

# NOTES & NEWS

## THE OLDEST PASSERINE

In Europe, any age record in excess of 12 years for a 40 g passerine bird is very exceptional and would be very carefully examined for possible errors. More precise information on the ringing history of the 26-year-old Chorister Robin *Cossypha ichnua* mentioned on page 27 of the last issue of SAFRING NEWS is, therefore, desirable to allay understandable doubts in the minds of those readers who find this record difficult to credit, particularly in view of the fact that only colour rings are involved.

I started to colour ring Chorister Robins and Starred Robins *Pogonochila stellata* in the Kilgobbin Forest in 1955. From the start my purpose was to render each bird individually identifiable, and one or two rings were used on one leg only. The colour ring sequence was coded in a left or right column depending on which leg was used. In 1954 I had bought 12 two-colour yellow and black rings (half-yellow and half-black). These were (fortunately) very good quality rings but I was unable to get more of them and had used them all up at Kilgobbin and other localities before going away to Zululand in 1956. I started ringing at Kilgobbin again in 1968, and started using metal rings with colour rings in 1972. When earlier colour-ringed birds were retrapped a metal ring was added on the other leg. Thus there is no question of ring loss causing confusion and the particular combination of black/yellow and white on the left leg was never duplicated. The grand total of Chorister Robins ringed between 1955 and 1978 was only 46, so there was not a problem of trying to find sufficient individual ring combinations.

Although the age achieved by this bird seems exceptional, it is not entirely unexpected. I know of a Mocking Chat *Thamnodia cinnamomeiventris* which had its territory on a cliff in front of a Natal farmhouse. This bird, a male, was not marked but had become completely habituated to the family living in the house and would come boldly onto the veranda for handouts. It did this for 21 years before disappearing, presumably through death. This is not the sort of evidence that is scientifically acceptable but it did give an indication of potential longevity.

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