

## Bird sets record as UK's oldest Arctic tern

By **Mark Kinver** Science and environment reporter, BBC News



The previous UK age record for an Arctic tern was 29 years, 10 months and 11 days

A sea-bird has officially become the UK's oldest recorded Arctic Tern.

It was ringed as a chick on the Farne Islands on 28 June, 1980, making it at least 30 years, two months and 23 days old. The birds typically live 13 years.

This bird's record-breaking status was confirmed after it was recaptured this summer on the islands, located a few miles off the Northumberland coast.

Arctic terns' 44,000-mile (70,000km) pole-to-pole migration is the longest known annual journey of any animal.

The previous UK record was 29 years and 10 months, although the typical life expectancy is about 13 years - primarily as a result of the terns being prey for other predatory birds, lack of food or being caught in storms while at sea.

The bird was originally ringed by John Walton when he was a seasonal warden for the National Trust, which owns the Farnes.

### **'Brilliant shape'**

Mr Walton, now property manager for the islands, told BBC News he was delighted when he heard the news that the chick he ringed three decades ago was still going strong.

## In detail: Arctic terns



- Scientific name: *Sterna paradisaea*
- Average wingspan of 75-85cm
- Adults weigh between 90g and 120g
- Breeds in Arctic and sub-Arctic
- Like swans, the birds mate for life
- Lays 1-2 eggs in small ground scrape
- Feeds on fish and crustaceans

"This bird would have flown close to one million miles, raised any number of chicks, survived predators and storms and still looks in brilliant shape."

The new record only came to light after the information was entered into a database managed by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Mr Walton explained, "then this figure pinged out saying 30 years and I thought wow!"

Ringling - which involves attaching a lightweight ring with a unique identification number around the leg of a bird - is carried out to allow researchers to learn more about individual birds.

The BTO says the main purpose of ringling, which started almost a century ago, can offer an insight into trends within populations of bird species.

Lee Barber, BTO recoveries officer, said: "This is a great record but something we wouldn't know about if this bird hadn't been ringed."

"Without this uniquely numbered ring, we really would have little knowledge about how long Arctic terns live and breed."

Although the tern, known as CE60645, has set a new UK record, it is still some years away from claiming the title of the world's oldest Arctic tern that is currently held by a bird ringed in the US and reached the age of 34 years.

"Fingers crossed, this bird is good for another four or five years, which would allow us to take the world record from the Americans," Mr Walton joked.