

BELVIDE RINGING REPORT FOR 2018

Overall picture:

As Table 1 shows 2018 was another very good year, with the second highest total of birds ringed; and the highest number of species ringed since we started in 2006.

There are various reasons as discussed later. There have been several really positive developments during 2018 which we hope bode well for the future.

First, the ringing group has consolidated around a very positive core group of members with a good number of active trainees to continue the good work. We have decided also to re-name the team (whilst still being officially the Bache Shearwood and McShane partnership in the BTO's eyes), and we are now to be known as the BELVIDE RINGERS, (www.belvideringers.blogspot.com); with a new blog and social media sites developing. We feel that this will align well with the BELVIDE BIRDING site and promote even further the great birding to be had at Belvide. We will of course still be ringing at other sites mainly around South Staffs while treating Belvide as our 'home' base.

The second big development is that we have gained permission from (currently) two farmers around the perimeter of the reserve, to operate with our nocturnal census and ringing using the thermal imager provided by the WMBC. Although we have only just started, we have already had a few Woodcock, Snipe and Skylarks to suggest that this could be a very productive extension to our activities over the coming years.

Now that we have become more formally allied to Belvide, we are beginning to see the benefits of a more co-ordinated approach. This was no more evident than in two operations. Recently a regular work party very helpfully cleared some of our net sites ready for next year. But more exciting was the co-ordinated approach to our first colour ringing project at the reserve. Black headed gulls started to breed on the west end islands a couple of years ago and results (unpublished) from a nearby site suggested a quite intriguing westward dispersal of newly fledged chicks. We wanted to see if this was a regular feature of the species; as well as getting some idea of the proportion of birds which return to breed at their natal site. Working closely with the regular birders, we developed a strategy which resulted in a very smooth operation in mid-June resulting in 139 chicks being ringed; 125 of which are also sporting a red plastic ring with unique inscriptions which can be read in the field—see later for the very interesting results so far. We also learned some useful lessons which should make next year's operation even smoother. We are extremely grateful to our dear friend, Gladys Chappell for sponsoring this project. Having just heard the sad news that she has recently passed away, this project will be a fitting legacy to her long-standing support for Belvide.

Although our friend Roger Clay prefers to maintain his independence as an ‘A’ ringer, we are pleased to be working in partnership with him as he continues to develop a new site at the west end of the reserve. He contributed over 300 new birds to the totals in Table 1 this year—and work he is doing on the site we feel will mean that he will contribute even more in 2019.

The only significant downside to the year was a house fire at yours truly’s place which destroyed all my ringing kit. This can all be replaced of course, but my ringing record book was lost and with it a couple (only 2 fortunately) ring numbers of birds we controlled which had been ringed elsewhere. Fortunately only a week or so before the fire, I managed to pull my finger out and enter 800+ records on the BTO website meaning that we lost none of the newly ringed records—a stroke of good fortune amidst the trauma!

Conditions during the year: These always have an impact on ringing. During the main post-breeding season the weather was good, meaning we lost hardly any planned sessions to rain or wind. Although the water levels were reasonably low, we still feel they are a 50-100cm too high for maximum reed growth early in the year. This , we believe, results in later breeding for reed warblers, which is the more important effect; but also means we always need to wear thigh waders to get to several of the net sites—not really serious, but a bit of a pain nonetheless.

The most bird-significant weather incident during 2018, was the infamous ‘Beast from the East’ during late Spring which brought sub-zero temperatures borne on strong north-easterlies. We believe the results are quite plain to see in Table 1—see later.

Results worthy of discussion : arguably all the results should be discussed but space prevents that approach, so the following section tries to pick out those most significant.

The cold Spring episode described above had, we believe, quite significant negative effects on those resident species and those early migrants in that their breeding efforts seem to have been significantly impeded, resulting in fewer birds of these species being ringed. For example:- Dunnock Wren and Goldcrest all were down this year—and most significantly our earliest breeding warbler, Chiffchaff, numbers were well below the average for recent years. Although we don’t operate on a strict Constant Effort regime as run by the BTO, we do have a sufficiently regular approach to make year on year comparisons and we feel the effect on Chiffchaff is ‘real’ rather than due to variations in our effort. Why then are other early resident breeders such as Blue and Great tits affected. We suggest that those breeding in boxes (mostly) were at least sheltered from the worst of the cold and the feeding stations would have helped particularly adults to get through the worst conditions—but it’s only our theory!

In comparison, later arriving warblers of both Phylloscopus and Sylvia groups used the good weather during later Spring and Summer to produce good numbers of chicks. It's difficult to separate breeding Sedge and Reed warblers from passage birds but if we assume similar passage most years, then the slightly lower numbers of both species in 2018 probably reflects the less than ideal breeding habitat caused by higher than idea water levels as referred to earlier.

No other clear patterns emerge with variations mainly due to luck and weather- and new techniques. Nothing illustrates this more than Moorhen numbers. There has not been an explosion in their numbers but we have been trialling a new type of cage trap which they seem to find impossible to resist.

TABLE 1-Species totals for 2018

Totals of Species Ringed at Belvide each Year	<u>2018</u>	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
Mallard*	1					
Sparrowhawk	1	1	0	1	0	1
Kestrel	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moorhen	10	2	2	0	0	0
Snipe	0	0	1	0	1	
Water Rail	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lapwing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Oystercatcher	0	0	0	0	0	(2)
Black Headed Gull*	(139)					
Lesser Black Backed Gull*	1					
Common Tern	2	0	0	0	0	0
Long Eared Owl	0	0	0	0	1	
Swift	0	191	2	76	0	4
Kingfisher	3	6	3	4	11	6
Gr Spot W'peck	2	0	2	2	1	0
Sand Martin	5	42	3	9	20	0
House Martin	53	45	7	87	38	0
Swallow	5	6	19	32	1	3
Tree Pipit	2	2	0	0	0	0
Meadow Pipit	19	24	8	2	142	123
Pied Wagtail	0	0	0	2	0	0
Yellow Wagtail	0	0	0	1	0	0
Grey Wagtail	0	0	1			

Stock Dove	0	0	0	0	0	0
Woodpigeon	0	2	0	0	0	1
Tawny Owl	0	0	0	0	0	0
Robin	23	41	14	25	32	22
Redstart	1	1	0	0	3	0
Whinchat	0	1	0			
Blackbird	16	12	9	3	18	6
Song Thrush	3	6	1	2	0	0
Redwing	6	4	0	0	6	2
Fieldfare	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pied Flycatcher	0	0	1	0	0	0
Spot Flycatcher	5	0	0	0	5	0
Duncock	18	51	17	31	17	24
Wren	30	58	40	40	47	24
Goldcrest	13	36	3	12	31	1
Nuthatch	7	2	2	4	3	1
Treecreeper	5	1	0	4	3	4
Cetti's Warbler	0	2	0	0	0	0
Chiffchaff	191	498	300	204	274	154
Willow Warbler	74	93	58	43	45	20
G'pper Warbler	1	10	0	1	0	0
Reed Warbler	269	336	178	169	199	93
Sedge Warbler	341	431	267	274	95	63
Lesser Whitethroat	10	20	17	5	10	8
Whitethroat	50	50	15	18	16	19
Blackcap	363	355	208	116	109	60
Garden Warbler	40	31	12	17	18	16
Blue Tit	147	156	69	73 (+93)	91	109
Great Tit	74	60	43	43 (+38)	55	57
Coal Tit	2	2	2	8	2	3
Long Tailed Tit	65	42	19	22	31	21
Willow Tit	0	1	1	0	0	2
Marsh Tit	1	1	0	1	2	2
Bullfinch	4	7	6	8	12	6
Chaffinch	1	1	2	3	2	16
Greenfinch	1	0	0	0	6	3

Goldfinch	3	18	13	6	8	5
Redpoll	0	0	0	1	0	1
Yellowhammer	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reed Bunting	37	37	12	24	124	25
House Sparrow	0	1	0	0	0	0
Tree Sparrow	4	39	12	0	14	10
Jay	0	0	0	0	0	0
Magpie	0	0	0	0	0	0
Starling	72	0	0	1	64	0
Total	2129 Of 45sp.	2714 Of 44sp.	1367 Of 37 sp.	1374 Of 38sp.	1497 of 38sp.	925 of 37 sp.

* refers to species ringed for the first time at Belvide

(-) means nestlings/not fully fledged birds

The Black Headed Gull Project.

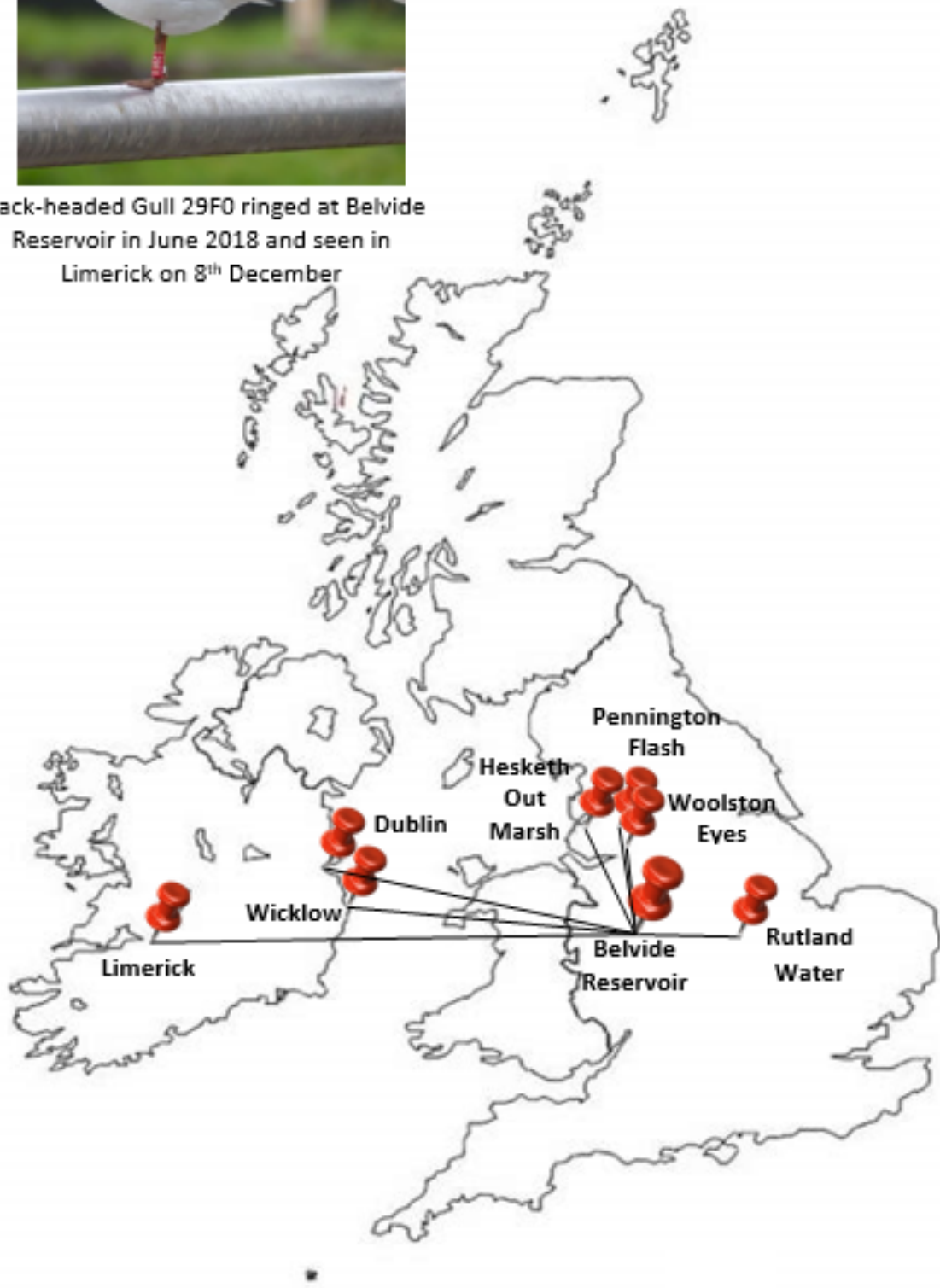
As has already been mentioned, red plastic 'Darvic' rings were placed on 125 almost fledged birds in mid/late June. The idea being that the relatively large, easy to read rings will encourage birders to log and report sightings. This is working well. The first report arrived a couple of weeks after ringing and was to the east at Rutland Water. A further six sightings have been reported, the most recent a few days before this report was written. In a similar pattern to another local colony—these have all been either west or north-west of Belvide. Table 2 shows both the distribution and what birders see when they come across these birds. The rings last for as long as the bird lives so we anticipate a series of sightings over the years which will elucidate the dispersal pattern of young black-heads from their natal colony and their subsequent return rate.

STOP PRESS—just after the main draft of the report was completed, an eighth gull was seen and its colour ring details submitted. It was seen at a pool at Crewe but its details have not been included in Table 2 below:

Where our Black-headed Gulls have gone



Black-headed Gull 29F0 ringed at Belvide Reservoir in June 2018 and seen in Limerick on 8th December



Other movements: as I have reported above, we caught two birds which had been ringed elsewhere (one Sedge Warbler and one Blackcap), but unfortunately the details were lost in the house fire before I had submitted them—lesson learned there--; and we have had only one report of one of our young birds (apart from the gulls) reported from elsewhere. This was a Sedge Warbler ringed as a first year bird by us at Belvide on 29th August , and recaptured at Finistere north west France on 6th September, obviously on its way to its wintering quarters.

And finally: as always, we express our thanks to anyone and everyone who has helped in any way during 2018. To all the ringing team—especially Pete who regularly holds the fort while I go traipsing around the world; to the birders/work parties who support us in a variety of ways; to the local farmers for their permission to operate on their land; and of course to the West Midland Bird Club for permission to ring at Belvide. Here's to 2019!!

Colin McShane on behalf of Belvide Ringers December 2018.