Wader Study Group Colour Marking Register

a report for 1997 and 1998.

The following report provides a further update of the WSG Colour–Marking Register's activities.

REGISTERED SCHEMES

The WSG Register holds details of 496 schemes using permanent marks (rings and flags). We hold complete details and addresses for 431 of these, of which 139 are currently active, involving 34 species. Full details are given in Table 1. In addition to the permanent schemes there are six temporary schemes also registered. The number of schemes registered for each species in different countries (from the address of the researcher rather than necessarily the country of study) is given in Table 2.

ACTIVITIES OF THE REGISTER

The register receives between 300 and 450 sightings of colour–marked waders annually (292 in 1997 and 465 in 1998). Of these, about 25% are untraceable (62 untraceable in 1997 and 123 in 1998). The number of reports received for each species and the number of untraceable sightings is given in Table 3.

There are a number of possible reasons for untraceable sightings:

1) The observer did not see and report the full details of all the colour–rings (colour, number, positions of the rings and presence of the metal ring) correctly, or the report is correct but the bird has lost some of its original marks.

2) There are overlapping schemes with more than one project using the same marks. This problem has arisen because of previous lack of co–ordination between schemes, especially those in different countries. The Wader Study Group Colour–Marking Register was introduced to overcome this but, because waders are long–lived, it will be some years before duplication between schemes is no longer a problem.

3) The scheme being reported is not be registered with the WSG. As the WSG register is fairly new and many countries and ringers have been involved in wader studies, some schemes may not yet be registered. (see below).

There are many reasons why some species are reported more frequently than others and why different proportions of these are traced. As these encompass a number of basic principles about wader colour marking they are discussed below.

High reporting rates may result from:

1) Species having long legs, so that rings are obvious (e.g. Avocet, Black–tailed Godwit).

2) A large number of registered schemes for a species (e.g. Dunlin, Curlew, Oystercatcher, Redshank and Ringed Plover).

3) The conservation interest and "appeal" of the species (e.g. Avocet, Black–tailed Godwit).

4) Birds frequenting areas with lots of bird watchers (e.g. Avocet and Black–tailed Godwit at inland sites in the UK).

A high number of traceable sightings result from:

1) A small number of registered schemes for a species (e.g. Black–winged Stilt and Little Ringed Plover)

2) Simple ring combinations (owing to a small number of schemes) or code rings (Avocet and Black–winged Stilt).

Table 1 The number of registered and active colour–marking schemes for each wader species on the WSG Colour–Marking Register 1998.

Species	No. of Schemes Schemes	No. of Active Scheme	Species	No. of	No. of Active Schemes
Avocet	21	4	Lapwing	38	11
Bar-tailed Godwit	11	3	Little Ringed Plover	12	5
Black-tailed Godwit	18	6	Little Stint	17	3
Black-winged Stilt	7	1	Oystercatcher	35	6
Broad-billed Sandpiper	3	2	Purple Sandpiper	21	8
Collared Pratincole	2	1	Redshank	25	6
Common Sandpiper	10	4	Ringed Plover	37	8
Curlew	26	9	Ruff	7	2
Curlew Sandpiper	12	2	Sanderling	13	2
Dotterel	6	1	Spotted Redshank	4	1
Dunlin	35	11	Stone Curlew	4	2
Golden Plover	16	5	Temminck's Stint	5	1
Greenshank	10	2	Terek Sandpiper	1	1
Grey Phalarope	1	1	Turnstone	24	5
Grey Plover	18	5	Various	4	3
Kentish Plover	23	12	Whimbrel	8	2
Knot	13	2	Wood Sandpiper	5	3

Table 2 The number of registered wader colouring ringing schemes in different countries in 1998.

	Belarus	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Germany	Iceland	Italy	Norway	Poland	Portugal	Russia	Spain	Sweden	The Netherlands	UK	Total
Avocet								1						1		2	4
Bar-tailed Godwit						1										2	3
Black-tailed Godwit														1		5	6
Black-winged Stilt											1						1
Broad-billed Sandpiper									1						1		2
Collared Pratincole													1				1
Common Sandpiper				1												3	4
Curlew				1		1								1	2	4	9
Curlew Sandpiper						2											2
Dotterel								1									1
Dunlin			1			1			1					4		4	11
Golden Plover						1										4	5
Greenshank				1												1	2
Grey Phalarope						1											1
Grey Plover						2										3	5
Kentish Plover		1		2				1			2		5	1			12
Knot						1									1		2
Lapwing															1	10	8
Little Ringed Plover														1		4	5
Little Stint						1			2								3
Oystercatcher						1	1	1								3	7
Purple Sandpiper						1			2		1		1	1		2	8
Redshank																6	6
Ringed Plover	1													1		6	8
Ruff									1							1	2
Sanderling						1										1	2
Spotted Redshank									1								1
Stone Curlew								1								1	2
Temminck's Stint				1													1
Terek Sandpiper	1																1
Turnstone						1			1						1	2	5
Whimbrel						1	1										2
Wood Sandpiper				1					1	1							3
TOTAL	2	1	1	7	0	16	2	5	10	1	4	0	7	11	6	64	136

Habitats where birds are not always standing in water, such as inland sites (e.g. Avocet, Black–tailed Godwit, Golden Plover, Lapwing and Little Ringed Plover) or rocks and harbour walls (e.g. Turnstone).

The annual total of sightings equates to about 30 sightings per month; however, reports tend to be concentrated in the migration and winter periods. Each sighting results in two letters, one for the person reporting the sighting, the other for the ringer. Many sightings are inaccurately reported and further correspondence is required. Approximately 20–30 new schemes are registered each year. For some species, such as Ringed Plover, it is becoming increasing difficult to find unique schemes.

COMPUTERISATION

Details of all active schemes and some inactive schemes are now stored on a computerised database. This has been a lengthy task and more of the historical data is slowly being added. The database can only be used for address and payment details and cannot be used to assign colour–ring sightings to ringers. Interpretation of sightings is something that only a human can carry out; to use a computer to do it would be extremely difficult. The database is fully linked with a word processing package and makes invoicing and financial record–keeping a much easier task.

EMAILS AND THE INTERNET.

Contrary to people's expectations the Internet and email are making the job of the register more complicated. For example, a European colour–ringing Web page (http://

Table 3 The total number of sightings, untraceable sightings and the percentage of sightings traced, for each wader species reported to the WSG colour-marking register in 1997 and 1998.

	1997 Sightings	1997 Untraceable	% Traced	1998 Sightings	1998 Untraceable	% Traced	97 & 98 Average
Little Ringed Plover	3	0	100	4	0	100	100
Black-winged Stilt	9	0	100	7	1	86	93
Black-tailed Godwit	62	4	94	105	11	90	92
Knot	1	0	100	11	3	73	86
Turnstone	14	3	79	15	1	93	86
Avocet	21	3	86	63	10	84	85
Golden Plover	7	2	71	5	0	100	85
Oystercatcher	44	6	86	42	9	79	82
Lapwing	5	0	100	5	2	60	80
Ringed Plover	29	4	86	69	19	72	79
Bar-tailed Godwit	6	1	83	12	4	67	75
Curlew Sandpiper	1	0	100	2	1	50	75
Purple Sandpiper	8	2	75	5	2	60	67
Sanderling	5	1	80	13	6	54	67
Redshank	13	6	54	24	7	71	62
Dunlin	10	2	80	28	16	43	61
Curlew	32	16	50	24	11	54	52
Common Sandpiper	3	0	100	1	1	0	50
Ruff	1	0	100	2	2	0	50
Whimbrel	2	1	50	4	2	50	50
Greenshank	3	2	33	4	2	50	41
Grey Plover	3	3	0	4	1	75	37
Kentish Plover	7	5	29	15	11	27	28
Dotterel	2	0	100	0	0	n/a	n/a
Terek Sandpiper	0	0	n/a	1	1	0	n/a
Wood Sandpiper	1	1	0	0	0	n/a	n/a
TOTAL	**292**	**62**	**79**	**465**	**123**	**73**	**76**

www.ping.be/cr-birding/cr-birding.htm) contains details of a large number of wader schemes. This causes two problems: firstly, many sightings are sent direct to the ringer and bypass the WSG. This would not be a problem as long as sightings always belong to the ringer to whom they are sent and if not, are sent to the WSG.

However, there is no guarantee that this will happen or that each country's ringing scheme will be notified of the ringing details. Secondly, it is possible that some ringers may be looking at the Web page and assuming that all existing schemes are on it. They may then be setting up their own scheme, which clashes with a scheme which is not on the Web page but is registered with the WSG. Web pages like this are useful because they provide quick and easy information on colour-ring sightings and, in this case, promote the work of the WSG.

However, a proliferation of this type of service would make it much harder to run the Register effectively. In addition, an increasing number of sightings are sent to the WSG Register using email, either directly or via UKBirdNet. Quite often the sightings are not reported correctly, as they do not have an official form to ensure all the details are included. Reporters usually forget to include their postal address, so ringers without email cannot respond, thus involving more correspondence for the Register.

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