

Geese at the Gann

Some of you may have noticed that we have a regular flock of six geese at Pickleridge Pools at the moment. They have black necks with a striped half collar, brownish bodies and large white patch under the tail. They are Brent Geese – but it is not quite as simple as that!

Five of these geese are Pale Bellied Brent Geese, a subspecies which breeds in Greenland and Canada and winters mainly in Ireland. These birds undertake a long migration each year and you may have seen 10 birds of the same subspecies fitted with radio-trackers in Ireland on the “Springwatch” programme on television. The progress of their spring journey back to the breeding grounds was monitored on the program and indeed their whereabouts can still be monitored on the website. Our birds are presumably a family group which has overshot Ireland on the return journey and finds the Gann to their liking. We have had a few birds here (between 3 and 9 individuals) over the last few winters – whether it is one family which returns each year we do not know.

The sixth bird is intriguing and is causing some excitement in “goose circles”. It is a Dark Bellied Brent Goose. This subspecies breed in Northern Russia and winters in Eastern and Southern England, Holland and France. It is obviously a bit off track here – but what is more interesting is that it is ringed. It has two large yellow colour rings marked Y and P. Ringing records reveal that this bird was ringed on the Blackwater Estuary in Essex in 1974 when it was at least 2 years old. This makes the bird at least 34 years old, which is extraordinarily old for a goose, maybe even a record!

However, there are sufficient uncertainties about this bird and its rings to fill the email airways with correspondence between goose experts in Ireland, Holland, Germany and New Zealand. Suffice to say that this bird is now famous and we may not have heard the last of it!