

appear reasonable in this case. Brown Snake Eagles are well named and have been known on occasions to allow their predatory zeal to exceed their discretion. Perhaps this individual did tackle prey bigger than he/she could subdue.

#### LONG-LIVED ALUMINIUM RING

Just to confound the usual beliefs and bitter experience concerning the effective lifespan of an aluminium ring in the exacting marine environment, gannet 536-05922, ringed as a nestling at Malagas Island on 25.02.1954 by Dr. Geoff McLachlan, was washed up dead at Lambert's Bay in December 1979. The number on the ring was still clearly legible after 310 months. The recovery provides an interesting longevity record for *Morus capensis* and an unexpected reward for Geoff McLachlan who was subjected to much criticism 25 years ago for using aluminium rings on sea birds!

#### COLOUR RINGING CHAOS

The following extracts are from an article by Bruno Ens published in the Wader Study Group Bulletin No. 31 (April 1981). It was written because the author was genuinely concerned that "good opportunities to gather valuable information (thousands of colour-banded oystercatchers combined with an even greater number of enthusiastic birdwatchers) were being missed because of the disastrous complexity of ringing schemes."

"Having observed oystercatchers from three different ringing schemes I am convinced that inaccurate observations can no longer

be blamed on the carelessness of observers, but are mainly due to the great number of extant ringing programmes and methods. The combination of all these schemes has necessitated the use of very complex types of colour-bands and has led to what to the well-intentioned outsider might seem like a conspiracy to prevent him from making correct identifications. The trickiest device developed so far in the ring race consists of a tall yellow plastic ring with horizontal black stripes on three positions. These stripes can be thick, thin or absent. In conjunction with this code-ring the birds ringed in the Exe estuary wear a small-sized colour-band on the same part of the leg and some birds have an additional colour-band on their other leg. Slightly less tricky is the multicolour-band previously used on Skokholm where three colours are stuck on one tall ring. Also, ordinary colour rings are not as ordinary as they might seem. Up to four bands can be found below the joint of one leg and a maximum of two above the joint on one leg in some ringing schemes. Although the number of colours used per scheme usually doesn't exceed six the total number used is extraordinary: white, yellow, orange, red, dark red, pale green, green, dark green, pale blue, blue, dark blue, dark brown and black. Sometimes the metal ring or the absence of a ring is considered a colour as well."

It is important to ensure that a similar situation never develops in South Africa. All ringers using, or intending to use, colour rings should supply the Ringing Organiser with full details of their colour ring codes.