



Afring News

An electronic journal published by SAFRING, Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town



Afring News online accepts papers containing ringing information about birds. This includes interesting ringing trips, interesting captures, faunistic observations relating to ringing, and analyses of ringing data. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, and any other interesting or relevant material.



Editor: H. Dieter Oschadleus

GARDEN BIRD RINGING

Adrian Craig

Recommended citation format: Craig A. 2013. Garden bird ringing. Afring News 42:19-20

URL: <http://safring.adu.org.za/content.php?id=14>

Published online: 24 June 2013

-ISSN 2222-341X -



GARDEN BIRD RINGING

Adrian Craig

Dept Zoology & Entomology, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 6140,
South Africa, email: a.craig@ru.ac.za

It's now 25 years since I began regular ringing in our Grahamstown garden, and six years since I last reviewed the results (Craig 2007). As described previously, this is a conventional suburban garden, with many exotic plants, large trees at the fringes and still a front hedge of *Tecoma capensis*, rather than a wall with electric wires along the top. There is a single bird feeder, furnished with seed only, and two shallow birdbaths. No nest-boxes have been set up during this period; an owl box was quickly occupied by bees, which had to be removed by a bee-keeper. Apart from the *Tecoma*, there is a large *Schotia brachypetala* tree, a small patch of *Leonotis*, and a *Halleria lucida* shrub which provide natural sources of nectar.

Several generations of dogs have been interested, or puzzled, spectators at the mist nets, but cats have always been discouraged from even visiting the garden. The birdlist now stands at 89 species, of which 53 have been ringed, although 11 of these are singletons. I have occasionally used clap traps for seed-eaters feeding on the ground below the bird feeder, and on one occasion caught seven juvenile Southern Grey-headed Sparrows at once. Baiting with beeswax attracted only Lesser Honeyguides at this site, and one colour-ringed individual was resighted over several weeks. Often I have set only a single 6-metre mist net, over a patch of lawn between the bird feeder and a birdbath, and I now routinely discard Laughing Doves. Table 1 lists the species for which > 5 birds have been ringed, and all those which have been recaptured or recovered.

Compared to my original report, there are now some notable longevity records. An Amethyst Sunbird, ringed as an adult male in full plumage, was caught by a neighbour's cat. There had been no recaptures since he was originally ringed – had he merely moved

across the road, or had this bird been out of town during the interim? Another tantalizing mystery is a Cape Weaver, with a longevity record of at least 13 years. It was a male in full breeding plumage when first ringed, weighed exactly the same when recaptured, and must then have been no less than 15 years old.

Apart from these two records after > 10 years, four additional species have now been recaptured more than 1 year after ringing (Southern Puffback, Greater Double-collared Sunbird, Southern Masked Weaver and Bronze Mannikin). There was also a recovery of a Southern Boubou and a recapture of a Cape White-eye after > 5 years. Compared to the 2007 stock-taking, there have been only two further recoveries, but another 66 recaptures, which illustrates the value of ringing at the same site repeatedly.

No long-distance movements have been recorded. Three weaver species (Cape, Southern Masked and Spotted-backed) and two starlings (Common and Red-winged Starling) have been recaptured or found dead at other sites within the town. With only two birds ringed in the garden (and only seven in Grahamstown), it was a surprise to recapture one Black-backed Puffback in the Botanical Gardens. Two juvenile Olive Thrushes and a Cape Robin have been recovered elsewhere in town, apparently after colliding with vehicles.

Our garden has experienced some definite shifts in species occurrence. Fiscal Flycatchers were regular in the garden when we first moved here in 1980, but were then absent for about 20 years. Recently a pair has re-established a territory in this area. Grey-headed Bush-shrikes were initially categorised as winter visitors to this part of town, heard occasionally but seldom seen. Now they can be heard almost daily in our area, and sightings are quite frequent. Bronze Mannikins first appeared in the Grahamstown Botanical Gardens in 1995 (Craig 1995), and gradually spread through the town. Although I had seen them at a bird-feeder at a neighbour's house, they were not recorded regularly in our garden until we established a bird feeder, and the first Bronze Mannikins were captured here in 2010. Burchell's Coucal seems to be absent in dry periods, re-appearing during wetter years. Cape Weavers



dominated the 'weaver catch' initially (in 2007 they made up 152 of 218 *Ploceus* weavers caught), but now Village Weavers are caught much more often (Table 1). Our garden still seems to be a transit zone for Olive Thrushes, with many new captures and no long-term repeats compared to the results for Cape Robins. However, this is definitely not the case for Grahamstown in general, and at sites such as the Botanical Gardens, both the capture and recapture rates for these two species are quite comparable (Craig & Hulley 1996).

Acknowledgements

My ringing has been funded primarily by research grants from Rhodes University. My wife Cheryl maintains the garden, and is a skilled ringing assistant during busy periods.

References

Craig, A. 1995. Bronze Mannikins in Grahamstown. Diaz Diary 23 (6): 15-16.

Craig A 2007. Garden bird ringing – a stock-taking. Afring News online 36:22-24.

Craig, A. & Hulley, P. 1996. What's the difference between robins and thrushes? Safring News 25: 51-52.

Table 1. Numbers of birds ringed, recaptured and recovered at 3 Florence Street, Grahamstown

Species	No ringed	Recaptured	Recovered	Longest interval
Laughing Dove	20	2	2	5 y 0 m
Speckled Mousebird	151	26	2	3 y 2 m
Red-faced Mousebird	66	1		4 y 11 m
Brown-hooded Kingfisher	4	1		1 m
African Hoopoe	3	1		4 m
Black-collared Barbet	16			
Lesser Honeyguide	5	1		2 m
Fork-tailed Drongo	8			
Black-headed Oriole	10			
Dark-capped Bulbul	61	5		5 y 3 m
Olive Thrush	60	15	1	4 y 0 m
Cape Robin	22	6	2	5 y 10 m
Bar-throated Apalis	9	3		4 m
Neddicky	4	1		1 m
Cape Wagtail	7	1		3 m
Common Fiscal	34	9	1	3 y 0 m
Southern Boubou	5	2	2	5 y 7 m
Black-backed Puffback	2	1		2 y 5 m
Bokmakierie	5		1	2 m
Common Starling	24	1	1	1 y 1 m
Red-winged Starling	20	1	1	6 y 0 m
Southern D-c Sunbird	15			
Greater D-c Sunbird	31	1	1	1 y 1 m
Amethyst Sunbird	24	2	2	12 y 0 m
Cape White-eye	299	29	3	5 y 1 m
Southern G-h Sparrow	80	5	1	2 y 4 m
Spectacled Weaver	8	3		6 m
Cape Weaver	198	16	3	13 y 8 m
Spotted-backed Weaver	185	18	2	5 y 2 m
Southern Masked Weaver	10	2		1 y 6 m
Bronze Mannikin	48	2		1 y 1 m
Brimstone Canary	7			
Streaky-headed Seedeater	6			
Other species	21			
Total (53 species)	1483	154	23	13 y 8 m