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Colour Ringing

Since 1966, we have been ringing ospreys in Scotland with individually unique metal rings supplied by the British Trust for Ornithology; on the other leg we have fitted a plastic colour ring. We try to ring as many chicks as we can every year and have now ringed over 1500 young ospreys.



The metal ring is numbered and includes a British address so that finders can send finding details to the BTO as part of the national bird ringing scheme. The colour ring is unique and allows individual birds to be identified in the field using a telescope or telephoto camera. This technique is particularly valuable for following birds at their nests in order to build up knowledge on lifetime reproduction. It means that we can determine whether our birds return to their natal area, identify the origin of new birds in the area and build up records on mating partners and brood success rates. We are extremely interested in sightings of colour rings and would be very grateful if reports of colour rings, including digital pictures showing the colour ring, are [reported using our simple online form](#).

The important information is colour of the ring, the inscription, the colour of the inscription and which leg is colour ringed. The other important information is place (including co-ordinates), date, time, observer's name and contact details, and any other interesting observations.

Osprey colour rings in the UK are marked with a combination of two digits or letters reading up the ring from the foot. These are repeated three times around the ring, so that the combination can be read from any angle. Older colour rings have a single letter or number reading around the ring, again repeated three times. Examples of rings are shown below. Because of the numbers of colour rings used in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, individual colours no longer designate a particular year, but in recent years, colour rings in Scotland have been placed on the left leg and those in England and Wales on the right leg.



If you photograph flying ospreys using a high speed digital camera have a look at the images on your computer screen with zoom – you might find a readable colour ring

number. It's an extremely good method of obtaining colour ring data – I use a Canon 350D with a 400mm lens and often get really good photos of rings – people using more up-to-date gear with a stabilised telephoto lens get incredibly good shots.



Photo at normal resolution



Photo zoomed in to show colour ring Yellow/black 9A



Roy's blog

