

## Black-headed Gull of 33 years and re-appeal to stop using aluminium rings to mark gulls

Recently, van Dijk et al (2012) presented an overview with three longevity records of Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*. The oldest individual was a bird with ring Arnhem 3.275.396, ringed near Zandvoort, Noord-Holland, the Netherlands, on 25 June 1978, and observed for the last time at Zoetermeer, Zuid-Holland, the Netherlands, on 21 March 2011. It had been ringed as a chick still unable to fly and reached an age of 32 years and 9 months. A new longevity record was established soon after the paper was published. The details are presented in this paper. We also present new data to underline our earlier recommendation that gulls should no longer be marked with aluminium rings.

*London EJ15299*

On 12 January 1980, the Worcester Gull Group ringed a second calendar-year Black-headed Gull with ring London EJ15299 at Hallow landfill site,

Worcester, Worcestershire, England (52°12'N, 02°14'W). It was one of the 243 Black-headed Gulls caught on that day. On 21 May 2012, it was found dead by Giny Kasemir in a breeding colony on Griend, Friesland, an islet in the Dutch Wadden Sea (53°15'N, 05°15'E), 32 years, 4 months and 9 days after it had been ringed. It was dead for about a week and not much was left of the body. The cause of death was unknown and measurements were not taken as the wardens, GK and Date Lutterop, were not immediately aware that it concerned a very old individual. The ring was on the right tarsus and the inscription was very well readable (figure 1). It was not noted whether the ring was placed upside down or not. The ringing details were received from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) on 28 June 2012 but the record was not listed in Dadam et al (2013). The database of Vogeltrekstation Arnhem (the Netherlands) holds no other records for this bird but it is interesting to note that Black-headed Gulls ringed in Britain during the non-breeding season are common as breeding birds on Griend (van Dijk & Oosterhuis 2010; pers obs). The bird was aged as a second calendar-year when ringed in January

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FIGURE 1 Incoloy ring London EJ15299 of Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, 32 years, 4 months and 9 days after ringing on tarsus (Date Lutterlo). Found dead on Griend, Friesland, Netherlands, on 21 May 2012.

1980. It was thus born in 1979 but the place of birth and the precise date of birth are unknown. The bird had reached an age of 33 years when it died. Currently, this individual is the oldest known Black-headed Gull (cf van Dijk et al 2012).

*Helgoland 5308939*

On 22 January 2006, Sönke Martens ringed a second calendar-year Black-headed Gull with ring Helgoland 5308939 in the city of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany (53°33'N, 10°00'E). Klaas van Dijk observed the bird in the city of Groningen, Groningen, the Netherlands (53°13'N, 06°35'E), for the first time on 29 January 2007. In any of the subsequent non-breeding seasons it was recorded again by KvD and others in the city of Groningen. It was also sighted at the Curonian Split, Lithuania (55°23'N, 21°03'E), on 9 August 2008 by the late Vytautas Pareigis. There are no other records from Hamburg nor from elsewhere. Frank Majoor trapped this bird twice in the city of Groningen, for the first time on 20 December 2007; based on biometrics, he identified it as a male (cf Palomares et al 1997). The bird was released with a white

colour-ring E9CS. The aluminium ring was almost totally illegible when it was retrapped on 17 January 2014 (figure 2). The ring was gaping heavily and was about to fall off very soon. It was replaced by a stainless steel ring Arnhem 2.506.463 on the tarsus and the colour-ring was replaced by white E4PU.

*Arnhem 3.398.919*

On 9 February 1985, the late Klaas Visser ringed an adult (older than second calendar-year) Black-headed Gull with ring Arnhem 3.398.919 along Hilversumsch Kanaal east of Kortenhoef, Noord-Holland, the Netherlands (52°13'N, 05°07'E). The bird was not reported for the next 23 years. On 27 March 2008, KvD observed the bird in the city of Groningen, where he saw it again on 24-27 June 2010, and it was trapped there by Rob Voesten on 28 June 2010. The ring was gaping and the second digit of the ring number was difficult to read (figure 3). Based on biometrics, he identified it as a male (cf Palomares et al 1997). The ring was replaced by a stainless steel ring Arnhem 3.693.294 on the tarsus and a colour-ring white E6EM was

FIGURE 2 Aluminium ring Helgoland 5308939 of Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, 7 years, 11 months and 26 days after ringing on right tarsus (Henri Zomer). Photographs taken during retrap in Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands, on 17 January 2014; bird had been ringed as second calendar-year in Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany, on 22 January 2006.



added. The bird was seen at the same locality on 29 June 2010, on 15 and 26 March 2011 and on 23 May 2011 (in full adult summer plumage in May). KvD saw it again on 6 March 2014, and for the last time on 15 March 2014 (not yet in full adult summer plumage). The bird was born in 1983 or earlier, so it was at least 30 years and c 9 months old when seen for the last time (and possibly one or more years older).

#### *Arnhem 3.357.298*

On 12 June 1982, Tseard Hiemstra ringed a chick of a Black-headed Gull with ring Arnhem 3.357.298 on the saltmarshes near Holwert, Friesland, the Netherlands (53°23'N, 05°54'E). Klaas Koopman retrapped the bird at this site on 19 April 1996. On 2 May 2014, KvD and Derick Hiemstra observed this bird in a breeding colony at Eemshaven, Groningen, the Netherlands (53°27'N, 06°49'E). The bird was in full summer plumage and its behaviour indicated that it was a male. The aluminium ring was on the left tibia. The second digit of the ring number was almost illegible. The bird was 31 years and 11 months old. Van Dijk et al (2012) listed only two Black-headed Gulls of this age or older. It turned out that DH was assisting his dad at the day when this bird was ringed.

#### *Discussion*

Gaston et al (2013) recently published an extensive analysis on differences in survival and recovery rate between soft and hard metal rings of a huge dataset of various species of gulls ringed in Canada and the USA. They concluded that a continued use of aluminium rings on gulls reduces the value of ring-recovery data, including reliable information on longevity in gulls. The conclusions confirm our earlier findings (Majoor 1995, van Dijk et al 2012) and are in line with conclusions of many other studies on wear and loss of metal rings on gulls, terns and other long-lived seabirds (for references, see van Dijk et al 2012 and Gaston et al 2013). Black-headed Gulls in Britain and Ireland get incoloy rings, a nickel-iron-chromium alloy. To date, no examples of excessive wear of these type of rings are known to us. We repeat our recommendation that all ringing schemes only use rings of stainless steel or incoloy on Black-headed Gulls.

#### *Acknowledgements*

We thank Vogeltrekstation Arnhem for the ringing permits and Natuurmonumenten for their support to do research on Griend. We also thank all those



FIGURE 3 Aluminium ring Arnhem 3.398.919 of Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, 25 years, 4 months and 19 days after ringing on right tibia (*Ana Buren*). Ring replaced on 28 June 2010, last observation of bird on 15 March 2014. Ringed as adult (after second calendar-year) near Kortenhoeft, Noord-Holland, Netherlands, on 9 February 1985.

who helped during the preparation of this paper and are grateful to all observers for reporting their sightings (please continue with reporting any sighting of a colour-ringed gull).

#### **Samenvatting**

KOKMEEUW VAN 33 JAAR OUD EN HERHAALDE AANBEVELING OM TE STOPPEN MET GEBRUIK VAN ALUMINIUM RINGEN BIJ MEEUWEN Dit artikel documenteert een nieuw leeftijdsrecord bij Kokmeeuw *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*. De vogel werd op 12 januari 1980 als tweede-kalenderjaar geringsd in Worcester, Worcestershire, Engeland, en werd op 21 mei 2012 door Giny Kasemir gevonden in een broedkolonie op Griend, Friesland. De vogel was ongeveer een week dood; de doodsoorzaak was onbekend. Hij was in 1979 geboren en bereikte een leeftijd van 33 jaar. Het vorige leeftijdsrecord stond op 32 jaar en 9 maanden. De ring vertoonde enige slijtage maar de inscriptie was nog prima te lezen (figuur 1). Britse Kokmeeuwen worden al erg lang met incoloy ringen gemerkt. Dergelijke ringen gaan langer mee dan de maximale levensduur van Kokmeeuwen. Dit geldt niet voor aluminium ringen. Een aantal nieuwe voorbeelden wordt gepresenteerd om dit te illustreren (figuur 2-3). Er wordt (nogmaals) voor gepleit om Kokmeeuwen te voorzien van ringen van hard metaal (roestvrij staal of incoloy).

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