

Using social media

Good practice guidelines from the Ringing Committee



The increasing use of social media on the Internet by society, the BTO and by ringing groups and individual ringers has the potential to disseminate news, views and discussions quickly and easily to a very wide audience. It can be a great way of promoting bird ringing and other studies but the downside is that, once posted, such material cannot be controlled and, in the case of ringing, could be used selectively to put the Ringing Scheme on 'trial by Internet'. Over the last year the numbers of complaints dealt with by the Demography Team emanating from internet postings and the like have increased markedly, so this note provides guidance on good practice.

The BTO's own blog ('Demog Blog') is the most visited of the British & Irish ringing blogs, with over 250,000 hits since its inception in January 2009. This gives some idea of the potential benefit of online publishing, but also of the scale of possible problems concerning content.

In effect any publication on the Internet is an instant press release and should be considered just as carefully as any more formal press release. Much time and effort, based on years of experience, is taken by BTO staff in drafting press releases concerning the Ringing Scheme. Without the ability to add clarification to a comment or to explain a misinterpreted image, all information must be clear and be able to be taken at face value.

General guidelines

Ensure that the wording of all posts is factually correct and avoid the use of any language that may be

misinterpreted. Language that you might (but perhaps shouldn't) use when talking to another ringer may be misinterpreted by a member of the public. When posting, imagine you're talking directly to your most vociferous critic and imagine how they would interpret your words. Where off-hand comments on the web are acceptable for most walks of life, this isn't necessarily the case with respect to a potentially emotive subject such as ringing. Simple, throwaway comments such as 'Our fourth visit to the Sand Martin colony this morning' or 'Dartford Warblers go crazy for tape-lures!' may not necessarily reflect poor practice but are open to negative interpretation.

Similarly, images posted online must be of the highest standard, as outlined in *Ringers' Manual*. Birds must look natural and not posed as 'trophy shots', unless there is a very good reason to do so. Photos of birds with closed eyes, fluffed or out of place plumage, flapping wings, inappropriately held or in

the midst of a crowd of photographers should be avoided. Although they are fine, birds often appear to be 'unhappy' in photographs. It is better to leave a post without an image than use an inappropriate one. Also be aware that it is very difficult to photograph a bird in a mist net, so this should generally be avoided. If you are not sure whether or not to use an image, play safe and do not use it.

Any video of birds in the hand should be of an equally high standard and should not include flapping birds or birds losing feathers, particularly

when being released – always remember to take the utmost care when handling birds. Also be aware that when video-recording, any comments made by those close-by may be audible, so avoid inappropriate background comments. When posting video of birds in the hand or of novel catching techniques on sites like YouTube or Vimeo, consider how these will be seen by a non-ringing bird-lover. Does your handling **look** overly intrusive or your catching technique **look** dangerous? There is a subtle, but distinct, difference between what is approved and what is appropriate to be broadcast. For example, perfectly acceptable practices such as wing-tagging and cloacal examination may not come across well in video format, or even weighing birds upside down in pots.

Ensure that all images and video used are of the highest standard. It is also essential to be aware of non-ringing photographers at ringing sessions that may go on to post images on their own personal blogs. If you think they may have images of birds that you yourself wouldn't post then politely ask them to refrain from publishing them or even ask them to delete the images, explaining your reasons.

Social media should not be used as a tool to find out where ringed birds came from as this could lead to data being lost to our databases. Ring numbers of controlled, recaptured and recovered birds should not be posted until all ringing details have been received from BTO HQ. Also, please remember that a practice is not

necessarily okay just because someone else has done it. Recent examples include promoting untested techniques for ageing (it is great to explore



possibilities, but they should not be used to age birds definitively until they have been proved and published) and photographs of waders held by the legs.

If material posted by ringers is thought to be inappropriate, they will be asked to remove it. Any ringer, having been warned, who continues to post inappropriate material may be referred to the Ringing Standards Select Committee of the Ringing Committee.

Blogs

The most familiar and popular form of internet publishing is blogs, with as many as 45 ringing-related blogs accessible from the 'Demog Blog'. The use of blogs by ringing groups is a good way of sharing news between group members and also keeping in touch with a much wider audience. Posts may be reports on ringing sessions, news of recent recoveries, interesting ageing/sexing observations or simply sharing photographs of interesting captures. In most cases only approved posters can add content to blogs, so there is always some level of control on what information is posted, but Ringing Committee strongly recommend that the general content of blogs, rather than individual posts, is monitored by trainers and

that comments and replies on posts should require approval. Remember that anyone can start their own individual blog and trainers should be aware of such activities by their 'C' permit holders and trainees and discuss content with them where appropriate. Also, a ringer visiting another ringer who they do not normally ring with should ask before blogging about that ringing session.

For many people, most interest will come from finding out about recoveries of ringed birds, especially those that have made a quick or long movement, or perhaps suffered an unusual fate. This is an appropriate and useful use of the Internet and encourages further reporting of ringed, and colour-marked, birds.

Social networking

Similarly, social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter allow the sharing of information, again to a very wide audience. The instant nature of this information means that there is often little point in editing, retracting or deleting postings, so extra care should be taken when composing these.

News groups

News groups serve much the same function as blogs but as most messages

are sent out as individual emails or daily digests, once they are published they can't be deleted. Such groups are also easily searched and inadvertent comments posted may be resurrected many years in the future. It is thus essential that all information posted is factually correct, clear and not open to misinterpretation. It should also be considered that emails from newsgroups can be stored locally and forwarded on to users outside of the original group, so any information or comments have the potential to be spread far wider than initially intended.

Ringers should also avoid entering into discussions on the pros and particularly cons of ringing unless posts are restricted to the presentation of unemotive, factual information. It is rarely possible to 'win' such online discussions and as postings escalate they can easily be hijacked by a vociferous minority who are well-versed in arguments against ringing. Such matters should be brought to the attention of BTO staff and left unanswered.

Sensitive species/rarities

In some cases, most interest will be generated by the capture of scarce/rare birds. Whilst detailing these captures will be of great interest to a large number of people, use this opportunity to show what can be learned from the bird in the hand. Being under such public scrutiny, be aware that anyone will be able to run a stopwatch on your activities, from the moment a bird is caught (from news released to the bird news services) to the time it's released (on EXIF* data on images), all permanently stored on the Internet.

* EXIF (Exchangeable image file format) is a section of the image data that gives things like focal length, camera type, lens type, serial numbers, copyright information, date, time, location (with geotagging extensions). If you are posting a photograph of a rare or sensitive species then, to avoid revealing the location, it would be wise to remove the EXIF data using one of the removal tools that can be found on the web.

BTO Bird Ringing
'Demog Blog'



Demography Team:
Bringing together ringing and nest recording

04 JULY 2012

10 Millionth Milestone continued...

Back in February we posted a story regarding a Swallow that was the 10 millionth record to be added into the EURING databank ([click here to read that post](#)).

This female Swallow was ringed on 16 April 2011 in Malta, while on passage and was later caught by another ringer in Raby, Czech Republic on 19 Jun 2011. She would have then travelled to South Africa for the winter, and we have just heard that this bird is now back at her breeding site in the Czech Republic!



FOR MORE INFORMATION,
VISIT WWW.BTO.ORG



Demography - "The study of the characteristics of populations, such as size, growth, density, distribution, and vital statistics"

BLOG ARCHIVE

▼ 2012 (31)

▼ July (1)

10 Millionth Milestone