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Kelp Gulls in colour – second helping

Phil Whittington

Department of Zoology, PO Box 77000, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, 6031, South Africa; Philip.Whittington@nmmu.ac.za

In 2003, c. 850 Kelp Gull chicks were colour-flagged at the Keurbooms River, Plettenberg Bay, and at the Swartkops Estuary, Port Elizabeth. Dispersal of these birds from their colony was reported in *Afring News* (2005) 34(2): 71. In 2006, the emphasis of research in the southern Cape moved towards adult birds. Relatively few Kelp Gulls have been ringed when adult; information submitted by ringers between 1975 and 2002 suggests that the proportion of adults ringed is only 3% of the total for this species (SAFRING unpublished data).

In October and November 2006, attempts were made to catch adult Kelp Gulls at the nest at the Keurbooms River colony, Plettenberg Bay, using three “walk-in” traps. Over a period of seven days, 143 birds were caught. All were fitted with white, plastic alphanumeric rings, bearing a two-letter code in black, on the left leg. Of those caught, 12 had already been ringed using standard 10 mm incoloy on a previous occasion; the other 131 were ringed as part of this study. Using the same method, five adult Kelp Gulls were trapped at the Gamtoos River mouth, near Jeffrey’s Bay, Eastern Cape, and ringed with a metal ring on the right and an orange leg flag on the left.

The number of chicks colour-ringed at the Swartkops River in 2003 that were subsequently reported was low and this may have been due in part to the difficulty of detecting the blue leg flags that were used. Consequently, a small sample of 30 chicks was colour-marked at this locality using a larger, green leg flag in November 2006.

Movements of adult Kelp Gulls have rarely exceeded 30 km from the site of ringing and the average distance travelled has been estimated as 6 km (Higgins & Davies 1996, Underhill et al. 1999, Whittington et al. in prep.). The absence of medium and long distance movements recorded may be partly a consequence of the small numbers of adults ringed. One bird ringed at the Keurbooms River on 27 October 2006 has already been recovered dead at the Great Brak River Estuary, approximately 110 km to the west.

The principal reason for ringing adults was to investigate whether the increase in numbers of adult-plumaged birds in the Port Elizabeth area in autumn (Whittington et al. 2006) is due to post-breeding adults moving in from colonies to the west. However, it also provides an opportunity to get a better idea of the degree to which adult birds do or do not move away from their breeding colonies. We would also like to increase our knowledge of the dispersal patterns of young birds from the Swartkops River.

Consequently, all sightings of colour-ringed Kelp Gulls would be of great interest and observers are asked to report any sightings to:

SAFRING, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7701, South Africa.
Tel: 021 650 2421/2
Email: safring@adu.uct.ac.za

The information required is:

1. The colour and position of the ring or flag (e.g. orange flag, left leg)
2. The two letter code if it can be read (e.g. white ring, black letters "BC")
3. The approximate age of the bird (juvenile, immature or adult) and
4. The location and date of the sighting (e.g. Lookout Beach, Plettenberg Bay, 17 February 2007).

All sightings will be acknowledged.

References

- Higgins PJ and Davies SJJF (eds). 1996. Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic birds. Vol. 3 Snipe to pigeons. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Underhill LG, Tree AJ, Oschadleus HD & Parker V. 1999. Review of ring recoveries of waterbirds in southern Africa. Avian Demography Unit, Cape Town.
- Whittington PA, Klages NTW & Martin AP. 2006. Seasonal patterns in numbers of Kelp Gulls *Larus dominicanus vetula* in the Port Elizabeth area and on Bird Island, Algoa Bay. Ostrich 77(3&4): 195–201.
- Whittington PA, Martin AP and Klages NTW. In prep. Movements of the Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus vetula* to, from and within southern South Africa.

Postscript

An additional 152 adult birds were colour-ringed at the Keurbooms River in November 2007 using green alphanumeric rings with two white letters, on the left leg.