



COLOUR RINGS, METAL RINGS & NECK COLLARS – YES IT IS WORTH THE EFFORT!

As a life-long ringer I have a compulsive fascination of wanting to know where it came from, how long ago it was marked & several other things when I see a ringed or colour-ringed bird. This last, harsh, winter seems to have brought me into contact with a lot more marked birds than usual and I have been successful in tracking down quite a bit of information. It's amazing what you can find out armed only with a loaf of bread and binoculars!

For a number of years now I have pursued **Black-headed Gulls** in various car-parks around the county. No, I've not been arrested yet! My first 'find' this last winter was an old friend at North Shields Fish Quay on 25th October 2009 whilst I was twitching the long-staying Sabine's Gull. **E1KC** (white colour-ring) was ringed as a nestling in Holland on 4th June 2006 and was seen at the Fish Quay by Dan Turner in Jan/Feb 2007 before returning to its natal site in June 2007 where it was present throughout summer 2008. It was found again at the Fish Quay in November 2008 (by Dan) and I first made its acquaintance on Christmas Day that year before it again returned to its natal site in March 2009. Staying with **Black-headed Gulls**, next up was **VA11** (white colour-ring) found at Killingworth Lake on 22nd November 2009 and still present there on 15th March 2010. It was ringed on 1st December 2008 as a first year male at Viborg, Denmark. Another old mate turned up on 30th November 2009 in the car-park at St. Mary's Island, **IA081146** (metal ring). I actually first saw this bird on 2nd Jan 2007 (at St. Mary's) but failed to read the full ring number and had to wait until it returned on 12th December 2008 to get the last digit! It was ringed as a one-year old bird in Rostock, German Democratic Republic on 6th June 2006. This winter I have read the number on five dates up to 20th February 2010. The car-park at St. Mary's Island is a chip-filled paradise for Black-headed Gulls and this last winter has also yielded up a Lithuanian-ringed bird (**HA00.288**) on 23rd December 2009 & again 11th March 2010 and two BTO-ringed birds, **EL44370** which was ringed as a nestling on Coquet Island in June 2005 and **EK06865** which turns out to be nearly 19 years old having been ringed as a nestling at St. Mary's Loch, Borders Region in June 1991. Finally, I also saw a Finnish-ringed bird but only managed to get three digits of the ring number – hope it comes back next winter!

On to bigger fare and 29th December 2009 at the Fish Quay saw me digi-scoping a colour-ringed **Cormorant (HVT)**. Marked as a nestling at Inverbervie, NE Scotland in July 2009 this youngster quickly moved 40 kms north to Aberdeen Harbour after fledging where it was seen seven times up to 29th November before decamping to Northumberland. What made it suddenly move south when it appeared to have settled in for the winter?

I have also recorded two red colour-ringed first-winter **Shags** at Stag Rocks, one (**SXF**) seen on 11th November 2009 had been marked as a nestling on the Farnes in June 2009 and the other (**PUI**), seen on 27th January 2010, as a nestling on Fidra, Firth of Forth also in June 2009.



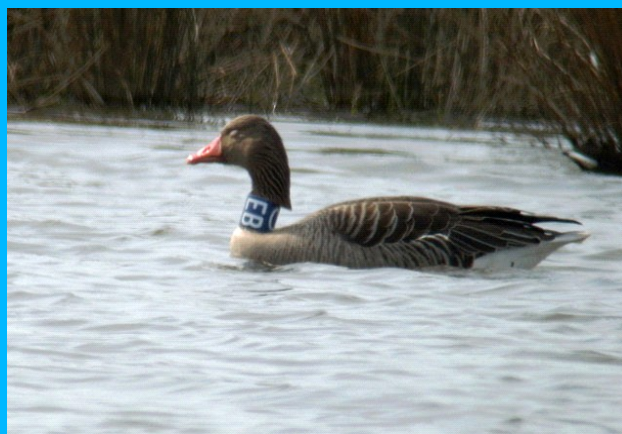
Geese have been very prominent in my birding these last few months and produced some interesting sightings. A blue neck-banded **Pink-footed Goose (A7H)** at Low Newton was first found by Gary Woodburn on 30th January 2010 before being seen by Bob Gadjus on 31st and myself on 1st February. I am not aware of it being reported after that date. This bird was originally marked on 26th March 2003 at Vest Stadil Fjord, Denmark and has had a veritable blizzard of sightings in Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland and the Netherlands during each winter period since BUT this is the first time it appears to have crossed the North Sea. It was previously reported in Belgium on 8th November 2009. Amazingly, I was lucky enough to locate another blue neck-banded **Pink-foot (R41)** at Budle Bay on 21st February 2010. I relocated this bird a couple of miles south of there near Elford on 1st March 2010, an interchange between feeding areas also reflected by two Tundra Bean Geese and many other Pink-feet in the area. This bird had also been originally marked at Vest Stadil Fjord, Denmark the year before A7H on 3rd April 2002 and had also been re-sighted many, many times in the Low Countries and Norway and Denmark in passage and winter periods. It had been present in Belgium on 17th January 2010. These two seem to be the first Pink-feet confirmed in Northumberland that almost certainly originate from the Svalbard population rather than the Icelandic population. Svalbard birds winter mainly on the near continent and presumably these were forced across the North Sea by the severe winter weather experienced there. The question is, how many of the large numbers of Pink-feet in the county during January-early March were from non-Icelandic populations?

Whilst visiting one of my ringing sites near Eshott on 18th February 2010 I found a grey neck-collared **Greylag Goose (DZJ)** who is no stranger to the county! Originally marked at Loch Eye, Easter Ross, Scotland in October 1998, this bird was in the Backworth/Holywell Pond area in March/April 1999, Druridge Pools & East Chevington in February 2004, East Chevington in December 2006, Hauxley NR in February/March 2009 and a variety of Scottish east coast localities in the winters in-between! The ringer has made the comment that this is quite old for an Icelandic Greylag and it must be good at avoiding the hunters!

A green colour-ringed **Greylag** near Bradford Flash on 10th March 'got away' as it was too distant to read the inscription but may also have come from Scotland. Even more interesting was a blue neck-collared **Greylag (OEB)** at Bell's Farm, Druridge on 28th February which had been first caught as a female at Yddingen, Sweden on 5th June 2000. It had been reported in that country fairly regularly up to 16th December 2007 before suddenly re-appearing here! Presumably another goose fleeing the severe winter weather. Remarkably I found this bird again at Monks House Pool on 10th April 2010 apparently paired up!



Icelandic Greylag



Swedish Greylag

In late January, Margery & Norman Tuck told me about a colour-ringed **Knot** at St. Mary's Island which I went to see. Subsequently I discovered that several others including Tim Sexton, Dick Gilhespy & Brian Robson had reported this bird earlier and then Ian Fisher took a superb photo (see club web site) of the said beast! When I sent an email to the ringer I received the quickest reply I have ever had about a marked bird – exactly 25 minutes had elapsed and he sent his reply via his Blackberry whilst doing shorebird counts in Surinam! At last a perfect use for new technology! The information provided by Guy Morrison on his return to Canada was amazing – this Knot had been caught in a rocket net at Alert, Ellsemere Island, Nunavit, Canada, sexed as an adult male (confirmed by DNA analysis) and weighed 128grams and was of the race *islandica*.

Staying with waders, two colour-ringed **Turnstones** at St. Mary's Island on 21st March were no strangers to the county having been ringed at St. Mary's and Amble in February 2000 and January 1999 respectively (and both last reported at St. Mary's in Aug/Sept 2009) and were still present on 24th April.

Passerines don't figure prominently in this little piece but I did see a colour-ringed **Twite** at Hemscotthill Links on 14th January. Unfortunately, I think I missed whatever was on the right leg (you try seeing Twite legs!!) but it is possible this bird was from the SE Pennines. Must try harder – the story of my life!

I know that a number of club members report their colour and other ring sightings and would encourage others to do the same. A couple of useful web sites are <http://www.cr-birding.be/> (European Colour-ring Birding) and, of course, the BTOs own <http://blx1.bto.org/euring/main/>. The ringers who take great time and effort to mark these birds will be very grateful for any sightings you can report and the information can be amazingly important for understanding several aspects of the various species lives. If you do get some information, no matter how little, please let the County Recorder or Birds in Northumbria Editor know so that it can be incorporated into the annual reports.

If you are really mad (sorry, interested!) you can keep your eyes open for ringed birds abroad – my recent successes have included an endangered Piping Plover in the States and a Turkish Greater Flamingo on Lesvos!

Mike S. Hodgson (April 2010)