

Devon & Cornwall Wader Ringing Group

Annual Report

2018

Compiled & edited by Keith Grant (Ringing Secretary)

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Group Structure, Members and Other Contributors during 2018

Chair

Tim Frayling

Vice-Chair

Nik Ward

Treasurer &

Membership Secretary

Chris Dee

Ringing Secretary &

Data Manager

Keith Grant

Projects & Logistics Officer

Ryan Burrell

Group Members

(as at March 2019)

Richard Archer
Chantelle Barry
Louisa Bartlett
Adrian Bayley
AJ Bellamy
Pete Burgess
Lucy Capstick
Andrew Carter
Jodie Case
Phil Chambers
Gary Clewley
Louise Clewley
Lee Collins
Ruth Croger
Emily Cuff
Miriam Guard
Lizzie Grayshon
Guy Hayden
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Chris Heward
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Eleanor Nesh
Josh Nightingale
Robbie Phillips
Pete Potts
David Price
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Robin Ward
Denise Wawman
Mark Worden
Sara Zonneveld

Other Contributors

Lucy Hawkes
Ivan Lakin
Joanne Morten
Susan Murphy
Fraser Rush
Brendan Shiels
Hannah Shiels
Humphrey Sitters
Jackie Sitters
Adrian Smith
Meg Speck
Barbara Swinfen
Roger Swinfen
Greg Wills

Summary of Ringing Operations

Tim Frayling

Things all started with a conversation I had with Pete Potts at a cannon net catch at Thorney Island in Sussex in November 2017, when he asked if there are any opportunities for wader ringing in Devon, and the seed of an idea was sown. After discussing with colleagues in Natural England about priorities, it quickly became clear that understanding the recent declines in wintering oystercatchers in the Exe Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA) was a high priority. Ivan Lakin and I put together a proposal for a project for a colour ringing scheme, with one of the key aims being to understand over-winter survival, and how oystercatchers use the functionally-linked land surrounding the Exe Estuary. In talking to the original DCWRG people (Humphrey Sitters and Roger and Barbara Swinfen) I discovered Humphrey had a similar plan to colour-ring oystercatchers to estimate overwinter survival three years ago, and had got the colour rings for a project. So with things falling into place, just a couple of months later a team of around 40 people were involved in the first cannon-net catch at Dawlish Warren since 2004.

On 4th February 2018, a total of 190 oystercatchers were caught, with 6 re-traps including one very old individual ringed at Dawlish Warren on 29th Sept 1989. A total of 150 birds were colour-ringed with a coded blue ring with a 2 digit alphanumeric code below an un-coded yellow ring on the right tarsus, and BTO metal ring on the left tarsus. We subsequently had many re-sightings from breeding sites around Britain (Derbyshire, Bedfordshire, Co. Durham and Highland, Scotland) as well as Belgium, Netherlands and Norway. The Dawlish Warren Recording Group have been busy re-sighting colour-ringed birds from the day after the ringing session and have now collected over 2,500 re-sightings of those 150 birds.

The first mist-netting session in recent times at Dawlish Warren, during the evening of 29th September 2018, resulted in a modest catch of 13 oystercatcher (10 new birds and 3 re-traps) and a dunlin. Of these 12 oystercatchers were colour-ringed, including another old bird which was first ringed 25 years previously.



Leucistic Oystercatcher, 29th Oct 2018



Setting mist-nets at low tide © Tim Frayling

The second mist-netting session at Dawlish Warren took place on the evening of 29th October 2018. Again this was a fairly small catch of 8 oystercatchers and 3 dunlin. We were hopeful that we would catch more as we had the island roost covered on three sides with nets. The catch was probably affected by the presence of a ship with bright lights which made the nets visible. The most interesting bird caught that night was an amazing looking leucistic individual.

The next session was the cannon-net catch that was planned to go ahead on the weekend of 10-11th November. After delaying from the Saturday due to heavy rain and then a failed fire on Sunday, we reset and regrouped and took a catch on Monday 12th November. Despite some of the cannons again failing to fire, we did catch a reasonable sample of 53 Oystercatchers. All of the oystercatchers, including an old WASP-ringed re-trap, were metal-ringed and colour-ringed. The term 'wasp' ring is used to describe the colour-rings used in the 1980s though to early 2000s, so called because the series of thick and thin lines on the ring resembled a wasp. Most importantly, all 10 GPS tags were successfully deployed thanks to Andy Hoodless and Ryan Burrell, and now these birds will be out there now collecting data. A fix on their exact position will have been recorded every hour during November to February and stored on the tag until it comes into contact with the base station, when it will download all the stored data. We have been working closely with Dr Lucy Hawkes at Exeter University, and her PhD student Jo Morten has been analysing the GPS tag data and going out across the estuary with the mobile base station to find any birds not returning to the main high tide roost at Dawlish Warren.

Now the adults have moved off to their breeding grounds, it is going to be really exciting waiting for tagged birds to return and reveal where they have bred.

Treasurer and Membership Secretary's Report

Chris Dee

At a meeting to relaunch the Group on 9th November 2018, it was decided that we did not need to raise funds immediately as grant funding from Natural England had covered all the initial set-up costs and sufficient rings for the foreseeable future. There was, therefore, no membership fee suggested at that time, although we will be suggesting a nominal future annual fee. Ad hoc catch fees may also be levied on cannon-net catches to cover consumables, such as powder and fuses.

We maintain a membership list to allow us to comply with GDPR legislation, in relation to communication preferences. As at 31st March 2019, the Group has 43 members.

To manage subscriptions, donations and purchases in the future, we are in the process of setting up a bank account, over which selected officers will have control.

Capture Totals, Sightings & Recoveries

Compiled by Keith Grant

Capture Totals for 2018

	Newly ringed	Reringed	Retraps	Total Captures
Oystercatcher	249	9	6	265
Dunlin	4	0	0	4

Retraps, Controls and Recoveries 2018

Age when ringed		Finding circumstances	
1	Pullus (nestling)	C	Controlled at another site (usually >5 km)
2	Fully grown, age unknown	Ne	Known to be nesting
3	Hatched during current year	R	Retrapped at or near (<5 km) original ringing site
4	Hatched previous year or older		
5	Hatched previous year	Re	Reringed (original worn ring replaced)
6	Hatched 2 years previously or older	S	Sighting of ringed bird
7	Hatched 2 years previously	X	Found dead
8	Hatched 3 years previously or older		

Oystercatcher

With many multiple sightings, I have summarised where possible whilst ensuring the last date in spring and first return date in autumn are noted. Only previously-ringed birds which we retrapped or 'our' birds which have been sighted elsewhere appear below. For a summary of the nearly 3,000 re-sightings on the Exe Estuary, see Ivan Lakin's report below.

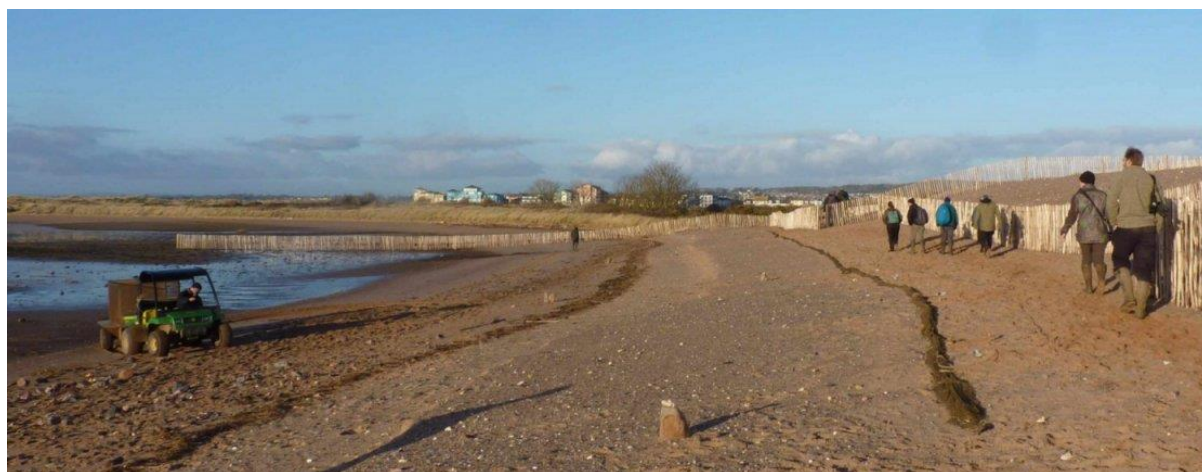
FA71752	7	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('8A'), then sighted 6 times until...	
	S	13/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	X	12/03/2018	Hury Reservoir, Baldersdale, (Durham)	450 km NNE
FC51395	8	17/11/2000	Dawlish Warren	
	S	03/10/2015	Dawlish Warren	
	S	15/01/2016	Dawlish Warren	
	S	16/10/2016	Dawlish Warren	
	S	30/12/2017	Dawlish Warren	
	S	04/01/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71761	Re	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('6E')	17 yrs 79 days
FA71766	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('7E'), then sighted 3 times until...	
	S	20/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	25/03/2018	Viste, Randaberg (Rogaland) NORWAY	1,095 km NNE
	S	23/08/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 9 times until...	
	S	07/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	

FA71771	S	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('0K')	
	S	17/03/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	18/03/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	12/05/2018	Titchfield Haven, (Hampshire)	155 km E
	S	25/09/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71782	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('J3')	
	S	13/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	16/03/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	25/08/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 4 times until....	
	R	12/11/2018	Dawlish Warren (GPS tag), then sighted 4 times until....	
	S	07/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71786	7	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('7J'), then sighted 8 times until...	
	S	27/04/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	15/07/2018	RSPB Snettisham, (Norfolk)	366 km NE
	S	04/10/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	06/10/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	01/11/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71787	7	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('5J'), then sighted 3 times until...	
	S	13/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	13/03/2018	Marston Vale C.P., (Bedfordshire)	257 km NE
	S	09/06/2018	Marston Vale C.P., (Bedfordshire)	257 km NE
	S	04/07/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 15 times until...	
	S	15/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71788	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('7K')	
	S	05/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	20/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	12/03/2018	Eastern Scheldt, (Zeeland) NETHERLANDS	509 km ENE
FA71800	7	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('4M'), then sighted 3 times until...	
	S	10/03/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	26/04/2018	Gåslandsneset, Bømlo, (Hordaland), NORWAY	1,154 km NNE
	Ne	30/06/2018	Gåslandsneset, Bømlo, (Hordaland), NORWAY	1,154 km NNE
	S	25/08/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 12 times until...	
	S	15/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71904	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('N8')	
	S	05/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	08/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	26/04/2018	Oxey Marsh, Lymington, (Hampshire)	135 km E
	S	12/07/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 10 times until...	
	S	07/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71909	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('1M')	
	S	05/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	11/02/2018	Starcross golf course	2 km NNW
	S	30/03/2018	Lochindorb, Grantown-on-Spey, (Highlands)	
	Ne	26/04/2018	Lochindorb, Grantown-on-Spey, (Highlands)	
	Ne	01/05/2018	Lochindorb, Grantown-on-Spey, (Highlands)	
	Ne	06/05/2018	Lochindorb, Grantown-on-Spey, (Highlands)	754 km N
	S	26/07/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 9 times until...	
	S	04/10/2018	Dawlish Warren	

FA71912	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('2L'), then sighted 5 times until....	
	S	17/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	23/08/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 6 times until...	
	R	12/11/2018	Dawlish Warren (GPS tag), then sighted....	
	S	30/11/2018	Starcross (golf course)	2 km NNW
	S	08/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71840	8	14/09/2004	Dawlish Warren	
	S	16/01/2015	Dawlish Warren	
	S	29/01/2015	Dawlish Warren	
	S	03/10/2015	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 3 times until....	
	S	05/02/2016	Dawlish Warren	
	S	17/09/2016	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 4 times until....	
	S	02/02/2017	Dawlish Warren	
	S	27/08/2017	Dawlish Warren, where sighted twice until....	
FA71915	Re	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('2M')	
	S	31/03/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	09/08/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 9 times until....	
	S	08/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	14 yrs 85 days
FA71923	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('0M')	
	S	05/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	08/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	Ne	19/05/2018	Grunna Voe, Mainland, (SHETLAND)	1,094 km N
	S	29/08/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	20/09/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	04/10/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71926	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('L4')	
	S	05/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	23/07/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 10 times until....	
	S	07/11/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	R	12/11/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71928	7	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('K7'), then sighted 13 times until...	
	S	02/06/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	09/06/2018	Goedereede Island, (Zeeland) NETHERLANDS	532 km ENE
	S	04/08/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 17 times until...	
	S	15/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71946	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('M7')	
	S	10/02/2018	Carsington Water, (Derbyshire)	298 km NNE
	S	11/02/2018	Carsington Water, (Derbyshire)	
	Ne	04/06/2018	Carsington Water, (Derbyshire)	
	S	18/07/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 14 times until...	
	S	08/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71955	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('3T')	
	S	27/08/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 4 times until....	
	S	25/09/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	R	29/09/2018	Dawlish Warren, then sighted 4 times until....	
	S	07/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FV63965	3	29/09/1989	Dawlish Warren	
	S	17/07/2015	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 3 times until....	
	S	25/10/2015	Dawlish Warren	
	S	18/07/2016	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 3 times until....	
	S	19/08/2016	Dawlish Warren	

FA71978	S	03/10/2017	Dawlish Warren	
	Re	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('U6')	
	S	08/02/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 3 times until....	
	S	12/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	28 yrs 136 days
FA71984	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	05/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	14/08/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 7 times until....	
	S	01/11/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	R	12/11/2018	Dawlish Warren ('Y5' + GPS tag)	
	S	07/12/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 3 times until....	
	S	15/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FC51423	8	17/11/2000	Dawlish Warren	
	S	20/08/2017	Dawlish Warren	
	S	03/01/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71987	Re	04/02/2018	Dawlish warren ('U1')	
	S	05/02/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 3 times until....	
	S	18/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	09/08/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 9 times until....	
	S	02/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	18 yrs 15 days
FA71870	8	14/09/2004	Dawlish Warren	
	S	26/09/2015	Dawlish Warren	
	S	03/09/2016	Dawlish Warren	
	S	11/12/2016	Dawlish Warren	
	S	29/12/2017	Dawlish Warren	
FA71988	Re	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('V2'), then sighted twice until....	
	S	20/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	09/08/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 10 times until....	
	S	13/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	14 yrs 90 days
FA71989	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('V9'), then sighted 3 times until...	
	S	18/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	Ne	08/06/2018	Haaland, Kleppe, (Rogaland), NORWAY	1,078 km NNE
	S	25/09/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 7 times until...	
	S	15/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FA71997	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('V7'), then sighted 3 times until...	
	S	18/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	16/03/2018	Zwevegem, Kortrijk, (West-Vlaanderen), BELGIUM	
	Ne	22/04/2018	Zwevegem, Kortrijk, (West-Vlaanderen), BELGIUM	477 km E
	S	28/09/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 5 times until...	
	S	15/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FC51060	8	05/10/1994	Dawlish Warren	
	S	24/09/2016	Dawlish Warren	
	S	09/08/2017	Dawlish Warren	
	S	10/11/2017	Dawlish Warren	
	S	09/08/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	20/09/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	R	29/09/2018	Dawlish Warren ('6A'), then sighted 6 times until....	
	S	29/11/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	30/11/2018	Starcross (golf course)	2 km NNW
	S	13/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	24 yrs 69 days

FC51113	8	28/01/1997	Dawlish Warren	
	X	18/07/2018	Balephuil, Isle of Tiree, (Argyll & Bute)	690 km NNW, 21 yrs 171 days
FJ28502	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	C	28/10/2018	Whiteford Sands, Gower, (Swansea)	128 km NNW
FC51390	8	17/11/2000	Dawlish Warren	
	S	24/12/2016	Dawlish Warren	
	S	03/02/2017	Dawlish Warren	
FJ28518	Re	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('Y8'), then sighted twice until....	
	S	12/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	17 yrs 87 days
FJ28524	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	03/04/2018	Nesna Havn, (Nordland), NORWAY	1,971 km NNE, 58 days
	S	12/04/2018	Nesna Havn, (Nordland), NORWAY	
	S	06/06/2018	Nesna Havn, (Nordland), NORWAY	
	S	07/09/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FC51475	8	17/11/2000	Dawlish Warren	
	S	20/07/2015	Dawlish Warren	
	S	06/08/2017	Dawlish Warren	
	S	16/10/2017	Dawlish Warren	
	S	26/07/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FJ28544	Re	29/09/2018	Dawlish Warren ('5C')	17 yrs 316 days
FA71832	8	14/09/2004	Dawlish Warren	
	S	29/08/2016	Dawlish Warren	
	S	03/02/2017	Dawlish Warren	
	S	05/10/2017	Dawlish Warren	
	S	16/10/2017	Dawlish Warren	
	S	07/09/2018	Dawlish Warren	
FJ28591	Re	12/11/2018	Dawlish Warren ('8Y' & GPS tag), then sighted 7 times until....	
	S	13/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	14 yrs 90 days
FP73313	1	07/07/2004	Easington, (East Riding of Yorkshire)	
FJ28602	Re	12/11/2018	Dawlish Warren ('5N' & GPS tag)	415 km SW, 14 yrs 128 days
	S	14/11/2018	Dawlish Warren	
	S	13/12/2018	Dawlish Warren	



Cannon-nets set, final check prior to high tide

© David Price

Bird Ringing for Science and Conservation – An update on DCWRG Projects

Ryan Burrell

The general aim of bird monitoring is to document changes in populations. Direct counts, such as the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) can be very effective at providing information on changing numbers. However, counts alone are insufficient if the aim is to determine drivers of change. Such insight can only be gained from understanding demography, be that reproduction, juvenile survival, recruitment, adult survival etc. This is where ringing can enter the frame, it can provide information on these drivers and feed in to conservation efforts.

DCWRG was restarted in 2018 with a scientific project-based focus, first with the Oystercatcher colour-ringing project and expanding to GPS tagging. Oystercatchers were well studied in the Exe Estuary in the 1970s-2000s, leading to several important publications. Despite the wealth of existing research, the main drivers that have and/or continue to influence the significant decline of Oystercatchers on the Exe are not sufficiently understood. In February 2018, 190 Oystercatchers were successfully caught and ringed, of which 150 of these were colour-marked, leading to high quality resighting data and allowing for a DEFRA grant for further colour-marking and a pilot GPS-tracking study in winter 2018/19.

On 11th November 2018, we planned a catch of Oystercatchers with the primary aim of deploying 10 GPS tags. The team comprised of DCWRG members, visiting members of the Axe Ringing and Wash Wader Ringing Groups alongside researchers from NE, GWCT and University of Exeter, as well as receiving a great deal of support from Teignbridge District Council staff based at Dawlish Warren. Unfortunately, the catch didn't exactly go to plan due to a cannon net equipment failure. Unfortunately, despite the rigorous testing that occurs when setting cannon-nets equipment, failures do happen though rarely. The team that morning remained in good spirits and we tried again the next day. Fortunately, on the 12th November, we did at least manage to catch 53 Oystercatchers - a reasonable sample of birds - all were colour-ringed including an old 'wasp-ringed' bird. Importantly, 10 GPS tags were deployed - six adults (Age 8), three sub-adults (Age 6) and one juvenile (Age 3). In addition to the yellow un-coded ring above the coded blue ring on right tarsus, the GPS-tagged birds were fitted with an un-coded blue ring above the metal on the left tarsus to make them identifiable easily in the field.

After the catch, several of the tagged birds were observed behaving normally back at Dawlish Warren, providing reassurances that the birds had adjusted well to wearing the tags. The GPS-UHF tags used in 2018/19 were programmed to take a GPS position each hour of the day and night throughout the winter. Positions are stored on the tag and transmitted to a base station when the bird comes within 300m. A member of the team then downloaded the data from the base stations periodically and prepared it for analyses.



Figure 1: Mobile base station deployed at Oak Meadow Golf Course and fixed base station deployed on the rise at Finger Point. From this location, the main Oystercatcher roosts on the Point and in the bight are covered well.

Initial fieldwork to collect data from the GPS tagged birds went well, with 8 of the 10 tags downloaded on the 30th November. On the 18th December data on all 10 tagged birds had been successfully downloaded. Many hours of fieldwork chasing Oystercatchers around the Exe Estuary over the winter continued to provide new data which has led to almost 15,000 GPS positions being collected. We have experienced variation in the number of positions collected for each bird, with the shortest data set being from catching until 14th December 2018 and the longest up until 11th February 2019. Through re-sighting efforts and conversations with the tag manufacturer, it was established that these differences arose from draining tag batteries leading to certain tags ceasing to transmit to the base station. Fortunately, these tags will charge during the summer, whilst they continue to record positions on the breeding grounds, and we should then be able to download further GPS positions when the birds return after the summer of 2019.

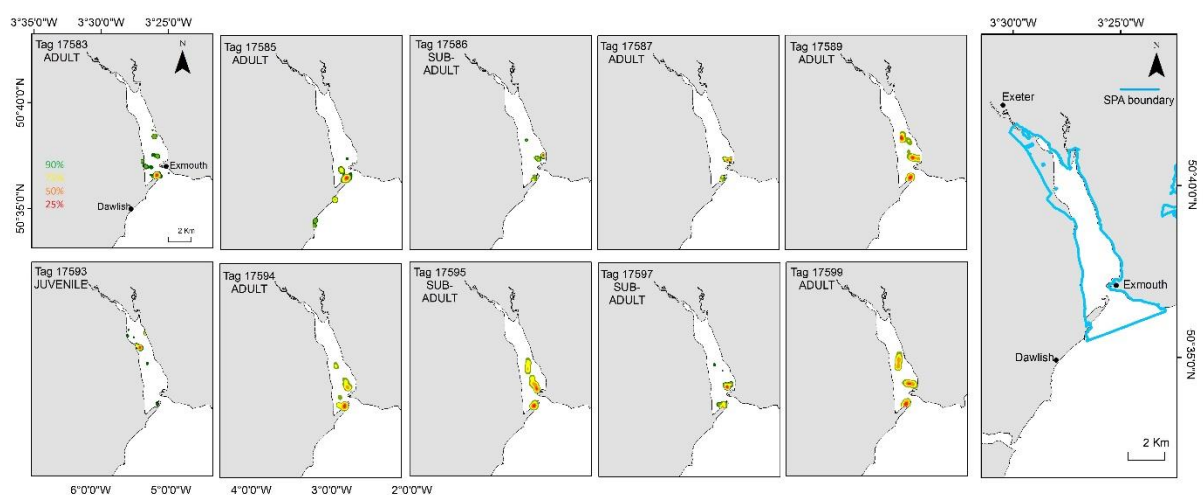


Figure 2: Kernel density maps showing areas of activity for the 10 tagged Oystercatchers marked in the Exe in 2018/19. Maps kindly produced by Jo Morten.

Though we have plans to alter the tag programming in 2019/20 and there is further analysis to conduct, this initial pilot has yielded fascinating insights into the ecology of oystercatchers in the Exe Estuary, building on decades of previous research. It appears key foraging areas within the estuary remain Cockle Sands and The Ridge, sites utilised at one time or another by all birds within our sample. Some individuals also utilise other areas, notably Oakfield Golf Course, an area outside of the SPA but already known as an important site. Further analyses will focus on linking the positions of the tagged birds with the tide times and heights to identify any patterns in movement or site use.

In an expansion to organisations working on the Oystercatcher project, Exeter University became involved following discussions with Dr Lucy Hawkes. Lucy's PhD student, Joanne Morten, was not due to start her fieldwork on Arctic Terns until the spring, and as a result was available in the winter. Jo has been conducting re-sighting surveys, behavioural watches and conducting invertebrate sampling which we can combine with the GPS data to gain a better insight into the drivers of foraging site choice (Figure 3).

Following successes of the initial tagging study, under the successful DEFRA grant, a further 20 GPS-UHF tags have been purchased for the Exe Estuary. These additional tags will be deployed during winter 2019/20 and focus on getting a good sample of juveniles to examine the differences in the use of the estuary between age classes. As we are interested in individuals likely to be using functionally linked land (FLL) outside of the Special Protection Area (SPA) boundary, a catch early in the 2019/20 winter season is planned to increase the probability of a reasonable proportion of juveniles.



Figure 3: Jo has collected prey samples from field and estuarine locations to investigate foraging site choice.

Looking to the future, at the 2018 AGM and in discussions since, additional projects for the group to undertake were discussed. Based on the success of the Oystercatcher colour-marking project, interest in colour-marking Curlew, Grey Plover and Dunlin was raised. A better understanding of the drivers of declines shown by these species in Devon and Cornwall estuaries, alongside obtaining information on site use would benefit management and policy. Though we must be cautious about over-committing our fledgling group, in 2019/20 we will be starting colour-ring projects on Grey Plover, Curlew and Dunlin with the focus remaining on the Exe and expanding to the Taw-Torridge if suitable sites can be identified.

In addition, in 2019/20 the group intends to deploy GPS tags on Curlew in the Exe and Taw-Torridge Estuaries. These Curlew tags will aim to inform us of the winter and breeding season movements of our Curlew and provide important information on habitat use within and around our estuaries. The tags are GPS-GSM tags which use the mobile phone network and do not require a base station to download the data. This work will form part of a wider study in partnership with Natural England, GWCT, BTO and Farlington Ringing Group.

The re-establishment of DCWRG and our initial project are an excellent example of collaboration with Natural England, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, Teignbridge District Council, University of Exeter and committed volunteer ornithologists/ringers, all now working together. We wish to extend a massive thank you to all those who have given up time for DCWRG and particularly the Exe Oystercatcher Project so far and look forward to the insight we are all going to gain about Devon and Cornwall wader populations in years to come.



FA71751 - 'A8' : newly ringed on 4th February 2018, with subsequent resightings listed below:-

FA71751	8	04/02/2018	Dawlish Warren ('A8'), then sighted 3 times until...
	S	10/03/2018	Dawlish Warren
	S	14/08/2018	Dawlish Warren, where sighted 10 times until...
	S	13/12/2018	Dawlish Warren, and into 2019....

Exe Estuary Oystercatcher Project

- interim results of colour-ringed birds

Ivan Lakin

Two cannon-net and two mist-net sessions at Dawlish Warren NNR in 2018 resulted in 224 Oystercatchers being fitted with uniquely coded colour rings. Of the 150 colour ringed on 4th February 2018, re-sightings exist for 145 (96.7%). Emigration to breeding grounds commenced soon after that ringing session and last sighting dates were recorded for 96 birds between February and April 2018. Re-sightings suggest that an additional 26 marked Oystercatchers (17.3%) over-summered on the estuary. During summer 2018, individuals were found across N and NW Europe (see Capture Totals, Sightings & Recoveries above).

Excluding the 25 summering birds (one died), re-sightings were obtained for 104 individuals returning in autumn 2018, which collectively represents 86% of those colour-ringed in February 2018. The earliest returning date recorded was on 4th July 2018. The totals for each month with first returning dates were July (30), August (55), September (15) and October/November (4). With unusually warm weather in February 2019 and the onset of Oystercatcher emigration for another breeding season, of the 150 ringed in February 2018, at least 113 were re-sighted up to and after 24th January 2019, equating to >75%. Given that approximately 30% of the birds ringed were immatures and will have lower survival estimates and that some adult birds may not have returned to or been re-sighted on the estuary, early indications are that the actual survival rates are broadly in line with published estimates.

Further years of research are needed to establish over-winter survival estimates, and to investigate why the Oystercatcher population has declined on this estuary. With around 2,500 re-sightings in 2018 alone from the 224 colour-marked birds, and ten of these deployed with GPS tags, we have made an excellent start to addressing key questions about the Oystercatcher population on this estuary.



The team at Dawlish Warren on 4th February 2018

Photo Portfolio

A further selection of photos from David Price



Acknowledgements

The group operates with the excellent support of Teignbridge District Council and Devon Wildlife Trust as landowners of Dawlish Warren, and Warren Golf Club kindly allows access across their land.

The value of the current project would not be fully realised without the excellent re-sighting work undertaken by the Dawlish Warren Recording Group.

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To report a sighting

Please see the *Report A Sighting* drop-down menu in www.dcwrg.org.uk .

Further Information

For further information regarding the activities undertaken by the group, please see: www.dcwrg.org.uk

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