

REVIEWS

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Wader ringing on The Wash: thirty-five years on

The Wash Wader Ringing Group Report 1993 - 94

The Wash Wader Ringing Group is, as they say, probably the longest running voluntary organisation in the wader study world. Formed in 1959 by a group of enthusiastic ringers, it has now undertaken 35 years of study of the wader populations of the Wash in eastern England.

In 1959 the group started catching waders with rocket nets on loan from the Wildfowl Trust for short periods during the summer, supplemented by the development of techniques of mist netting waders on the shore at night. By 1967, under the driving leadership of Clive Minton, the group had developed its own cannon nets, and started to catch birds throughout the year. These included a number of species, such as Sanderling *Calidris alba*, which were previously very difficult indeed to catch. The resulting data transformed our knowledge of the migrations and requirements of many of Europe's shore wader species. The cannon-netting technology soon spread throughout

much of the wader ringing world, and we now have three decades of wader studies, especially of wintering waders, which owe a debt of gratitude to the development of this technique.

Since 1967, the Wash Wader Ringing Group has carried on an intensive programme of wader studies, catching, on average, over 9,000 waders per annum over the last 28 years. Perhaps even Clive's early vision would not have expected this programme to continue for so long and in so robust a manner, though it seems from *Wader Study Group Bulletins* that he is aiming to create the same sort of record on the other side of the world!

By 1992 Wash Wader Ringing Group's basic statistics provide an impressive reflection on the amount of work undertaken by the group. The ringing total stood at over 214,000 birds, with over 2,000 birds controlled which had been ringed away from the Wash. Over 3,400 birds ringed at the Wash had been recovered elsewhere, including 250 within the Arctic Circle, over 100 in Africa, nine to Canada and one Knot *Calidris canutus* even to the West Indies. Two key species on the Wash, Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* and Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, had both provided over 1,000 recoveries.

This work has continued through 1993 and 1994, and Wash Wader Ringing Group have just published the latest of their long-running series of biennial reports (1993 and 1994). For 25 years Nick Branson undertook the onerous task of producing the reports, which provide a backbone of information about the group's work. Nick is now taking a well-earned rest, and under the editorship of Allison Kew, Wash Wader has made use of

the BTO data archive and a computer mapping package to review and summarise all the recoveries and controls of birds caught on the Wash since the Group's inception. This report therefore provides an invaluable summary of one of the world's biggest site-specific ringing data sets.

The report also reviews the catching undertaken in 1993 and 1994; which is increasingly aimed at collecting particular data from chosen species, at specific locations and times of year. There are also summary papers on a number of publications resulting from Wash Wader Ringing Group data. These include items on Oystercatcher starvation in the 1992 winter, changing Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* populations on the Wash, migration of Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea*, the sex differences in moult and migration patterns of Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, progress on colour-ringing Black-tailed Godwits *L. limosa*, catching of Brent Geese *Branta bernicla*, and an analysis of wader roosts on the Wash, with a view to the need for the formation of wader roost refuges. A full bibliography of papers using Wash Wader Group data ends the report.

For those of you who want to read all about it, copies of the 1993/1994 *Wash Wader Ringing Group Biennial Report* are available from Philip Ireland, 27 Hainfield Drive, Solihull, West Midlands, B91 2PL, UK, at a price of £5 plus £1 postage UK and £2 overseas.

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