

**PAPERS ABOUT
BIRDS IN THE
LONDON AREA**



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Foreign-ringed Black-headed Gulls by *Alan Gibson*

Data on foreign-ringed Black-headed Gulls, observed by Alan Gibson in four Inner London parks and three parks in Middlesex, now include records from 2023.

These are part of the composite datafile of his records, which are arranged on worksheets in date order, in order of metal and plastic ring markings, and in order of the metal rings in each of the 15 foreign countries in which the gulls were originally ringed (Croatia being added to the list in 2023).

The 2013-2023 file can be downloaded from the LNHS website:
<http://www.lnhs.org.uk> > Publications > London Bird Report > London Bird Report
additional materials > 'Foreign-ringed Black-headed Gulls 2023'

Previous page: *Egyptian Goose continues to enjoy breeding success in London.*
(*Jonathan Lethbridge*)

RINGING REPORT

DANIEL WHITELEGG



Adult Cuckoo ringed at Ingrebourne Valley, a record year for this species in London. (Paul Hawkins)

In London, bird ringing is undertaken by a variety of groups, partnerships and individuals who, collectively, cover a wide range of sites throughout the capital. Full details of ringing that took place in 2022 can be found on the BTO website at: <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/ringing/publications/online-ringing-reports>

The number of ringed birds for many species varies each year due to a range of factors. These include ringer effort and coverage, as well as weather conditions, and can all have a marked effect on catching success and final totals for a year. These variables mean that in a report such as this one, any changes in species numbers are not a reflection on population levels but are more often a reflection on ringer activity. A much better reflection of population levels can be seen through Constant Effort Sites (CES), and there are a number running in the London area. The data for CES is pooled nationally and can be found on the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) website at: <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/surveys/ces>

Table 1 gives totals for each species, and annual totals are also given for the previous two years to enable comparison.

Like 2021, 2022 was a poor year for the number of birds ringed, with the second lowest total since 2010. However, species diversity was up, with the inclusion of two new species, probably never ringed before in London, amongst other noteworthy highlights. The largest increases were for Chiffchaff (up by 495) and Redwing (up by

264). These were about equal to the largest decreases: Starling (down by 419) and Whitethroat (down by 254).

An adult and gosling from a pair of Barnacle Gese that bred (unsuccessfully) at Walthamstow Wetlands were ringed. This is probably the first time any have been ringed in the London area. Greylag numbers were at their highest in a decade, bolstered by a colour ringing project in The Royal Parks. Six of the eight species of ducks to have been historically ringed saw increases, with access reinstated at Rye Meads allowing good numbers of Gadwall and Mallard to be ringed. Inclement weather affected access to the heron and egret colonies in the Lee Valley, reflected in poor returns for both these species. Both Moorhen and Coot numbers remain low, although the latter contributed to over 20% of national totals.

Aided by the use of thermal imaging cameras, ringers were able to tag three Woodcock – the first time this species has occurred in this report since 2016. By using the same technology, Jack Snipe numbers reached an all-time high, mirroring a five-fold national increase over the last decade. It was a usually meagre year for other wader species. A combination of limited access and predation of chicks meant the ringing of both Black Headed Gull and Common Tern was well down. All three ‘common’ large gulls were ringed for the first time since 2019.

It was an exceptionally good year for Barn Owls, possibly indicting a bounty of small mammals, as ringing effort remains fairly consistent between years for this species. Peregrines had their best year and Ringed-necked Parakeets the worst, though despite the former’s taste for the non-native escapee, there is no causal link. A Rook was ringed by the Maple Cross Ringing Group, marking only the second London record for this bird. It was a fairly average year for tits, with the exception of Marsh Tit, which had the best year since 2010. After an eight-year hiatus, Skylark were once again ringed, helped by the use of thermal cameras.

Ringing sites around the capital’s major rivers continue to do well for Cettis Warblers, whose numbers have increased yet again. For other warblers, it was a mixed year. Out of the nine common species, five increased, two remained the same and two decreased. A Marsh Warbler ringed at Swanscombe Marshes was probably the first to be ringed inside the LNHS recording area and may have bred.

2022 was a good year for winter thrushes, but a mediocre year for breeders like Song Thrush. Nightingales bred and were ringed at Swanscombe, a welcome return from this scarce breeding migrant. 27 Stonechat and six Pied Flycatchers, mainly ringed in autumn, represented good passages across the capital for both species. Sadly, the Tree Sparrow has now become extirpated from this area, with only one bird being retrapped at Tyttenhanger. Only Meadow Pipit was ringed from this family, in stark contrast to last year.

It was a below-average year for all finch species, with both Bullfinch and Greenfinch still in long-term decline. Yellowhammers remain a scarce but reasonably distributed bird on the edges of the recording area, as reflected in the only ringing records coming from the Rye Meads and Maple Cross areas. In summary, despite low overall totals, it was a good year for scarce species and it is hoped that some of these species will remain on the ringing list over the following years.



Adult male Marsh Warbler ringed at Swanscombe Marshes. This bird was heard to mix Goldfinch song into its own song while displaying. (Terry Hilsden)

Table 1. Species totals of birds reported as ringed in the London Area during 2022.

2022 Pullus	2022 Full Grown	2022 Total	Species	2021 Total	2020 Total
25	139	164	Canada Goose	193	41
1	1	2	Barnacle Goose	0	0
11	58	69	Greylag Goose	33	11
48	96	144	Mute Swan	206	116
0	1	1	Egyptian Goose	0	0
0	2	2	Mandarin Duck	5	0
0	1	1	Shoveler	0	0
3	30	33	Gadwall	0	1
4	49	53	Mallard	14	4
0	9	9	Teal	5	4
1	0	1	Pochard	0	1
1	4	5	Tufted Duck	1	2
17	1	18	Grey Heron	31	1

2022 Pullus	2022 Full Grown	2022 Total	Species	2021 Total	2020 Total
9	0	9	Little Egret	19	12
0	1	1	Cormorant	1	0
0	12	12	Sparrowhawk	12	13
0	1	1	Buzzard	4	1
0	2	2	Water Rail	2	3
3	16	19	Moorhen	17	10
3	92	95	Coot	60	68
4	0	4	Lapwing	5	8
0	26	26	Jack Snipe	14	10
0	5	5	Snipe	7	6
0	0	0	Common Sandpiper	1	0
0	8	8	Green Sandpiper	8	7
0	0	0	Greenshank	1	0
45	125	170	Black-headed Gull	313	214
0	1	1	Common Gull	0	0
0	5	5	Herring Gull	0	0
2	0	2	Lesser Black-backed Gull	0	0
11	0	11	Common Tern	25	45
20	1	21	Stock Dove	30	48
0	36	36	Woodpigeon	37	58
1	11	12	Collared Dove	16	26
2	3	5	Cuckoo	3	2
32	7	39	Barn Owl	18	7
6	1	7	Tawny Owl	8	1
6	1	7	Little Owl	13	1
8	8	16	Swift	9	5
0	38	38	Kingfisher	28	28
0	71	71	Great Spotted Woodpecker	61	61
0	17	17	Green Woodpecker	12	16
24	2	26	Kestrel	19	25
0	0	0	Hobby	0	3
17	5	22	Peregrine	13	6
0	19	19	Ring-necked Parakeet	33	65
0	13	13	Jay	23	19
18	25	43	Magpie	40	56
6	14	20	Jackdaw	35	50
0	1	1	Rook	0	0
3	1	4	Carrion (or Hooded) Crow	3	1
8	71	79	Coal Tit	75	111
8	13	21	Marsh Tit	0	2
1,397	2,162	3,559	Blue Tit	3,713	3,844
709	1,049	1,758	Great Tit	1,525	1,645
0	2	2	Bearded Tit	4	1
0	12	12	Skylark	0	0

2022 Pullus	2022 Full Grown	2022 Total	Species	2021 Total	2020 Total
206	9	215	Sand Martin	306	69
5	67	72	Swallow	18	43
0	0	0	House Martin	0	6
5	289	294	Cetti's Warbler	213	89
0	591	591	Long-tailed Tit	450	576
0	272	272	Willow Warbler	132	156
6	1,882	1,888	Chiffchaff	1,393	1,620
0	0	0	Yellow-Browed Warbler	0	1
33	284	317	Sedge Warbler	263	317
41	1,071	1,112	Reed Warbler	1,093	806
0	1	1	Marsh Warbler	0	0
0	4	4	Grasshopper Warbler	4	4
1	2,613	2,614	Blackcap	2,452	2,775
0	149	149	Garden Warbler	241	309
0	86	86	Lesser Whitethroat	87	60
0	448	448	Whitethroat	702	622
0	7	7	Firecrest	4	3
0	254	254	Goldcrest	123	256
6	420	426	Wren	359	349
0	16	16	Nuthatch	12	32
0	40	40	Treecreeper	23	30
17	1,179	1,196	Starling	1,615	2,049
1	292	293	Blackbird	292	336
0	5	5	Fieldfare	0	4
0	400	400	Redwing	136	286
1	175	176	Song Thrush	168	139
0	0	0	Mistle Thrush	2	0
35	713	748	Robin	642	720
0	2	2	Nightingale	0	0
0	0	0	Spotted Flycatcher	0	2
0	6	6	Pied Flycatcher	1	1
0	1	1	Redstart	2	4
0	0	0	Whinchat	0	1
0	27	27	Stonechat	11	15
0	0	0	Wheatear	2	0
0	235	235	House Sparrow	319	422
0	0	0	Tree Sparrow	17	31
1	468	469	Duncock	469	556
0	0	0	Yellow Wagtail	0	2
20	5	25	Grey Wagtail	21	14
0	1	1	Pied Wagtail	6	2
0	168	168	Meadow Pipit	80	296
0	0	0	Tree Pipit	1	10
0	0	0	Water Pipit	5	1

2022 Pullus	2022 Full Grown	2022 Total	Species	2021 Total	2020 Total
0	0	0	Rock Pipit	2	0
0	102	102	Chaffinch	65	118
0	3	3	Brambling	4	3
0	8	8	Bullfinch	20	17
0	195	195	Greenfinch	241	322
0	30	30	Linnet	26	17
0	0	0	Redpoll Sp*	0	2
0	0	0	Common Redpoll	1	0
0	20	20	Lesser Redpoll	174	440
1	528	529	Goldfinch	725	1,016
0	37	37	Siskin	92	1
0	26	26	Yellowhammer	11	39
8	124	132	Reed Bunting	137	240
2,831	17,523	20,354	Total	19,857	21,897

*Taken from the National Ringing Database, which offers three selection options: Common, Lesser or Redpoll sp.

One of the main reasons for ringing birds is to obtain information about the longevity and movement of a species from the recoveries of ringed individuals. Recoveries can be from dead birds, from other ringers catching birds from elsewhere or from field sightings of colour-marked birds that are easily identifiable, providing some excellent life histories on individual birds. There are now many sources on the internet that list data collected from recovered birds; the most recognised source detailing all the London recoveries can be found on the BTO website at:

<https://app.bto.org/ring/countyrec/results2022/recGBLO2022.htm>

Male Shoveler, and worn German ring, that was ringed in north-east Germany in 2011 before being recaptured at Rye Meads in 2022. (David Spensley)



For the purpose of this report, highlights from the BTO's summary of recoveries are illustrated here:

The provenance of the wintering flock of Barnacle Geese around the Esher area was discovered when a colour-ringed gosling from Merseyside was seen in November. A colour-ringed Cormorant chick, also from this area, was seen in August at Hatfield. An adult male Shoveler that was ringed in north-east Germany in June 2011 was recaptured at Rye Meads in December 2022. The original ring was very worn, so was replaced with a new BTO ring and a colour ring. It was subsequently seen three times up until April 2023.

The Little Egret from Walthamstow Wetlands that was reported in Belgium in 2021 was resighted, this time from The Netherlands in January. Although a breeding bird in London, a large proportion of wintering Water Rails arrive from the continent. This was demonstrated by a bird ringed near Frankfurt, Germany in March, which was then retrapped at Lemsford Springs in late October.

A Coot chick ringed in 2011 at Rye Meads was re-encountered and still present at the site 11 years later. A Dunlin ringed near Aberystwyth in May 2019 on spring migration was seen at the King George V Reservoir three years later on the same journey north. Another wader, a Redshank, was seen at the same reservoir in July, having been ringed seven years earlier while wintering at Chichester Harbour.

New longevity records for Green Sandpipers were set by a bird from Lemsford Springs at eleven years and four months. Despite the low numbers currently ringed, there were three good recoveries of Common Tern chicks ringed in London: a 14-year-old bird from Rye Meads that was hit by a plane at Paris Airport, a bird from Bedfont Lakes that was recruited into the breeding colony at Brownsea Island and a fledging from Walthamstow that was seen on autumn migration in Cadiz, Spain. Two Peregrine siblings, born in 2012 at Vauxhall, were observed breeding at opposite ends of the country; the male in Nottingham and the female in Southampton. A three-year-old Marsh Tit was retrapped in a garden in Banstead, South London. The origin of wintering Chiffchaffs has been known for a while, nevertheless it was nice to see a Danish-ringed bird return to Rye Meads for its 3rd consecutive winter.

A male Blackcap from West Dorset was found dead, having been predated by a domestic cat near Hampstead Heath, highlighting the risk many birds face by migrating through London. Like Water Rail, many Blackbirds arrive in the UK from further east in Europe. Birds from Norway, Germany and The Netherlands were recorded around the capital during the winter of 2022. One of the more unusual recoveries was of a Redwing found freshly dead in Estonia. Ringed at Queen Mary Reservoir in December 2017, it was discovered in late April 2022, presumably on its way to breeding grounds. There aren't many recoveries of songbirds from London this far into eastern Europe, and seeing them return in the autumn demonstrates just how far these birds have travelled.

References

ROBINSON, R.A., LEECH, D.I. & CLARK, J.A., 2023. The Online Demography Report: bird ringing and nest recording in Britain & Ireland in 2022. BTO, Thetford (<http://www.bto.org/ringing-report>, created on 23 June 2023)

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In future reports, we aim to include details on some ringing projects currently in the works. Ringers in London are encouraged to write up short projects or notes on ringing activity for inclusion in this report and to send in photographs of interesting birds caught. Photographers are also invited to send in pictures of birds with colour or metal rings and details of these birds that may be of interest. Material can be sent to danielwhitelegg@gmail.com.

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FOREIGN-RINGED BLACK-HEADED GULLS THE GIBSON THEORY VINDICATED

—
ALAN GIBSON

My theory arose from observing, over the past few years, the declining numbers of new Black-headed Gulls with foreign rings. I reiterate that the theory supposes, by and large, that older birds continue to visit their old haunts while younger ones short-migrate.

I have since thought that the theory could apply to other species. The Bewick's Swans at Slimbridge seemed the best example to study for evidence of this. I wrote to Slimbridge and enquired whether the percentage of new birds had declined in recent years. I got a reply together with a copy of a research paper. Slimbridge answered that the Bewick's Swans travel in family groups and have a strong family bond, with the young following the adults – therefore, the theory could not apply to them.

However, the research paper also mentioned Barnacle Geese and Black-tailed Godwits. Some of the juvenile Barnacle Geese are using a stop-off point not used by the adults, and some of the juvenile Black-tailed Godwits are using a stop-off point proportionally more than the adults are. This provided a good indication that the Gibson theory can apply to other species as well.

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