box without trying to catch the adult. It is important to carefully place any scattered eggs back into the nest scrape.

Once eggs have hatched, adults will sometimes sit tight and can be taken off the nest by hand (although they will lie on their backs with their feet pointing at you) but, if not, they can be caught with a hand-net placed over the box entrance (similar to a fishing landing net but made from small-mesh clap-net material). Also, a drop door can be fitted to the outside of the box, to cover the entrance. This can be triggered manually using a pull cord from a hide, allowing selective catching of the adults to minimise disturbance. Depending on the style of nest box, adults can sometimes be replaced in the nest, with the entrance blocked for a few minutes until they settle. With open-fronted boxes, birds can be released a short distance away from the box when the ringers leave.

RINGING PULLI

The age at which Kestrel chicks are ringed can depend on the design of the box. They should be ringed when they are at an age where it is more likely that they will survive (three to four weeks) but they can be ringed at a younger age if necessary. Chicks at feather stage FS or FM are easier to return to the nest than older chicks as there is a reduced risk of them fledging prematurely. Larger chicks in nest boxes with smaller entrance holes (e.g. not in an open-fronted box) can be ringed when a little older but care needs to be taken to ensure they settle back in the box after ringing; ringers should retreat from the box slowly and quietly so as not to panic the chicks. Any chicks which appear especially active around the nest-box entrance, or are seen to leave the box

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POLE-MOUNTED CAMERAS

Matt Stevens' set up for his pole-mounted camera uses a camera that is similar to a Go-Pro (an Akaso EK700 Pro) on a telescopic pole. The camera, which costs about £80, can be viewed and controlled remotely using a smartphone. The telescopic pole (e.g. Vine Antennas Hampole) costs a similar amount. A mobile phone fixed to an extendable pole also works for remotely monitoring nests

regularly and use surrounding branches, should be left undisturbed.

Small chicks can be removed from the box reasonably easily and without pain to the ringer! As they mature, young birds can often lie on their backs with talons held in front when a first attempt is made to remove them from the box. A grab by a Kestrel can be painful; where birds are more alert and defensive, picking up birds with a hand that is inside a large (30 cm x 30 cm) cotton bird bag can help. If this process is performed very slowly and steadily (and without reacting to any attempts to grab made by the birds e.g. quickly withdrawing hands) then the bird may be picked up and then enclosed in the bag it is surrounded by without the ringer suffering any puncture or grab wounds.

For more mature chicks, reaching into the box through a black, dense-mesh butterfly net placed over the entrance of the box usually works. Again, if performed slowly and steadily there is usually a good chance of achieving this without receiving any grab wounds. Using a net over the entrance can also be a good safety measure for catching any chicks making an attempt to leave the box while the ringer tries to collect the young. This is especially useful for larger broods (fives and sixes).

AGEING AND SEXING

Ageing and sexing of full-grown Kestrels is covered well in Baker (2016; look at flank feather centre shape and primary covert tips for ageing) and the relevant page in the guide produced by Javier Blasco-Zumeta and Gerd-Michael Heinze. For ageing Kestrel chicks, the information provided by Bijlsma (1997) on wing length and mass of growing nestlings is very good. Determining sex in Kestrel chicks can be reasonably straightforward from about three weeks of age using the uppertail-covert colour and pattern (males – greyish uppertail-coverts with narrow, dark brown or black centres along each side of the shaft, and narrow dark brown bands; females – brown uppertail-coverts with broad, dark brown bands) although around 15% are intermediate and are best left unsexed.

NEST RECORDING

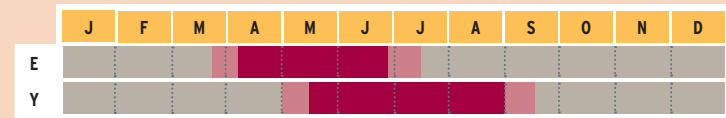
First-egg dates are usually from mid-April to mid-May. Failure at egg-stage (if early enough in the season) can often result in re-laying. Using a pole-mounted camera for box checking speeds up nest visits and can significantly reduce disturbance.

If time and travelling allows for follow-up visits, fledged Kestrels stay in the vicinity for a week or so after fledging so success can easily be recorded. These visits are particularly useful for confirming actual fledging success and they can be recorded in DemOn by adding an additional nest visit and recording young as being near the nest (code NN). In large broods the younger individuals are at greater risk of mortality at the point of fledging or in the following weeks, so more accurate data on successful fledging is very helpful.

Kestrel: nest-recording profile

Typically open country with suitable nest sites, from rural to urban and industrial, coastal to upland, and wetland to open woodland; avoids dense forest, treeless wetlands and land over 480 m. Solitary, but pairs will breed in close proximity where nest sites are limited.

Site: Wide range: ledge on a rock face, cliff or large building, or other sheltered site on human artefact (e.g. ruins, bridges, pylons); or old nest of another bird (especially corvids); or large cavity, broken snag or shallow hollow in tree; readily uses nest boxes, exceptionally on ground, or down rabbit burrows (e.g. Orkney where foxes are absent).



Nest: Scrape with no material added, pellets and small feathers accumulate during incubation.

Eggs: White or yellowish-buff, usually so heavily speckled with dark red-brown that ground colour obscured; sometimes variably marked or blotched with reddish-brown, purple, grey or yellowish-brown.

Broods: 1, **Eggs:** 4–5 (3–7), **Incubation:** 28 (27–29) days, **Hatching to fledging:** 27–32 days.



Text adapted from BTO's A Field Guide to Monitoring Nests, Kestrel eggs, by Justin Walker; Kestrel chicks, by Greg Conway

Facing the chop?

Farmland hedgerows form an important habitat for birds and other wildlife. They are currently maintained through annual, or multi-annual, cutting cycles which are designed to occur outside the breeding season between 1 March and 31 August. A new BTO report, written by **Hugh Hanmer** and **Ellie Leech**, assesses what impact a change in the duration of the hedgerow cutting regime would have on 15 species of songbirds likely to nest in farmland hedgerows.



Farmland hedgerow, by Justin Walker

Currently, active nests and dependent fledglings are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), such that it is an offence to intentionally take, damage or destroy them. Damage and destruction may not be intentional, however; it could, for example, occur as an incidental consequence of commercial work undertaken during the breeding season, such as hedgerow management. To minimise this specific risk, as part of the cross-compliance regulations that apply to farmers who receive rural payments, Defra rules previously prohibited the cutting/trimming of farmland hedgerows between 1 March and 31 August (with some specific exceptions). These rules were derived from EU legislation, however, and therefore lapsed at the end of 2023, following the UK's exit from the EU, necessitating the development of a new UK legal framework.

The aim of this BTO study, commissioned by Defra with a focus on England, was to evaluate the degree of overlap between the existing period of prohibition and avian breeding seasons, noting that the latter may be changing in response to climatic change, with a specific focus on the end of the season

as this is where the greatest potential for conflict with agricultural activities lies. Four proposed scenarios were assessed, involving the suspension of hedgerow management until 1 August, 15 August, 1 September (as currently) and 15 September.

This analysis used data from both the Nest Record and the Ringing Schemes, collected in England between 2011 and 2021, to provide estimates of the timing of each stage of the nesting cycle for 15 passerines (Blackbird, Blackcap, Bullfinch, Chaffinch, Dunnock, Garden Warbler, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Linnet, Long-tailed Tit, Robin, Song Thrush, Whitethroat, Wren and Yellowhammer) that breed in hedges, with a particular focus on the start and end of the breeding period, and the subsequent period of parental dependency.

The results showed that 14 species were still likely to have nests containing eggs or nestlings after 31 July, with Yellowhammer, Bullfinch, Goldfinch and Linnet the most frequently observed. Nests of 11 species were likely to still be active after 14 August, with Yellowhammer still being the most frequently recorded; Bullfinch and Linnet were also likely to still have

dependent young at this point of the year. After 31 August, the number of species with active nests fell to six, but this accounted for fewer than 1.5% of the annual attempts made by any of them; 12 species were still likely to be caring for dependent young, but again the proportion of annual attempts for which this was likely to be the case was low (< 10%) for all species. No active nests of any species were recorded after 14 September and, of the eight species still caring for dependent young at this stage of the year, this accounted for < 1.5% of annual attempts.

These results formed part of a wider consultation on domestic hedgerow regulations. As a result of that consultation, new regulations, reinstating the previous hedge cutting suspension on agricultural land between 1 March and 31 August came into force in English legislation on 23 May 2024. We extend our thanks to all the nest recorders and ringers whose data contributed to this analysis, ensuring that mitigation measures implemented to protect birds are based on robust, current evidence.

[Hanmer, H.J. & Leech, D.I. 2024. *Breeding periods of hedgerow-nesting birds in England*. BTO Research Report 762. BTO, Thetford, UK.](#)



Photographs courtesy of Aggregate Industries staff

The quarry-nesting Little Ringed Plover and the protected nest.

Interesting snippets

We are occasionally contacted by ringers or nest recorders to let us know about interesting or unusual observations or occurrences. We thought it would be nice to share some of these stories more widely. In this article, we have a great example of good practice relating to a Schedule 1 species, an interesting Peregrine nesting record and a very unusual Blackbird nest record.

SCHEDULE 1 SPECIES NEST SITE BLOWN UP

Bob Medland got in touch to say he didn't need to renew his Schedule 1 permit because the nest site had been 'blown up' – literally. Thankfully, the reasons weren't as bad as we feared and it proved to be a good news story.

The Little Ringed Plover nest was on a 'lift' (a ledge) halfway up a vast quarry in the Mendip Hills, run by Aggregate Industries. When the explosives team were drilling for the next blast – to loosen hundreds of tons from the rock-face – they discovered the nest. This was amazing in itself, especially given what they were doing. But they then took a photo with a mobile and sent it to the quarry manager with the message "Guvnor, blasting team here. We've found this little bird's nest with eggs. Wot should we do?" He checked with their environment manager who got in touch with me.

A few days later they took another photo, having stopped working in the area and put rocks around the nest (now containing four chicks) so

it wouldn't be damaged or destroyed accidentally. They also diverted all heavy lorries etc. away from the nest area. Unfortunately, I was too late when I got there – the pulli had left the nest and scattered. I did try locating the pulli using an infra-red device; trouble was, it was a baking-hot morning in June. Using said device to locate warm pulli among a quarry full of hot rocks was, er, unsuccessful! So, no luck and a pity as I have never ringed LRPs. But never mind, far more important was that the outcome was a breeding success, solely due to the superbly responsible attitudes shown by all involved at the quarry, not least for reprogramming their work to another part of the quarry for the next four weeks. In the world of heavy industry, how often do we encounter this sort of thing? Hats off to the company and staff (but not safety hats, of course).

BASKET-NESTING PEREGRINE

Adrian Blackburn recounts the unusual occurrence of a basket-nesting Peregrine.

In early June 2019 we went to check on a stand of trees that regularly had Hobbies breeding in old crow nests. To our amazement we found a Peregrine in a crow's nest, with three large chicks which we could not access due to the strong likelihood of them bailing out. During December 2019 we removed the old crow's nest and replaced it with a basket. The Peregrines took to it straight away, but we could not access the nest or ring the chicks as Covid restrictions were in place. In 2021 the birds moved about a third of a mile and nested high up in a crow's nest that was totally inaccessible.

During the following winter 2021/22, we removed the nest and put another basket up which was easily accessible with a triple ladder. The birds moved again in 2022 to a site about half a mile away, again in a crow's nest but were unsuccessful. They were almost certainly shot one night as the chicks were present at 8 p.m. one evening but the nest was empty the following morning and there was a large hole in the base of the nest. In 2023

the birds returned to the tree they had used in 2021 and nested in the basket and we ringed the three chicks. During the autumn of 2023 we refurbished the basket and they bred again in 2024 and we were able to ring another three chicks.

MULTI-BROODED BLACKBIRD

David Oliver wrote to us about some unusual Blackbird nesting behaviour:

On 20 April 2023 I found a new Blackbird nest in a beech/privet hedge which contained four chicks which were ready to fledge, so unringable. On 8 May, the female was sitting on the same nest, which by 11 May contained five warm eggs, and I ringed four of the chicks on 24 May. By 1 June, all the

chicks had left the nest and the male was carrying worms nearby. On 16 June I was surprised to find another clutch of five warm eggs in the same nest. I ringed three of the four chicks on 28 June. By 7 July there were four chicks ready to fledge.

Yet again, by 21 July there were four warm eggs in the nest, which had a little fresh lining in the cup. On 23 July the female was on the nest with the male feeding at least two juveniles and presumably the female. I ringed three out of the four chicks on 7 August, and by 13 August they were ready to fledge and were gone by 16 August. The obverse to this pair of productive Blackbirds was a ringed pair in a nearby orchard which built at least six nests, all of which were predated! In my

experience of 70 years nesting, this multi-brooded Blackbird was unique!



Peregrine chicks in the basket, by Robert Morris

Svensson 5th edition – a review

There can't be many ringers who haven't come across Lars Svensson's *Identification Guide to European Passerines* (IGEP). First published in 1970, over 30 years have passed since the fourth edition was released in green. After that long wait, the fifth edition of the book referred to as just 'Svensson' or 'the ringer's bible' is now available in fetching maroon.

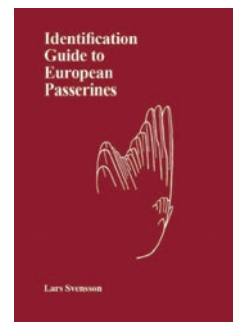
Following previous editions, the introduction opens with a guide to using the book, essential reading for getting the most out of it. The well-written discussion of general techniques for ageing and sexing provides a solid foundation to what some might refer to as first principles. The value of these sections cannot be overstated, serving as an excellent introduction to the topic for new ringers and a worthy revision for others.

As expected, most of the book is comprised of the species accounts, the taxonomy and sequence of which is updated with the IOC list current at the time of publication. The number of

species in IGEP5 has increased by 38 to 267. Many are the result of taxonomic splits, Eastern Bonelli's Warbler for example, while others are included based on vagrancy, such as Pale-legged Leaf Warbler.

Each species account includes a section on identification, with emphasis on features appreciable in the hand: plumage, soft part colours, morphology, and biometrics. Any subspecies, variation and range are discussed. Moulting strategy is described along with any specific observations. A new feature is a brief mention of the extent of partial post-juvenile moult for all species having this strategy.

The format of the ageing and sexing discussion may initially appear confusing and inconsistent across different species, even within the same genus. There is method though, with sections ordered to present the most likely needed information first. Information required to arrive at a decision is clearly presented, with readers advised to consult spring and



autumn descriptions for completeness. Svensson is rightly keen to point out ambiguities that may prevent an informed and robust conclusion from being reached. Line drawings clearly illustrate criteria more difficult to describe concisely.

For beginners, IGEP5 could be considered an essential text, while seasoned ringers will benefit from the new and revised species accounts. All, however, will profit from Svensson's continued commitment to extending taxonomic research. The 'green one' has a worthy successor.

Justin Walker



Mist nets set to catch waders on a saltmarsh at night, by Rob Robinson

Mist nets need to be suitable for the type of catching being undertaken. Those used to catch waders on a saltmarsh at night need to be stronger than those used to catch passerines, for instance.

Properties of mist nets

Different mist nets have different properties that make them more, or less, suitable for your needs. This may be quite confusing to anyone new to mist netting or for a ringer that has only used a limited selection but wishes to use different types of nets. This article, written by **Phil Belman, Jez Blackburn, Chris and Denise Lamsdell, and Ruth Walker**, aims to provide an overview of mist-net specifications for the nets most commonly used.

For any mist-netting session, the choice of which net to use will be dependent on the species that you are trying to catch and the habitat in which you are operating. As different nets are more appropriate for different species groups, birds of other sizes to the intended catch might not be caught or might escape from the net more easily. Passerine nets are less likely to hold a Magpie than a large-mesh net and large-mesh nets are less likely to hold passerines.

It is important to use a net appropriate to the catching situation to ensure the choice of net does not negatively impact on the welfare of the birds being caught. For example, if waders are being caught over water (particularly in tidal situations) then the net needs to be made of a larger mesh, be less prone to sagging and be stronger than one used for passerines.

Net strength is determined by a multiplier of ply x denier (d); 3-ply nets aren't necessarily stronger than 2-ply unless they are also made from heavier netting i.e. a higher denier. Any increase in ply or denier will make a net stronger but also more visible, so choose the combination that best matches your catching situation.

REFERENCES

Francis, D. & Butterworth, J. 2005. *Making and mending mist nets*. BTO, Thetford. Available as a downloadable PDF on the Ringing Hub.

NET TERMINOLOGY

It is helpful to understand the terminology around mist nets before deciding which to purchase. Nets come in different lengths, with varying numbers of shelves and are made of different fibres (polyester or nylon) and come in different thicknesses (ply), weights (denier), mesh sizes, can have braided or twisted shelf strings and are tethered in different places.

Ply – the ply is the number of strands in the actual netting material. Nets are either 2-ply or 3-ply with the latter being thicker and, as a result, more visible.

Denier – the denier refers to the weight of the netting material and is defined as the weight (in grams) of 9,000 m of thread.

Mesh size – mesh size refers to either the unstretched length of mesh e.g. 16x16 mm measured knot to knot, or the stretched length e.g. 32 mm measured diagonally knot to knot. The net specification should indicate which measurement is being used. Nets of a variety of mesh sizes are available to facilitate catching different sizes of birds.

Tethering ensures that the slack in the netting is evenly distributed and prevents the netting from becoming bunched at

one end by the wind. Tethering is usually added to one or two shelves. For guidance on tethering mist nets, see Francis & Butterworth (2005).

Shelf strings can be braided or twisted. Braided shelf strings are less prone to stretching than twisted shelf strings and come in two thicknesses: normal and wader gauge.

Fibres – nets are made from either nylon or polyester thread. In fine-thread form, nylon holds dye and UV blockers better than polyester, so will retain colour and strength for longer under prolonged UV exposure. Monofilament nylon nets are not recommended for birds unless the ringer is very experienced and the nets are constantly supervised. Any birds caught need to be removed quickly as monofilament is relatively ‘sharp’ and can damage birds left in the net too long. Monofilament nets of ultra-thin (0.08 mm) thread are sometimes used for hummingbirds and by batworkers but only where small catches are expected.

TYPES OF NET

There are various brands of mist nets available to purchase (by ringers with a mist-net endorsement), some of which are available through BTO Sales, while others can be bought elsewhere. Some, which are no longer manufactured, can still be obtained second hand from other ringers.

The nets used most commonly are North Ronaldsay and Ecotone, both of which are available through BTO Sales. Additionally, Merlin nets are available directly through Merlin Ringing Supplies. Older nets that ringers might still have, and pass on, but are no longer manufactured are Japanese, SpiderTech, Gundry and Knox.

North Ronaldsay small-mesh nets are made from Japanese polyester 16x16-mm netting and come in lengths of 6, 9, 12 and 18 m. They have four shelves, braided shelf strings, are tethered on the top shelf and come in 75d, 2-ply (super fine) or 3-ply (standard). Larger mesh sizes, made from Japanese nylon, with a higher denier, are also available in two- or four-shelf versions.

Ecotone nets are made in Poland using Japanese netting. The nets sold through BTO Sales are made with 2-ply/75d, small mesh (16x16 mm) polyester netting in

lengths of 3, 6, 9, 12 and 18 m, with four or five shelves. They have twisted shelf strings and are tethered on the two middle shelves. Heavier-duty, larger-mesh nylon nets are also available for wader netting. Many additional Ecotone nets can be purchased directly from the company.

Merlin nets come in a variety of net and mesh sizes in nylon material. The finish to their construction, such as depth of pockets and wind tethering, has been improved, although the loops are less refined than those of more expensive nets. Nets made with the standard 16x16-mm mesh are available in 6, 9, 12 and 18 m lengths, with five panels. They are available in 2-ply/70d (super fine) & 110d (slightly stronger and more visible). In addition, 12 m, 70d, 16x16-mm mesh, double and single panel nets are available. Merlin also supplies 20x20-mm mesh, 2-ply/110d, four-shelf nets, available in 12 and 18 m lengths, 30x30-mm mesh, 3-ply/210d, four-shelf nets, available in 12 and 18 m lengths, and 60x60-mm mesh, 2-ply/210d, four-panel nets, available in 6 and 12 m lengths.

PREVIOUSLY AVAILABLE NETS

Japanese nets were made of polyester 16x16-mm mesh, 2-ply, 75d netting and were available with four shelves or a single shelf and in lengths of 6, 9, 12 and 18 m. The nets were made with a twisted shelf string, which stretched over time. They were tethered on the top shelf.

SpiderTech nets were made with nylon 16x16-mm mesh netting, were available in 6, 9, 12 and 18 m lengths and were made with four shelves. The netting is 2 ply, originally 110d and later 70d; they have a twisted shelf string and were tethered on two middle shelves.

Gundry nets were made with small mesh of 16x16 mm or standard mesh of 19x19 mm. Early Gundry small mesh were made up from 3-ply / 70d nylon as 3 shelf, later as 4 shelf, with ‘Superfine’ 2-ply / 75d polyester subsequently added to the range. They tend to have deeper pockets and are particularly good for roosting passerines, thrushes, petrels and species that are caught in wooded areas with a dark backdrop.

SECOND-HAND NETS

If acquiring a mist net second hand, it is important to check the specification to ensure you are getting the net you want and to be aware of any modifications you may need to make so that it is fit for purpose. Second-hand nets may need tethering for instance.

To determine the ply of any netting you may not be sure of, place one strand of the mesh between the thumb and index finger of each hand and twist in opposite directions. The strands of the mesh will separate to reveal either two or three individual strands.

SUPPLIERS

North Ronaldsay and Ecotone nets can be purchased through the BTO shop: www.bto.org/shop

Ecotone nets are also available through their own website (<https://en.ecotone.com.pl/>) or from NHBS (www.nhbs.com/).

For Merlin nets, see Merlin Ringing Supplies website: www.merlinringingsupplies.co.uk

Twisted shelf string (discontinued by BTO) is still available by special order from PT Winchester (item LP06012999) ptwinchester.co.uk



Adult male Goosander, by Katherine Booth Jones / BTO

Goosanders (particularly females) are sometimes mistaken for Red-breasted Mergansers, which are resident and breed in Scotland, NW England and Wales and parts of Northern Ireland, but are mostly a winter visitor elsewhere.

Goosander tagging and tracking

In the springs of 2021 and 2022, BTO Scotland staff trialled the catching and tagging of Goosanders with GPS tags to try and answer some of the questions about what Goosanders get up to during the salmon smolt run; this is a critical period in the salmon life cycle where young fish migrate en masse down river systems and out to sea. In this article, **Anthony Wetherhill** discusses the background to the project and shares the results of the trial.

Goosanders colonised Scotland from Scandinavia in the late 1800s and have since spread to breed on most river systems in the north and west of the UK. As fish-eating birds, their gradual increase in range and population size has brought them into conflict with anglers and fisheries organisations, due to their perceived impact on salmon and trout (salmonid) stocks. Over the past 40 years salmonid numbers returning from the sea have declined by approximately 40%, and this has coincided with an increase in Goosander population of 139%, as well as a range expansion in both breeding and wintering range.

Salmonid declines are thought to be largely driven by poor at-sea survival rates and reviews into the effects that fish-eating birds have on salmonids have so far proven to be inconclusive. Fishing for salmon in Scottish rivers is worth many millions of pounds to the Scottish economy, so the concerns of the angling industry over the potential additive pressures that fish-eating birds might have on dwindling fish populations must be taken seriously. Statutory nature conservation organisation NatureScot issues licences annually in

Scotland to shoot Goosanders as an aid to scaring them away from places where fish are particularly vulnerable to predation, but this status quo may become harder to justify given the lack of conclusive evidence that Goosander have a significant negative effect on salmonid numbers. So, there is a very real need to gather more and better information about Goosander numbers, habitat and movements.

CATCHING METHODS

Catching Goosander to attach tags is no mean feat. They are bulky birds and fast flyers, and very restricted to their riverine habitats. In past studies, Goosanders have been caught at pre-moult migration roosts using cannon nets (Little and Furness, 1985), but the usual way in which Goosanders would be caught for ringing would be either off the nest, or by netting flightless juveniles. In order to fit GPS tags to the birds during the salmon smolt run, we needed to devise a method of catching the birds while they were fully flighted. Initial attempts to catch birds in flight resulted in severely damaged mist nets but, eventually, a method was developed which

was generally successful. Nets were placed across watercourses where the water was shallow enough to enter safely while wearing a pair of chest waders. Usually this would be under, or near, a bridge or in an area where the tree cover formed a tunnel, meaning that the birds would have to fly low to the water to pass the obstacles.

The mist nets themselves were 12-metre, 70x70-mm mesh Ecotone nets, specially strengthened using wader-braided shelf string and modifications to the net loops to prevent them snapping when the fast-flying birds hit the net. The net should be set with a little slack so that the birds are brought to a slow and safe halt when they fly in. The ringer must sit relatively close to the net, with it in view at all times, to avoid the risk of birds drowning when they are caught; this is especially a concern when small bycatch such as Dippers become entangled. There are two approaches to catching Goosanders in this manner: waiting for commuting birds to fly downstream to roost sites in the evening, or actively flushing feeding birds towards the nets. In the latter case, it is essential to have a helper to do the flushing, while the extractor waits ready near the nets. When flushing, the trick is to get around the bird without flushing it in the wrong direction, and ensuring that you do not make eye contact with the bird is key. There is a much higher chance of catching a bird if it is flushed downstream toward the net, as invariably they end up in the bottom shelf of the mist net and the flow of the river helps to keep them from rolling out of the shelf; the river tends to push the bird out of the bottom shelf if it has flown upstream towards the net.

TAGGING

This study used a glue-to-feather mounting technique to attach the GPS tags to the bird's back. Initial results using a variety of adhesives were not successful, with the birds easily removing the tags within about a week. It was often said during the project that if you were going to design a tool to remove glued-on tags, it would probably look a bit like a Goosander's serrated beak! After some trial and error, Araldite epoxy adhesive was found to be the most effective. The material used between the tag and the



Typical net configuration for catching Goosanders, by Anthony Wetherhill

A 12 m large-mesh mist net set near a bridge in shallow water on the Gala Water in Galashiels, Scottish Borders

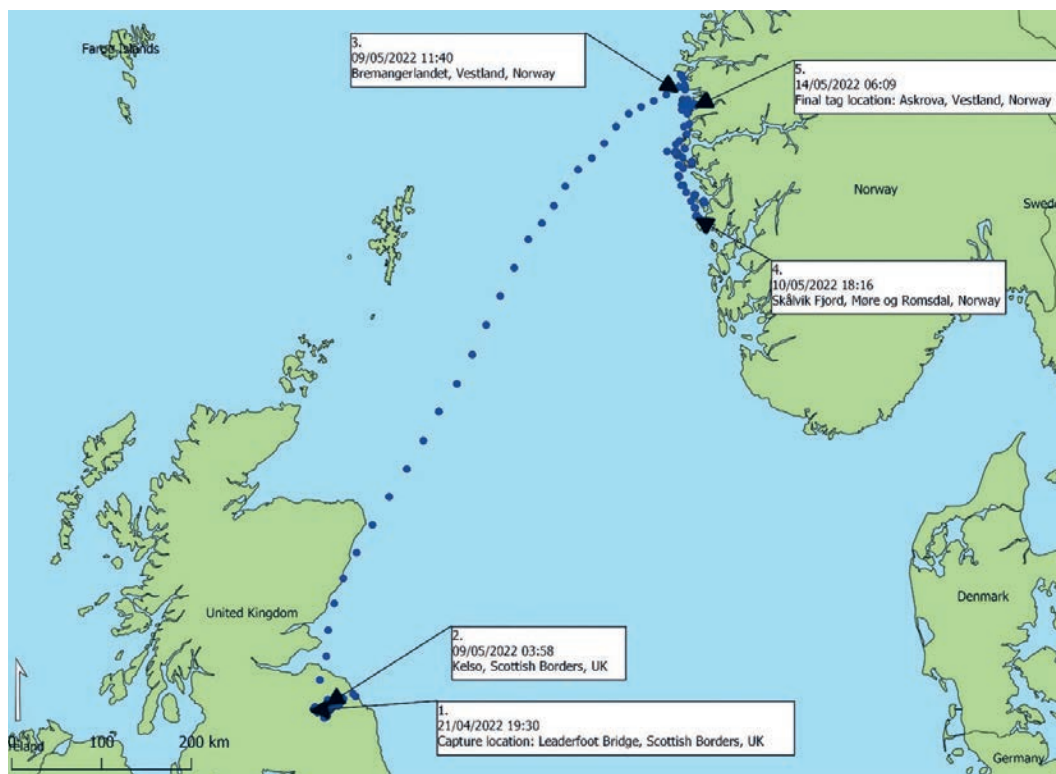
body of the bird was also changed part way through the study. Initially we used cotton gauze, but it appeared from retrapped birds and field observations that the Goosanders were able to pick at and peel away this material quite easily. On the advice of the tag manufacturers, we started using thin neoprene pads, which improved tag retention time.

Tagging of Goosanders has so far revealed some interesting movements. As expected, Goosanders spend nearly all of their time along linear watercourses, with some individuals spending time on lochs and ponds on occasion. There was a big difference in the lengths of river utilised by Goosanders in the River Tweed catchment and those caught in the Scottish Central Belt, but more work needs to be done to tease out why that might be the case.

As well as generating data on the movements of Goosanders during the salmon smolt run, the tracking data also resulted in the first instance of a British drake Goosander being tracked on its moult migration to Norway. Most drake Goosanders in Britain and Ireland migrate to the Tanafjord in northern Norway to moult, with females and first-year birds moulting at aggregations on British estuaries. This male Goosander left its roost in Kelso in the Scottish Borders on 9 May 2022 at 03:00 and by 11:00 the same day

REFERENCE

Little, B. & Furness, R.W. 1985. Long-distance moult migration by British Goosanders *Mergus merganser*. *Ringing & Migration* 6: 77-82.



Tracking data from a male Goosander migrating to Norway in May 2022.

was on the Norwegian coast, a distance of 513 miles in eight hours. It then moved south along the Norwegian coast towards Bergen, before turning north and then losing its tag.

SUBSPECIES

Worldwide, there are three subspecies of Goosander (known as Common Merganser outside Europe). Only the Eurasian subspecies has been recorded in the UK, but the chances are high that the North American subspecies has occurred here, as many other Nearctic waterfowl do on an annual basis. North American Common Merganser can be recognised by its different bill morphology when compared with Eurasian Goosanders, with the lateral feathering at the base of the bill forming a straight line from the forehead to the mandible rather than a triangular protrusion, and the hook at the tip of the bill being far less pronounced than in Eurasian birds. Drake North American birds also have a dark wing bar and a smoother, less rounded looking head than our local birds. It's worth having a closer look at

Goosanders, particularly in the west of the UK, in case a stray Merganser is among the flock.

FUTURE WORK

Although this study utilised GPS tracking technology, metal rings were also important in generating data points. Nearly all the recoveries of ringed Goosanders during this study have been from birds shot under licence, and examining the bodies of shot birds enabled us to see if there were any ill effects from the tags after they had lost them.

Over the past 10 years there have been relatively few Goosanders ringed in the UK, with a peak of 35 birds ringed in 2016, compared to 94 birds ringed in 1984. In total, 24 birds were ringed as part of this project and we had six subsequent encounters of those ringed birds. There's a real need to generate more data for this species, and for the related Red-breasted Merganser, a species that is now on the Birds of Conservation Concern Amber List, but also able to be shot under licence to protect fish of conservation concern.

Obituaries



DAVE OKILL (1949-2023)

When Dave Okill died, too soon, just after his 74th birthday, on 28 May 2023, we lost one of the UK's foremost amateur ornithologists.

His crowning achievement came as a leader in the tagging of Red-necked Phalaropes. A male breeding in Shetland, fitted with a geolocator, was retrapped the following year revealing that it had wintered in the Pacific Ocean, near the Galapagos, a round trip of 16,000 miles. This and later studies showed this species has a migratory divide, with Scandinavian birds wintering off Arabia, and North American, Icelandic and Shetland birds wintering in the Pacific.

Rob Cockbain, a founder of the Merseyside Ringing Group (MRG), began training Dave, aged 15, to ring birds. He joined in every ringing activity – not easy when travelling by bus and bicycle. With his A permit in 1968 came more travelling and ringing opportunities, including trips abroad and to Bird Observatories, most significantly Fair Isle, which started Dave thinking about moving to Shetland. Dave was MRG secretary in 1970–71 and members enjoyed meeting at his house where his mother provided excellent home-made cakes.

In 1973, with his Diploma in Public Health, Dave became a Public Health Inspector for Liverpool City, but in 1975 Merseyside's loss became Shetland's gain when he moved to Environmental Health in the Shetland Islands Council. In 1996, he moved to SEPA, as Team Leader, where he remained until his retirement.

Dave met Gillian in 1978 when he gave her a lift from the ferry from Aberdeen. She was working on Arctic Skuas. They were married in 1981 and their son Antony was born in 1987.

In 1983, Dave became BTO Regional Rep for Shetland and was awarded the BTO Jubilee Medal in 2003, for devotion to the Trust. Looking at the people he trained and the projects he'd been involved with, it's clear that Dave made a massive contribution to ringing, especially in Shetland. He was a keen supporter of Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust, providing much practical assistance to the staff. He became a director in 1982, Vice Chair from 1985 and an Honorary President in 2022.

Dave was a Committee Member of Shetland Bird Club from 1976, which included compiling the Bird Report from 1977 to 1983, organising a Whooper Swan count and representing the Club on the Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group. He was a founding member of the Zetland Raptor Study Group and was Secretary of the Shetland Ringing Group from 1993, generously paying for all the rings until very recently. Dave loved ringing Red-throated Divers, but less appreciated perhaps was his Storm Petrel ringing. This became much more widespread, including in Wales and Portugal, due to his advocacy and encouragement. He was also author or co-author of scientific papers on many species.

In 1983, Dave ringed 1,800 Arctic Tern chicks in Shetland's largest colony on Papa Stour. In 1984, he found only dead chicks, from a devastating shortage of sandeels. The eventual agreement with the Shetland Fishermen's Association led to the effective closure of the sandeel fishery, but this was also partly the first consequence of climate change recorded in the UK.

He used his experience gained during the Esso Bernicia oil spill in 1978/9 during the MV Braer oil spill in 1993, when he chaired

the Environment Committee which assessed the risks to wildlife and advised on necessary actions.

Dave's innovation and inspiration to others has always impressed. He was very kind and generous. His pioneering ringing and monitoring activities in Shetland and his encouragement of young people mean his legacy will certainly continue.

This obituary was prepared by David Norman (Merseyside RG) and Pete Ellis (Shetland Bird Club)



TREVOR SQUIRE (1949-2023)

Trevor passed away suddenly on 20 December 2023 and will be sorely missed by his family and friends, in particular his wife Sheila, his daughters, Tracey and Dawn, and his grandchildren, Liam, Dylan, Polly and Bea.

Trevor's first experience of bird ringing (aged 10 years) was in the early 1960s at Elmers End in southeast London, where he met Peter Meredith, who was to become his Trainer, and subsequently they formed a ringing partnership (Meredith and Squire). I first met them both around 1967 when they moved their ringing operations to northwest Kent and established the Dartford RG. At this time Trevor was in his late teens, and for me, a total inspiration that changed my life. We were ringing every weekend, primarily at sites around Dartford, but also on Bardsey Island, Dungeness and elsewhere, in the company of the likes of Bob Scott and Peter Grant.

Trevor moved to Dorset in the early 1970s, where he set up the Stour RG. Then, from 1991 he worked at The Wetland Trust (Icklesham, East Sussex), where he played a lead role with ringing operations, habitat management, running bird-ringing courses, and ringing expeditions to sites in Africa, Israel and the Far East.

Trevor moved back to Dorset in 2001 and in 2007 he purchased a small area of stubble field of around 4.5 ha (11 acres) from a farmer near Stalbridge, created a small lake (stocking it with fish) and then started the long process of creating his nature reserve, with habitats developed primarily for birds. For autumn passage, sound systems were set up to play calls of a range of species through speakers positioned around the site (which were all connected by underground cables). The site aptly became known as ‘Squire’s Down’.

Between 2007 and 2023 Trevor ringed a total of 53,292 birds of 80 species at this site (with a little help from his friends) and this was from a site that was formerly a stubble field, located 30 miles from the coast.

Trevor also developed a method for catching adult Red Kites and in total ringed 144 Red Kites plus 38 Buzzard (with patagial wing tags fitted to most kites). On a trip to the Antikythera Bird Observatory in Greece, Trevor caught two Marsh Harriers and a Pallid Harrier whilst demonstrating his methodology.

One species that Trevor focused on at Squire’s Down was Grasshopper Warbler, and in total he ringed 3,050 birds, with annual totals peaking at 411 in 2022 (19% of the total ringed in Britain and Ireland that year). Most of these birds were caught on the first net round just as it was getting light, from what became known as the Grasshopper nets.

On 8 January 2024 (19 days after Trevor’s passing) one of Trevor’s Grasshopper Warblers was controlled at Kartong Bird Observatory in The Gambia, some 499 days after ringing

and 4,408 km from the original ringing site, Squire’s Down; the first BTO-ringed Grasshopper Warbler reported from The Gambia, the fourth south of the Sahara and the most southerly to be found in West Africa. A just tribute to an exceptional ringer who passed on so much to so many over so many years. He was a great friend and will be sorely missed.

This obituary was prepared by Colin Prescott



MIKE HARRIS (1939-2023)

Late in 2023, we mourned the loss of Professor Mike Harris, a world-renowned seabird scientist and conservationist. A proud Welshman, Mike obtained both his first degree and PhD from Swansea University and it was there in his home country that he grew his passion for seabirds, studying gulls on Skomer.

Following more pioneering research during the 1960s on seabirds in the Galapagos, Mike joined the Nature Conservancy in Aberdeen in the early 1970s, which went on to become the Institute for Terrestrial Ecology (ITE) and later the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH, now UKCEH). He started the work for which he is probably best known, studying Puffins on St Kilda and the Isle of May, the latter becoming his ‘natural habitat’ for the next five decades.

It was in that magical seabird city that I first met Mike when he co-supervised my PhD during the early 1990s. I couldn’t have asked for a more knowledgeable or supportive mentor. Mike wasn’t a theoretical academic but,

rather, a true field ornithologist with a deep understanding of his focal species gained from many thousands of hours spent observing and recording their behaviours. He was also extremely practical and pragmatic, always candid in making his views clear and sharing his experiences. He didn’t always say what one wanted to hear, but he was almost always right and his views were always delivered in a supportive way.

Of great relevance to BTO, Mike was the leading light in setting up the UK Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) in 1986, he was the driving force behind the exemplary long-term studies of seabirds on the Isle of May (one of the SMP ‘Key Sites’) and he personally ringed many thousands of seabirds, as well as many more indirectly through all of us that he trained.

He and his long-time research partner and wife, Professor Sarah Wanless, also began to use a whole range of logging devices as they became available, carrying out research that led to a much greater understanding of movements and foraging ecology away from breeding colonies, and adding to all the other research on breeding phenology, productivity, diet, survival, dispersal, recruitment, disease (the list goes on)...

Sarah, the Seabird Team at UKCEH, and the many students and researchers that Mike trained, mentored, supported and inspired will ensure that the huge legacy that he left for seabird research and conservation lives on. Like many others around the world, I will be forever grateful to Mike (and Sarah) for providing such a great start to my career in ornithology and for their lifelong friendship. I am also so happy that Mike was still on the Isle of May, doing what he loved most, at the age of 84, just a few months before his passing. I hope that, despite his modesty, he was rightly proud of all that he achieved!

This obituary was prepared by Chris Wernham



RICHARD HEARN (1971-2024)

It is with a heavy heart that we record the sad news that Richard Hearn died on 15 February after being diagnosed with kidney cancer nearly two years ago. From the lochs of Orkney in the north, the Solent in the south and across many countries internationally, Rich will be known to many bird ringers.

Rich started his career at the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) in 1993, when the Trust hired him to join an expedition to Argentina to search for Brazilian Merganser. It was this expedition that sparked Rich's interest in studying wildfowl and, on returning, he went on to work on non-native Ruddy Ducks (in the UK) and Pink-footed Geese. In 1995, Rich took on a

full-time post as a Ringing Assistant, coordinating WWT's bird capture and ringing activities, along with working closely with UK bird ringers to increase wildfowl capture and marking effort.

Becoming WWT's Head of Species Monitoring, he went on to work on a range of mostly international waterbird conservation projects, including numerous population monitoring and assessment projects and he led the UK's Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme for several years.

He also worked on species action planning and recovery for Baer's Pochard and Long-tailed Duck, avian influenza surveillance, capacity building for waterbird monitoring in the African–Eurasian and East Asian flyways, and other issues such as sustainable hunting and goose–agriculture conflict.

He travelled extensively during his time at WWT including to Iceland to ring Pink-footed Geese and Whooper Swans, to Russia (Bewick's Swans), Bulgaria (Red-breasted Geese), China (Spoon-billed Sandpipers and Baer's Pochard), Bangladesh, Kuwait, Dubai and Nigeria (waterbird monitoring capacity-building work).

Although waterbird ringing was his main passion, Rich was often found contributing to WWT Slimbridge's long-term Constant Effort Sites scheme, whether running the team or assisting with sessions. He was also a cannon-netter, often being drafted in to catch birds as part of long-term studies or as part of specific projects, he colour-marked Grey Herons and set up the national colour-marking scheme for Little Egrets. A big fan of long-term studies, he championed their continuation along with encouraging the monitoring of less notable and favoured species.

His passion for birds, especially waterbirds and their monitoring, status and conservation was infectious. He was always kind with his time and knowledge and always especially keen to pass this on to younger ringers, birders and scientists. His legacy will live on; his team of staff and those who trained under him will continue his good work. The ornithology world will be a different place going forwards without Rich Hearn – he leaves a huge hole and will be desperately missed.

This obituary was prepared by Kane Brides

As we were preparing this edition, we were saddened to hear of the passing of Bobby Smith, the scheme's oldest ringer. A full obituary is being prepared and will appear in the next edition.

Use of the BTO logo

As outlined in the recent RIN paper (RINMAY24_ITEM5), the BTO logo is a core part of BTO's brand identity and, as a Registered Charity, we need to be aware of how and where it may be used. There are two areas in the Charity Commission guidance that address the use of a charity's logo. In both cases, charities are asked to consider the implications of allowing external people or organisations to use their logo. The first of these is managing reputational risk, where a charity may be negatively exposed to the activities and

reputation of the external individual or organisation because they have used the charity logo e.g. on a ringing group report for a landowner. The second refers to where potential is created for the public to become confused about the relationship between a third-party organisation and the BTO e.g. where a ringing group might request our logo to be displayed on their clothing alongside the ringing group name.

As a result, we do not provide the BTO logo for use by groups or individuals. We have, instead, added

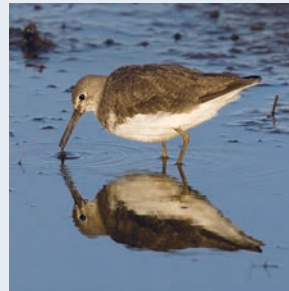


text to the Ringing Scheme logo (available by emailing ringing@bto.org).

If you have any queries or concerns about use of the logo, please contact communications@bto.org

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.



Peregrine, by Philip Croft / BTO;
Green Sandpiper, by Liz Cutting / BTO;
Swallow, by Allan Drewitt / BTO

IMPACTS OF DDT ON SCOTTISH PEREGRINES

Researchers studied the breeding performance of Peregrines in southern Scotland using 75 years (1946–2021) of monitoring data from 315 unique nest sites. The study aimed to determine whether the population declines during the 1950s–1970s were a result of the effects of organochlorine pesticides such as DDT and the cyclodiene compounds, aldrin and dieldrin. The results of the study showed that Peregrine breeding success increased substantially following the reduction, and then ban, of organochlorine pesticides. These results were more dramatic in the more arable southeastern Scotland than in southwestern Scotland, which is more forested. The study also showed that Peregrines closer to the coast had a higher fledging success than those further inland and that fledging success is negatively affected by low temperatures and high rainfall in May. Overall, abundance of Peregrines in southern Scotland increased in line with greater breeding success following the reduction and ban on the use of organic pesticides in the UK, but that recovery was slow, occurring over four decades. The study concluded that reproductive failure caused by organochlorine pesticides was a driver in the decline of the southern Scottish Peregrine population.

Oli, M.K. *et al.* 2023. Reproductive performance of Peregrine falcons relative to the use of organochlorine pesticides, 1946–2021. *Journal of Animal Ecology* 92: 2201–2213.

INVESTIGATING GREEN SANDPIPER MIGRATION ECOLOGY

Between 2013 and 2022, 19 Green Sandpipers were fitted with geolocator or GPS tags in their wintering area in Hertfordshire in order to investigate their migration ecology. The devices collected location data during the birds' northward migration to their breeding areas, during the breeding period and on their return migration. The results showed that the tagged birds all bred in Fennoscandia (Finland, Sweden and Norway) and that the birds' northward migration was undertaken in between two and five days (median duration two days; mean distance 1,463 km). By contrast, the southerly migration was more leisurely, taking between eight and 16 days (median duration 11.5 days). The male birds stayed on the breeding grounds for longer (60 days) than the females (42 days), taking over the parental duties after the young had left the nest. This study shows that, for most of the year, Green Sandpipers are on their wintering grounds. This particular population winters much farther north than many, which go as far as Africa or South Asia; this strategy balances the risks of poor survival during cold winters with the benefits of a shorter and easier migration.

Smith, K.W. *et al.* 2024. Migration patterns and breeding areas of Green Sandpipers *Tringa ochropus* wintering in southern Britain. *Bird Study* 71: 32–39.

INVESTIGATING THE LINK BETWEEN AERIAL INSECTS AND SWALLOW NUMBERS

This study used abundance figures and nest data for Swallows, and data from four Rothamsted Insect Survey suction traps, which sample aerial insect abundance, to investigate the association between changes in invertebrate prey abundance, Swallow productivity and population trends. The nest data were collected by NRS participants between 1973 and 2002, within 100 km of the four insect traps located in southern England, while the data on Swallow numbers were collected as part of the Common Birds Census. The analyses explored the link between Swallow breeding success and insect abundance and weather, the link between insect abundance and its timing, with prey availability to breeding Swallows, and the link between insect abundance and Swallow population growth. The study revealed a positive statistical relationship between Swallow chick survival and the biomass of aerial insects available for chicks, with survival through to fledging being higher where aerial insects were more abundant. Interestingly, insect availability for the chicks was largely a function of the year-to-year variation in insect abundance rather than the timing of egg laying and insect emergence. This study did not find any evidence of a link between insect abundance and Swallow population growth though.

Martay, B. *et al.* 2023. Aerial insect biomass, but not phenological mismatch, is associated with chick survival of an insectivorous bird. *Ibis* 165: 790–807.

Noticeboard

USED RING STRINGS

Some ringers may not be aware that plastic ring strings can be reused by Porzana. All ring strings other than the blue strings can be reused. If possible, please do not snip the knots off the end of strings, although shorter strings can be used for bat rings so please still return strings even if they have been cut. Please send your boxes of used ring strings to:

Porzana, Elms Farm, Pett Lane,
Icklesham, East Sussex, TN36 4AH.



POTTER TRAPS FOR SALE

Two sizes (12" & 16"), also Chardonneret and other traps on request. Please contact John Mawer on 07502 221078 or via email johnmawer@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
 Special Methods: ringing.specialmethods@bto.org
 Ringing sales: sales@bto.org

CONFERENCES

Irish Ringers' Meeting

Sunday 3 November 2024

Location: Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Craigavon, Co. Armagh

More information, the programme and booking form are available here: www.bto.org/community/events/202411-irish-ringers-meeting-2024

Scottish Ringers' Conference

8-10 November 2024 (Friday evening to Sunday lunch time)

Location: Carrbridge Hotel, Scottish Highlands

For information and bookings, contact Shirley Millar (shirley@edenecology.co.uk). The programme and booking form are available on the BTO website: www.bto.org/community/events/202411-scottish-ringers-conference-2024

Sandwich Bay Ringing Conference

Saturday 5 April 2024

Location: Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory, Kent

More information to follow.

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 2024/25 WINTER RINGING PROJECT VISIT PERIODS

Visit	First Date		Last Date
1	Saturday 2 November	to	Friday 15 November
2	Saturday 16 November	to	Friday 29 November
3	Saturday 30 November	to	Friday 13 December
4	Saturday 14 December	to	Friday 27 December
5	Saturday 28 December	to	Friday 10 January
6	Saturday 11 January	to	Friday 24 January
7	Saturday 25 January	to	Friday 7 February
8	Saturday 8 February	to	Friday 21 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: Common Sandpiper

Although mostly a summer visitor to the uplands of Wales, northern England, much of Scotland and western Ireland; small numbers of this Amber-Listed species winter in southern parts of Ireland, England and Wales. Find out how you can help monitor this declining species.



Common Sandpiper, by Edmund Fellowes / BTO

CURRENT KNOWLEDGE

The UK breeding and wintering Common Sandpiper populations have declined by -28% and -34% respectively since the mid-1990s, leading to it being included on the Birds of Conservation Concern Amber List in 2009. The species has also undergone a decline across Europe since 1980. Common Sandpiper has a large breeding and non-breeding range, and little is known about the European migration corridors, or the migration routes and non-breeding ranges for many of the birds that breed here. Despite this, and the fact that the drivers of these declines are unclear, they are not thought to be a result of issues on the non-breeding grounds but are more likely to be related to problems occurring during the breeding season, on migration, or both.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

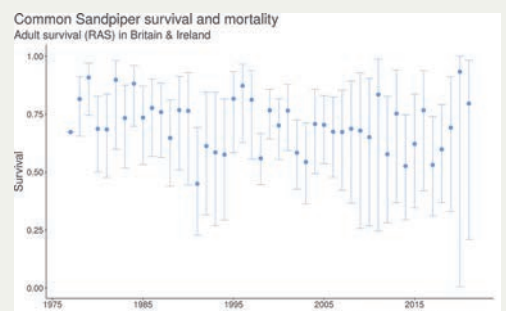
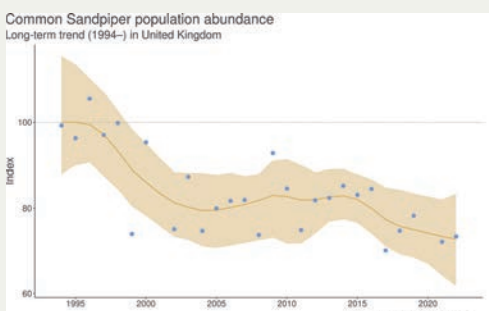
Start a RAS project

Although Common Sandpiper is a RAS target species, we no longer have any active RAS projects on the species. Common Sandpipers are relatively long-lived birds, with quite a high survival rate, so are well suited for RAS studies. For a RAS to be successful, it would ideally require a site, or river catchment, containing approximately 24 pairs. Common Sandpipers can be caught in spring traps, using mealworms as bait, or in mist nets set across a water course or along the edge of a larger water body.

Collect nest records

The number of nest records received annually for Common Sandpiper is small (average of only 22 records per year for the past five years), making

it difficult to ascertain whether the declines the species has suffered in recent years are linked to changes in breeding success. More nest records would therefore be welcome for this species. Common Sandpipers nest by clear streams, rivers and lakes, usually in hilly regions up to 800 m, but also around sea lochs and occasionally on flooded gravel pits. They display loudly and frequently in late April to May, making this a good time to look for territories, while nest searching is best carried out between mid-May and June. Nests will rarely be more than 10–30 m away from water and are often concealed in tall vegetation or sparse scrub. The young are nidifugous and precocial and will leave the nest as soon as they are dry. See the BTO Wader Hub (www.bto.org/wader-hub) for more nest-finding tips.



Graphs shown are taken from the BTO Trends Explorer (http://data.bto.org/trends_explorer), where results from the Ringing and Nest Record Schemes are published annually, alongside census data. Image by Philip Croft / BTO.