

# REPORTS & SHORT NOTES

## REPORT ON THE 1996-1997 RINGING YEAR

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This will be the last ringing-year report that I will compile. Over the years, since the annual ringing report was first published in *Safring News* in 1982 (earlier reports were published in *Ostrich*), I have tried to make it interesting for the ringers. The presentation of various summaries, such as regional ringing totals and individual totals, have become established features of these reports, while other summaries have been featured from time to time. The aim of the report has been to facilitate an appreciation by our rather widely scattered ringing fraternity, of the range of activities being pursued by ringers in different areas and to highlight the fluctuating levels of success from year to year. I have also drawn attention, to interesting or puzzling interim results that

have become manifest from the accumulating records. Aside from the last-mentioned features, which have often drawn good responses, there has been very little feedback on the general format and content of these reports. It takes a significant amount of time (an ever decreasing resource in SAFRING) to extract the figures for some of the tables, so I would ask that active ringers (individually or collectively) advise the Ringing Coordinator on which features they find interesting and what new features they would like to see introduced. Such feedback will greatly assist the new editor to provide an annual ringing report that is of interest to the majority of readers.

### Ringing effort

The provisional total of birds ringed in the 1996-1997 ringing year stands at 67 429, with some ringers' schedules still outstanding. Totals for the sub-Antarctic banding have not yet been received, so the final ringing total for the year

**Table 1.** Geographical distribution of ringing effort in the 1996-1997 ringing year.

Province or country	Number of ringers returning schedules	Number of species ringed	Number of birds ringed	Birds per ringer (average)
Western Cape	23	145	13 547	589
Gauteng	25	236	12 034	481
North West Province	10	193	10 928	1 093
Free State	7	230	8 242	1 177
KwaZulu-Natal	11	194	4 541	413
Zimbabwe	9	191	4 397	489
Namibia	10	135	4 285	429
Eastern Cape	12	120	3 840	320
Mpumalanga	6	156	1 973	329
Botswana	3	110	1 916	639
Malawi	4	129	646	162
Northern Cape	6	43	572	95
Northern Province	3	98	469	156
Totals	129	508	67 429	522

may well exceed 68 000 birds. In view of the low levels of penguin banding in the western and eastern Cape, it is evident that the high overall level of ringing of the last few years (inflated in the record 1994-1995 year by the extra penguins banded after the *Apollo Sea* catastrophe) has not slackened off. Table 1 shows regional ringing totals. There are two regions less than last year, the totals for the sub-Antarctic island teams being still outstanding, and ringing in Zambia having taken a back seat during the compilation of the local Bird Atlas. Nevertheless, the totals are up on the previous year. Regional totals are based on the efforts of ringers domiciled in the respective areas, irrespective of where the birds may have been caught. Nowadays, ringers move around a great deal, and it would be too time-consuming to reflect the actual geographical distribution of birds ringed. It is, in the final analysis, the commitment of individual ringers rather than the regional availability of birds that determines how many birds are ringed.

Gauteng has climbed into second spot, and the Free State has come up from ninth place last year to fourth place, due largely to the fact that Gerrie Grobler is now based in Bloemfontein. So North West's loss is Free State's gain.

As predicted in the previous ringing report, the Top 20 ringers or ringing groups (Table 2) all achieved four-figure totals. Gerrie Grobler has achieved the highest total ever recorded by a single ringer, in a single ringing year, in the history of the scheme, and his total was based on the ringing of 192 different species. Gerrie heads the list of seven ringers in the Top 20 who have come from, or are still part of, the Wesvaal ringing group. The Tygerberg ladies are also making their contribution and ensuring that gender equality flourishes in the ringer ranks. Eight of those named in the Top 20 are of the fairer sex; Leisha Upfold, a member of the Sea Fisheries team makes it nine. A welcome is extended to Stephanie Tyler, who has come to Botswana as

**Table 2.** Top 20 ringers or ringing groups in the 1996-1997 ringing year.

Ringers	Region	Number of birds ringed
Gerrie Grobler	Free State	6 200
Sam de Beer	North West Province	4 224
Sea Fisheries Research Institute team	Western Cape Province	3 022
Rihann Geyser	Gauteng	2 736
Jo Johnson	Western Cape Province	2 618
John and David Dalziel	Zimbabwe	2 541
Dave and Sally Johnson	KwaZulu-Natal	2 464
Dries Nel	North West Province	2 204
Debbie Philogene	Western Cape Province	1 882
George Underhill	Western Cape Province	1 742
Margaret McCall	Western Cape Province	1 580
Monika Nel	North West Province	1 507
Norbert Klages and group	Eastern Cape Province	1 500
Herman and Zephné Bernitz	Mpumalanga	1 407
Stephanie Tyler	Botswana	1 400
William Scott	North West Province	1 219
Rita Marais	North West Province	1 098
Dale Hanmer	Zimbabwe	1 028
Peet van der Walt	Gauteng	1 019
Philip Grobler	Gauteng	1 011

an experienced ringer from the UK, and is enjoying trapping Palaearctic warblers in their non-breeding quarters.

The most frequently-ringed birds in the year under review are listed in Table 3. The first three landbirds on the list are exactly the same as in the year before and the first 16 all featured in the previous Top 20. This consistency is probably due to the level of site-dedicated ringing effort. It is worth noting that 12 of the Top 20 landbirds are seedeaters and that they comprise 74% of the almost 38 000 individual birds in the Top 20 landbirds total. Unlike most insectivorous birds,

seedeaters often move about in flocks, and this sociability is certainly a factor contributing to their high numbers in netting totals. Overall, however, their dominance in the Top 20 is probably indicative of their proportionate importance in the terrestrial avian biomass. The seabirds listed provide an accurate picture of the effort devoted to the ringing of inshore marine birds around the coast of southern Africa.

The most common ten raptors caught with the aid of bal-chatri traps are listed in Table 4 along with the names of the six ringers who ringed the most significant numbers of each species. Michael

**Table 3.** Most-ringed birds for the period July 1996–June 1997.

1996-97 Rank	Species	1995-96 Rank	Total
<b>Landbirds</b>			
1 Red Bishop	<i>Euplectes orix</i>	1	6 488
2 Redbilled Quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>	2	6 121
3 Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus velatus</i>	3	5 321
4 Cape Weaver	<i>Ploceus capensis</i>	6	2 753
5 Cape White-eye	<i>Zosterops pallidus</i>	5	2 595
6 Blue Waxbill	<i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i>	7	1 704
7 African Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus baeticatus</i>	11	1 679
8 European Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	4	1 664
9 South African Cliff Swallow	<i>Hirundo spilodera</i>	8	1 314
10 Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	12	1 255
11 Cape Sparrow	<i>Passer melanurus</i>	9	1 102
12 Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>	17	979
13 Blackeyed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	20	812
14 Olive Thrush	<i>Turdus olivaceus</i>	14	667
15 Whitewinged Widow	<i>Euplectes albonotatus</i>	13	658
16 House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	15	603
17 Spottedbacked Weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>	-	600
18 Melba Finch	<i>Pytilia melba</i>	-	570
19 Cape Robin-Chat	<i>Cossypha caffra</i>	-	553
20 Levaillant's Cisticola	<i>Cisticola tinniens</i>	-	507
<b>Seabirds</b>			
1 Cape Gannet	<i>Morus capensis</i>	1	4 776
2 Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	-	804
3 African Penguin	<i>Spheniscus demersus</i>	5	551
4 Swift Tern	<i>Sterna bergii</i>	3	500
5 Cape Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i>	4	456

Raum had a particularly good winter trip from Gauteng to the Western Cape, catching a total of 57 birds in the course of the three days it took him to travel a somewhat indirect route from Johannesburg to Cape Town. For the first time, there was a tie between two ringers in the totals of PCGs caught, and a near tie for BSKs. This listing of Top 10 raptors was started some years ago, to acknowledge the travel-intensive ringing effort of the 'bal-chatri brigade', but some ringers contend that looking for occupied raptor nests and monitoring them until the chicks are ready for ringing is equally travel-intensive. This may well be so, and all those involved and interested in raptor ringing should convey their viewpoints to the new editor.

### Recoveries

The list of most-recovered species in Table 5 speaks for itself. It is similar to last year's list (64% of the species common to both lists) and even to the list for 1994-1995 (50% common to both lists). When we look at recoveries we are

dealing with small samples, so chance can play a major role. Chance factors include such things as unseasonably cold weather and the hunting success of suburban cats. Only two species in the current year list require comment. The Olive Thrush (in 8th place) has moved up from 21st place in the previous year's ranking, with the number of recoveries increasing from 5 to 12. This is the most noticeable movement in the table, though there is no obvious reason for it.

The Redbilled Quelea, ranked in 9th place, also has 12 recoveries, and did not feature at all in the previous lists of most-recovered birds. In this case, however, its high recovery rate is directly attributable to the fact that farmers on whose lands quelea control operations have taken place, are encouraged to search for and to report dead ringed birds. A third species is worthy of comment because it is uncharacteristically absent from this year's list. The 1996-1997 summer in southern Africa must have been a very pleasant one for European Swallows!

**Table 4.** Top 10 free-flying birds of prey caught in 1996-1997 ringing year.

Species		Total ringed	No. of ringers	Ringers with highest totals of this species	
Pale Chanting Goshawk	<i>Melierax canorus</i>	181	10	Herman Bernitz	44
Blackshouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	69	12	Abrie Maritz	44
Steppe Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	67	12	Michael Raum	20
Rock Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	51	12	Marc Herremans	19
Greater Kestrel	<i>Falco rupicoloides</i>	38	6	Terry Robertson	22
Spotted Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo africana</i>	37	10	Michael Raum	12
Jackal Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufofuscus</i>	34	9	Herman Bernitz	15
Pygmy Falcon	<i>Polihierax semitorquatus</i>	29	1	Abrie Maritz	29
Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	10	6	Ron Hartley	5
Blackbreasted Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	10	4	Herman Bernitz	5

**Table 5.** Most frequently recovered species in the 1996-1997 ringing year.

1996-97	Species	1995-96	Totals
1	Cape Gannet <i>Morus capensis</i>	2	94
2	African Penguin <i>Spheniscus demersus</i>	1	68
3	Cape Weaver <i>Ploceus capensis</i>	5	22
4	Masked Weaver <i>Ploceus velatus</i>	6	21
5	White Stork <i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	13	18
6	Swift Tern <i>Sterna bergii</i>	3	17
7	Laughing Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	7	15
8	Olive Thrush <i>Turdus olivaceus</i>	21	12
9	Redbilled Quelea <i>Quelea quelea</i>	-	12
10	Kelp Gull <i>Larus dominicanus</i>	4	11
11	Whitebreasted Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	-	10
12	Spotted Eagle Owl <i>Bubo africanus</i>	15	9
13	Cape Sparrow <i>Passer melanurus</i>	18	9
14	Red Bishop <i>Euplectes orix</i>	-	9
15	Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba</i>	-	8
16	Whitebacked Vulture <i>Gyps africanus</i>	-	7
17	Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	-	7
18	Cape Robin-chat <i>Cossypha caffra</i>	22	7
19	Cape White-eye <i>Zosterops pailidus</i>	10	7
20	Rock Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	-	6
21	Blackeyed Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	-	6
22	Redwinged Starling <i>Onychognathus morio</i>	17	6

