

BERKSHIRE BLACK-HEADED GULL RINGING PROJECT

2011 REPORT

Reading and Basingstoke Ringing

January 2012

1 Introduction

In 2007 we rang many of the Black-headed Gull pulli (chicks) at Moor Green Lakes and quickly had recoveries from Wales and France. Subsequently we heard about Cotswold Water Park Ringing Group's (CWPRG) successful project colour ringing pulli across the Severn and Thames Basins. We decided to join this project and geared up to ring the Moor Green pulli in 2008. Unfortunately that colony failed in 2008 and again in 2009 so our plans for widening the project were brought forward and we ringed the Gulls at Hosehill Lake LNR.

Our objective is to gather data on the Berkshire breeding population of the Gulls including:

- Non-breeding dispersal and migration patterns
- Patterns of visiting natal colonies by immature birds
- Eventual breeding locations of Berkshire bred birds

Black-headed Gulls are long-lived - the UK record from ringing is a bird seen over 29 years after it was ringed, so we expect this project to continue for many years to come.

John Wells who runs the colour ringing project at Cotswold Water Park registered his main site as a BTO RAS project last year and after a long discussion with the BTO the Hosehill site was also registered in January 2011. These are the only 2 Black-headed Gull projects in the UK and are breaking important new ground. RAS stand for Retrapping Adults for Survival, and there are currently just over 100 projects across the country studying 38 species. The objective of the project is to gather retrap information on breeding birds, which will allow the BTO to monitor the survival rates of a wide range of birds in a variety of habitats. Information on survival rates is important because it can help us to understand why bird populations may be changing. Knowing about changes in survival rates of birds is vital for effective conservation action, but all too often this information is sadly lacking. In most cases the projects involve catching a very high proportion of the breeding adults in the study area each year, obviously we're taking a different approach - by colour ringing enough pulli we should be able to get to the position that enough of the adults are colour ringed so that we can get a statistically relevant measure of year on year survival.

Black-headed Gulls breeding strategies have a number of characteristics which will have an impact on how the data is analysed. Typically only a small proportion of birds breed in their first summer and most start breeding in their 2nd or 3rd summers. During their pre-breeding period a proportion don't visit their natal colony at all but may return when they're ready to start breeding. It's believed that a high proportion of birds remain loyal to their breeding colony once they start breeding as long as the colony remains viable.

Hosehill counts as the official study area in this case and records from here will be used for the main analyses. The BTO will be able to deal with sightings from elsewhere that prove that birds have survived which weren't seen at Hosehill. They will also have to adjust the data for birds which return to the colony after one or more pre-breeding seasons away from Hosehill. Fully robust statistics need at least 30 returning birds each year and preferably 50. 34 of the birds ringed in 2009 were seen locally in both 2010 and 2011 and 28 of the birds ringed in 2010 were seen locally in 2011 so the data are already useable.

Registering our project as a RAS scheme shouldn't detract from any of our original objectives - sightings of birds elsewhere in the breeding season will still contribute to these targets and the BTO will be able to allow for these when they calculate survival rates.

In 2011 we started a new but related project colour ringing Common Tern pulli - this year it was only possible to ring birds at Lea Farm Gravel Pit, Hurst, hopefully we'll be able to expand the project to other colonies in the future.

2 Ringing Methods

Both the Moor Green and Hosehill colonies are on fenced islands and the Lea Farm colony is on fenced rafts, the fences offer some protection from predators but prevent the Black-headed Gull pulli from taking to the water readily. The fences at both colonies have holes and the one at Hosehill is low enough in places for some pulli to jump over. The fences certainly make it very difficult if not impossible for pulli to return to the islands unaided. On un-fenced sites Black-headed Gull pulli are naturally aquatic from a very early age and they form crèches of young on the water; this probably ensures that the young are safe from ground predators. Gull colonies are naturally quite chaotic places and even small chicks wander some distance away from their nests so any kind of formal monitoring of individual nests is impossible.

The colonies are regularly checked from the shore and generally two visits are made to each island to ring the young. Most of the nests are quite well synchronised and two visits about 10 days apart are usually sufficient to ring a high proportion of the young. The visits are carried out by a small team of ringers and the time they are present on the island is limited. Because the fences make it difficult for any young that get off the island to return the boatman is equipped with a landing net so he can round up any escapees. The colonies return to normal very quickly after the team leaves the island – most of the adults have landed before the team has even reached the shore. Pulli are ringed with a standard metal ring on one leg and an engraved colour ring on the other. The colour ring has the same internal diameter as the metal ring and is tall enough to fit 4 reasonably large characters without being so large that it can't be used on half grown pulli.



We normally limit the number of colour rings used each year and any additional pulli are just ringed with standard metal rings.

Following colour ringing regular shore based checks of the colonies and surrounding areas are made to record as many of the birds as possible before they disperse. Subsequently as many flocks of Black-headed Gulls as possible are checked to try and establish local movement patterns. Sightings from other people are reported via the routine national and international channels, by email to gulls@rbringng.co.uk or through our web site.

3 Numbers Ringed

3.1 2007 Moor Green

In 2007 we ringed pulli at Moor Green Lakes with metal rings. We had two visits to the breeding island on 4 and 15 June and ringed a total of 79 pulli. On 15 June we found the remains of 4 ringed birds which had died since the first visit. Subsequently the remains of a bird which had just about fledged were found during a work party on the nesting island. A few chicks were too small to ring and some birds still had eggs on the second visit to the island and it is almost certain that fewer than 100 chicks hatched and the number that fledged successfully was certainly much lower than this. 124 nests were counted on the island and it is likely that wet weather contributed to the low level of breeding success. In hind sight it is also possible that predation may have also had an effect.

3.2 2008 and 2009 at Moor Green

In 2008 an estimate of about 100 nests and reasonable numbers of young hatching was followed by almost all the young disappearing suddenly and a trip out to the island on 19 June found just 2 small chicks and 21 nests with eggs. The chicks were too small for colour ringing and were ringed with metal rings, neither of these survived to fledging and none of the nests found on 19 June resulted in fledged young. Around the time the chicks disappeared there was a torrential storm which almost certainly killed many young but we also suspect that predation played a significant part in the colony's total failure.

After the poor breeding success in 2007 and failure in 2008 the colony was significantly smaller in 2009 – just 75 nests being counted from the shore. Then there were two nights when the colony was decimated – on the mornings of 4 and 18 June it was clear that the colony had suffered heavily in the preceding nights. Just 3 nests with eggs and no young were found when the island was visited on 23 June, none of which subsequently hatched young. It was hard to find definitive evidence but Mink were the most likely culprits.

3.3 2009 Hosehill Lake LNR

Following the Moor Green failure we arranged access to the Hosehill colony with Theale Area Bird Conservation Group (TABCG) and West Berkshire Council and carried out two ringing visits on 13 and 20 June. 100 pulli were ringed with colour rings and a further 54 just with metal rings, no firm count of the number of nests could be made because the birds had heavily disturbed much of the nest material.

3.4 2010

Hosehill

This was another successful year at Hosehill and we colour ringed a total of 116 pulli and metal ringed a further 11. This represents a slightly lower overall total than 2009. It is difficult to monitor nesting activity from the shore and the reduction could be due to lower numbers breeding on the main island, smaller clutches or lower hatching success. More birds nested on the large island and small tern rafts than in 2009 so it's likely that the overall colony size actually increased. No attempt was made to ring pulli on the large island or tern rafts.

Moor Green

After two more or less complete failures in the preceding years it's hardly surprising that the colony was very slow to get going this year and the few birds that did attempt to breed were very late. We visited the colony on 3 July primarily to ring the Common Terns, by this time many of the Hosehill pulli had already fledged! We found and ringed just 5 Black-headed Gull pulli, and only 2 of which were big enough to colour ring. On 12 July the colony was once again attacked by Mink and it was obvious that all the gull pulli and all unfledged Terns were killed. A few Terns had fledged in time – 2 were seen at Lea Farm GP (11 km NNW) on 13 July. One of the gull colour rings was found during a work party on the island in October.

3.5 2011

Hosehill

This was yet another good year at Hosehill and we colour ringed a total of 122 pulli and metal ringed a further 30, the total of 152 ringed is almost identical to the 2009 figure. The ringing visits this year were made on 4 and 11 June. About 60 pairs nested on the small island where we ring the pulli and another 40-50 pairs nested on the large island and rafts. No attempt was made to ring pulli on the large island or tern rafts.

Moor Green

Once again the Common Tern and Black-headed Gull colony was predated – this time when the birds were incubating eggs rather than after the majority of young had hatched as in previous years. The birds totally abandoned the colony after this and so there were no young to ring this year.

Lea Farm

The Friends of Lavells Lake asked to ring the gulls and terns breeding on the Dinton Pastures complex this year. Seeing as it was the first year we had done this and we needed to make

sure we had the logistics organised we made a single visit to ring the Black-headed Gull and Common Tern pulli on the rafts at Lea Farm Gravel Pit on 26 June. All the Black-headed Gull pulli were a suitable age for colour ringing and 39 birds were ringed. 2X53 which hatched and was colour ringed at Hosehill in 2009 was seen at Lea Farm several times during the summer and almost certainly bred there.

3.6 Ringing Summary

Year	Moor Green		Hosehill		Lea Farm		Total	
	Colour + Metal	Metal only	Colour + Metal	Metal only	Colour + Metal	Metal only	Colour + Metal	Metal only
2007	-	79	-	-	-	-	-	79
2008	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
2009	-	-	100	54	-	-	100	54
2010	2	3	116	12	-	-	118	15
2011	-	-	122	30	39	-	161	30
Total	2	84	338	96	39	-	379	180

Table 1: Annual Ringing Totals

4 Results to Date

Maps of sightings and recoveries are given below, up to date results including full details of these birds are given on our web site – www.rbringing.co.uk. The web site is updated frequently and has the latest records.

4.1 Metal Ringing

Metal ringing provides less data than colour ringing because results are dependant on other ringers catching ringed birds, people finding dead birds and reporting the ring or very occasionally bird watchers or photographers reading rings in the field. Two of the birds ringed at Moor Green in 2007 have been found dead – one in south Wales in it's first winter and the other in France in it's first summer. Since 2007 we have ringed another 101 birds with metal rings and we have had just one recovery from these birds – someone managed to read a metal ring on one of our birds in Wales.

4.2 Colour Ringing

When we started colour ringing at Hosehill we hadn't appreciated how excellent this site is. Once the young have fledged many of them spend a lot of time loafing on the big island, which is only used by a few nesting birds but is within easy range of a viewing screen. We are getting a large number of individual records of our colour ringed birds – see Table 2. Totals of different Hosehill birds seen in each month and season are given in Table 3.

Year	2009	2010			2011				Grand Total
Cohort	2009 birds	2009 birds	2010 birds	Total	2009 birds	2010 birds	2011 birds	Total	
January		0		0	3	2		5	5
February		0		0	4	3		7	7
March		1		1	24	10		34	35
April		24		24	137	39		176	200
May		95		95	123	81		204	299
June	5	134	178	312	73	56	151	280	597
July	186	34	134	168	18	10	164	192	546
August	1	9	6	15	3	4	2	9	26
September	3	5	0	5	0	2	3	5	13
October	0	1	2	3	3	2	5	10	13
November	1	6	1	7	1	1	3	5	13
December	1	10	5	15	1	0	1	2	18
Total	197	319	326	645	390	210	329	929	1772

Table 2: Count of colour ring records for birds ringed at Hosehill

Season (not plumage)	2009					2010					2011					
	Ring	Colour			Metal	Ring	Colour			Metal	Ring	Colour			Metal	
	Ringed	100			54	Ringed	116			12	Ringed	122			30	
	Reported	72 (72.0%)			0	Reported	94 (81.0%)			1	Reported	89 (73.0%)			0	
	Date	Local ≤20km	Distant >20km	Distant >20km	Date	Local ≤20km	Distant >20km	Distant >20km	Distant >20km	Date	Local ≤20km	Distant >20km	Distant >20km	Distant >20km		
1st Autumn	Jun-09	5	66	2		Jun-10	75	90	1		Jun-11	67	88	5		
	Jul-09	64			1		Jul-10			72		Jul-11			70	2
	Aug-09	1					Aug-10			3		Aug-11				2
	Sep-09	2			1		Sep-10					Sep-11				2
	Oct-09						Oct-10				1	1			Oct-11	
1st Winter	Nov-09			1		Nov-10		2	8				2	4		
	Dec-09			1		Dec-10	1	3					1			
	Jan-10					Jan-11		1					3			
	Feb-10					Feb-11		3								
1st Summer	Mar-10		34	5		Mar-11	2	28	6		Mar-12					
	Apr-10	11			3		Apr-11			11		Apr-12				
	May-10	27			1		May-11			18	3	May-12				
	Jun-10	24					Jun-11			17	1	Jun-12				
	Jul-10	15			1		Jul-11			5	2	Jul-12				
2nd Autumn	Aug-10	5	6	2		Aug-11		1	4		Aug-12					
	Sep-10	2			1		Sep-11			1	1	Sep-12				
	Oct-10				1		Oct-11			1	1	Oct-12				
2nd Winter	Nov-10	1	4	6		Nov-11		1	1		Nov-12					
	Dec-10	3			3		Dec-11					Dec-12				
	Jan-11	1			1		Jan-12			1		Jan-13				
	Feb-11				1		Feb-12					Feb-13				
2nd Summer	Mar-11	12	34	1		Mar-12					Mar-13					
	Apr-11	30				Apr-12				Apr-13						
	May-11	23				May-12				May-13						
	Jun-11	20				Jun-12				Jun-13						
	Jul-11	11				Jul-12				Jul-13						
3rd Autumn	Aug-11	2	2	3	1	Aug-12					Aug-12					
	Sep-11						Sep-12				Sep-12					
	Oct-11	1			2		Oct-12				Oct-12					
3rd Winter	Nov-11		1	2	1	Nov-12					Nov-12					
	Dec-11				1		Dec-12				Dec-12					

As would be expected the monthly count of sightings shows a clear peak when the colony is occupied but we are getting a growing number of sightings at other times of the year. Last year we were surprised by the number of birds back in the colony in April so we made sure we did some early checks this year and the value of those checks is shown by the number of sightings that were made (Table 2). The number of local bird watchers who are submitting records continues to grow and their efforts are very much appreciated. Both nationally and internationally there is a growing number of birdwatchers who take the time and effort to look for and report colour ringed gulls and we have now had sightings from France (1 location), Eire (6 locations), Wales (5 locations) and spread across 12 English counties between Cornwall and North Yorkshire.

The records are beginning to build up a good picture of the birds movements. Currently we are splitting birds into annual age groups until the end of their third winter after which we are classing them as adults. The published literature suggests that whilst a few Black-headed gulls breed in their first summer most wait until they are at least 2 or 3 years old. In an attempt to understand seasonal movements the year is divided into three periods:

- summer from April to July when colonies are occupied
- autumn from August to the end of October
- winter from November to the end of March

Apart from the summer period the divisions are slightly arbitrary and may well be adjusted as we get a better picture of movements. Initial results suggest that birds may return from winter quarters very quickly making it difficult to distinguish and standard "spring migration" period.

We have set a limit on local movements of 20 km in an attempt to differentiate between local wanderings and a more defined migration. A 20 km limit from Hosehill has the advantage that it encompasses all the main gravel pits and water bodies in central Berkshire (eg the Kennet Valley west to Newbury, Dinton and Twyford gravel pits and Moor Green Lakes) and our records have demonstrated that first summer birds in particular can move fairly rapidly around this area.

So far there has only been one sighting of a Lea Farm bird – 27J1 was reported from the Otter Estuary in Devon, 193km away, on the early date of 25 August. The rafts used by the colony at Lea Farm are close enough to the hide there for colour rings to be read with a telescope so hopefully the local bird watchers will start to report more birds there in future years as we would like to build up a similar data set to the Hosehill one. It would be interesting to compare survival data for the two colonies.

4.3 Survival Data

The oldest birds we have colour ringed are now 2½ years old and we're already beginning to build up a reasonable set of survival data for the birds (Table 4).

	2009	2010	2011	All
Colour Ringed	100	116	122	338
Known to have fledged	72 (72.0%)	94 (81.0%)	89 (73.0%)	255 (75.4%)
Seen locally during 1st summer (Mar-Jul)	34 (34.0%)	28 (24.1%)	N/A	62 (28.7%)
Known to still be alive in June when 1 yr old	39 (39.0%)	24 (20.7%)	N/A	63 (29.2%)
Seen locally during 2nd summer (Mar-Jul)	34 (34.0%)	N/A	N/A	34 (34.0%)
Known to still be alive in June when 2 yr old	22 (22.0%)	N/A	N/A	22 (22.0%)
Found dead at any time	1 (1.0%)	5 (4.3%)	2 (1.7%)	8 (2.4%)
Recorded at distant location	19 (19.0%)	15 (12.9%)	8 (6.6%)	42 (12.4%)

Table 4: Survival data

Most, but not all the records proving birds have fledged come in the first couple of weeks when many spend a lot of time loafing around Hosehill. Despite our efforts to record birds earlier in the season in 2011 the proportion of one year old birds seen in 2011 was significantly lower than in 2010 – this suggests that they may have had greater difficulty surviving the harsh

winter of 2010-11. Black-headed Gulls tend to move in response to winter weather so some birds could have perished while moving on in response to the cold as well as some getting caught by the freeze. Of course it's also possible that some decided not to migrate back for the summer and they could return in 2012. The 2011/12 winter is currently very mild so it'll be interesting to see if the 2011 cohort shows a different pattern in 2012.

So far a remarkable 42 (12.4%) of all the birds we have colour ringed have been reported from places more than 20km away from Hosehill.

4.4 First Autumn

Many of the fledglings spend time at Hosehill before they disperse – each year we've recorded at least 60 on site and a few birds each year are recorded at other local sites. In both years the colony was abandoned during July with both adults and juveniles leaving around the same time. In 2011 we were lucky to have several very early long distance records – a late report of a 2009 bird just 76 km away in Oxfordshire on 27 July 2009 was our previous furthest early movement but this was easily surpassed this year.

26D0 was last seen at Hosehill on 30 June but just 5 days later on 5 July it was reported from Waterford in Eire a remarkable 452 km away! This was followed by our first Channel Islands record – 21J0 was on Guernsey on 17 July and it stayed until at least 23 October. 25D5 was in Cornwall on 6 August as was 24D0 on 22 September. 21J5 was at Slimbridge on 28 September – it stayed until at least 2 January 2012. Five long distances records makes 2011 easily our best first autumn so far.



21J0 on Vazon Beach, Guernsey on 17 July 2011
© P K Veron

4.5 First Winter

No first winter birds were reported locally in the first half of the 2010/11 winter and the run of long distance reports continued from the autumn with 27D9 reported from Waterford, Eire on 1 November. While the next 2 birds should really be mentioned in the 2011 report I couldn't resist including them. 28D1 became our seconded furthest ever record when it was reported from central Cork in Eire, 513km west of Hosehill, on 1 January. On 2 January 23D8 was at Helston Pool in Cornwall.



21J5 at Slimbridge Gloucestershire on 21 December 2011
© M Colquhoun

4.6 First Summer

Once again we had a large number of sightings of first summer birds and these followed similar patterns to the birds in the previous year. The published literature suggests that only a few first summer Black-headed Gulls breed and we only saw 1 or 2 birds which showed any signs of breeding behaviour and these were birds which arrived back at the colony with the adults in April. Those that didn't make breeding attempts displayed a variety of strategies:

- Short (<5 days) stay birds could arrive at any time during the breeding season.
- A small number of birds stayed locally for 2-3 weeks
- The majority of first summers stayed until the colony dispersed in early July, so early arrivers stayed a long time and late arrivers stayed for a shorter period.

Altogether we had 171 local records of 28 different first summer birds – despite starting checks earlier in the summer these figures were both lower than in 2010. Six first summer birds were seen more than 20km away, four of these weren't seen locally at all and 22C7 and 27C8 spent the entire summer around Aberystwyth where they had both spent the previous winter. 20C9 was in Worcestershire on 2 March but back locally from 28 May until 28 June and was seen at Woolhampton between visits to Hosehill. 21D3 was at Hosehill on 30 March but obviously didn't stay long as it was not seen again until it turned up at Lower Test NR, Hampshire on 30 June.



22C7 spent all it's 1st winter and 1st summer at Aberystwyth
© L Wright

4.7 Second Autumn

The pattern of records for second autumn birds was very similar to 2010 – just two birds were seen locally at Woolhampton and Lavells Lake and four were seen at more distant locations. Like last year we had a French record – 29C6 was in Morbihan from 16 to 21 August, 22C7 was still in Aberystwyth on 24 August, 22C9 was near Dublin on 20 September, 27C1 was in Weston-Super-Mare on 13 October.



29C6 at Larmor-Baden, Morbihan, France on 16 August 2011
© F Le Gall

4.8 Second Winter

The 2009 cohort's second winter was from November 2010 through to February 2011 and during this period we had records of 4 different birds locally and 6 at distant locations. The combined totals for the 2009 and 2010 cohorts in their first winters was just 1 bird seen locally and 11 seen at distant locations. This difference would appear to be significant and suggests that a higher proportion of second winter birds stay closer to their natal colonies than first winters. If this trend continues in future years it suggests that Black-headed Gulls have similar migration strategies to some of the larger Gulls like Lesser Black-backed Gulls which tend to winter closer to "home" as they get older.

The six distant second winter birds were 2X18 in Scarborough, North Yorkshire on 10 December, 2X23 which stayed in Datchet, Berkshire all winter, 2X39 in Bath on 19 November, 2X89 in Wanstead, London on 10 December, 2X94 in Pembrokeshire on 19 November and 2X54 in Gloucestershire on 14 February. So of these six only two (2X18 and 2X94) were more than 100 km away.

4.9 Second Summer

34 of the 2009 cohort returned to Hosehill during their second summer in 2011, this is exactly the same number of 2009 birds that returned in their first summer however five birds were seen back for the first time in 2011 (ie they weren't seen locally during 2010) and 5 birds which were seen in 2010 didn't re-appear in 2011. 2X53 is strongly suspected of breeding at Lea Farm this year. We were able to sex 10 of the second summer birds this year because they were seen mating, eventually we may be able to detect difference in the movement and attendance patterns of males and females if we can sex enough birds.

4.10 Third Autumn

Two third autumn birds were seen locally including 2X53 which was seen in the Lea Farm area in August and October. 2X23 returned to Datchet where it had spent the 2010/11 winter on 8 October and 2X33 was in Barnstaple, Devon on 10 August and 2X68 was in Cardiff on 16 October.

4.11 Third Winter

Just 2 months in to the 2009 cohort's third winter we've had reports of 2X23 continuing its stay around Datchet and 2X32 at Albert Village, Leicestershire on 29 December. This is the first distant record of 2X32 but it came back to Hosehill from 13 May to 19 June 2010 and 24 March to 2 July 2011.

4.12 Sighting of birds ringed elsewhere

During 2010 three birds ringed by CWPRG were seen at locally. 2A98 is a female which was ringed in Gloucestershire in 2004, it was seen at Hosehill 3 times during 2009 and in 2010 it

was present between 14 April and 26 June and made 2 separate breeding attempts – neither of which were successful. 2A98 returned to Hosehill on 21 March and stayed until 30 June, it had at least 1 breeding attempt but we don't know if it was successful. 2N27 was ringed at Slimbridge in 2010 and visited Hosehill on 2 June 2011. 2Y69 was ringed in Wiltshire in 2009 and seen at Hosehill on 2 October 2011.

Three foreign colour ringed Black-headed Gulls were reported from our sites during the year and rather unusually all were in the summer/early autumn.

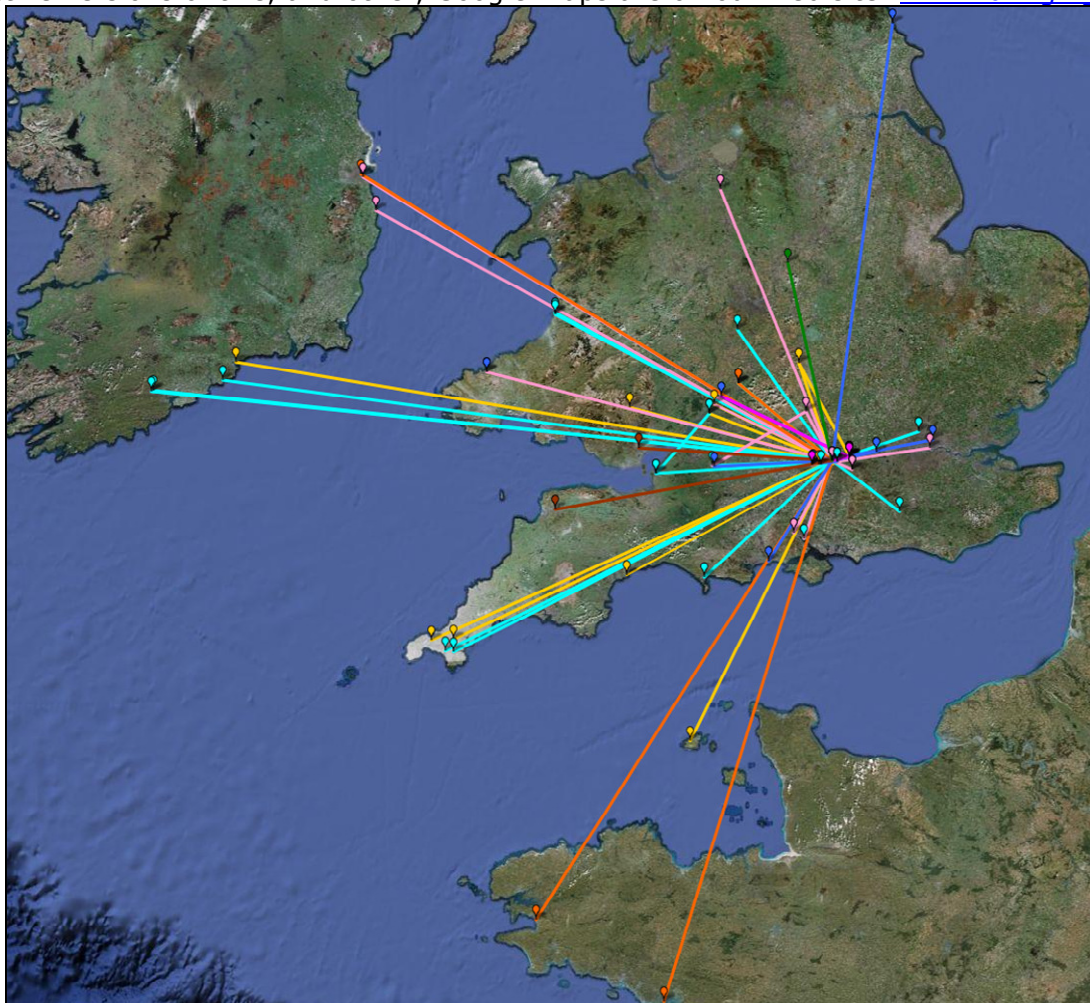
Yellow K084 was ringed as a chick at Sosnovaya Polyana, Sankt-Petersburg, Russia on 10 June 2010 and was reported from Lea Farm on 15 March and Hosehill on 7 May 2011 (a movement of 2,162 km). It seems to have been doing something similar to our 22C7 and 27C8 which spent their first summer in their wintering area.

Yellow N176 was ringed as a first winter in Salamanca, Spain on 2 January 2011 and seen at Hosehill on 11 May, subsequently it was seen near Madrid (south-east of it's ringing location) on 11 November. CWPRG have had several records of their colour ringed birds from Iberia and it is tempting to think that this bird was actually bred locally and ringed on it's wintering grounds. It's certainly a bird we'll be keeping an eye out for in future years.

Black R17C was ringed as a chick at Oye Plage, Pas-de-Calais on the French Channel coast on 7 June 2011 and seen at Lea Farm on 27 July – it was obviously following a similar pattern to many of our birds and moving rapidly west in it's first autumn. Lea Farm is 210 km WNW of Oye Plage.

5 Maps

Interactive versions of this, and other, Google maps are on our web site: www.rbringinq.co.uk



Sightings and recoveries of birds ringed at Hosehill LNR. Colours represent seasons (Table 3)

6 Common Tern Colour Ringing

After the success we've had with the Gulls we've started a similar but separate project colour ringing Common Tern. The rings are obviously much smaller than the gull rings – and dark blue with a three character code engraved in white, we're starting with codes E01 to E99. Common Terns legs are nowhere near as visible as Black-headed Gulls so we won't get as many records – but they do go to even more exciting places and it'll be interesting to get an idea of how they move around. As you know colonies are often quite short lived and we should be able to get information on both natal dispersal and adult loyalty to their breeding colonies.

After events at Moor Green we were only able to ring at Lea Farm and even there numbers were a bit disappointing but we did manage to colour ring 10 of the 12 birds, the last 2 birds were too small for the colour rings and were only ringed with metal rings.

We've already had one good long distance record E02 was reported from Titchfield Haven, Hampshire (75 km SSW) on 27 August. First year Common Terns don't often return to the UK so we'll probably have to wait until 2013 before we see these birds again. Hopefully some will be seen on their migrations – ringing recoveries of British bred birds in West Africa aren't uncommon and some adult ringed birds have reached South Africa and one even turned up in Australia!



Blue E01 – the first Common Tern for the project

7 Acknowledgments

We'd like to acknowledge the support of and thank the following individuals and organisations.

John Wells of Cotswold Water Park Ringing Group is the national coordinator for this Black-headed Gull colour ringing project and has provided invaluable help and advice. He also deals with all sightings reported through national channels.

The Berkshire colour ringing project was initiated with the help of a small project grant from the BTO.

Moor Green Lakes Group (MGLG) and Wokingham District Council have provided grants to help with costs. Access to the colony is provided by MGLG, Bruce Archer monitors the colony and helps us plan visits, he also arranges a boat and boatman with the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership and helps on ringing sessions.

Access to the Hosehill colony is provided by Theale Area Bird Conservation Group (TABCG) through Brian Uttley who acts as boatmen for the ringing sessions. West Berkshire Council Countryside Service fund the cost of rings at Hosehill Lake.

Access to Lea Farm is provided by Friends of Lavells Lake (FOLL) through Fraser Cottington who also acted as boatman for the ringing session. FOLL funded the cost of rings at Lea Farm.

A number of local birdwatchers have helped gather sightings of the birds and it would be impossible to mention them all but Ken Moore, Roger Stansfield and Richard Crawford have all supplied many records. Jerry O'Brien has provided many of the photos of our colour ringed birds used in our reports and on our web site.