

EDITORIAL

Species Codes

Were it not for unforeseen delays which were set in train by dock strikes in Britain, the eagerly awaited new edition of Roberts Birds of South Africa would have been on booksellers' shelves before Christmas 1984. Nevertheless, it will be in the hands of most birdwatchers by mid-1985. As most ringers are aware, the species numbers in the new edition will differ from those in earlier editions (except for some half-a-dozen species). This is of no consequence to all those who will use the book to identify birds and to learn what is known about them. It becomes of very real consequence, however, when the numbers are used as species codes, as on SAFRING schedule forms. Currently the Schedule 1 forms that most ringers have in their possession require that the 3-digit numbers in Roberts Birds of South Africa be used for species. On newly printed schedules (see p 84) ringers are instructed to use the 3-digit number in the SAFRING 'Guide to Ring Sizes' (issued in updated form to all active ringers annually). These are the old Roberts numbers with additional numbers given for X and Y species.

Although consideration was given to reverting to the old style of schedules in which the name of the ringed bird was written out, a numbering code for species would still be required for the schedule summary which is the only portion of the schedule to be computerised. A quite different numbering system was recently developed for the National List of Bird Names. This is a family-based system and it has a great deal of merit inasmuch as it cannot become redundant before publication and additional species can be added in the appropriate section of the list. Most important of all, in the context of a computerised data bank, is that these numbers cannot be mistaken or confused with either the 'old' or 'new' Roberts numbers. For example, for the Cliff Swallow the old Roberts, new Roberts and National List numbers are 504, 528 and 70.12 respectively. Similarly, for the Brubru Shrike the numbers are 731, 741 and 85.6.

If SAFRING is to change its species code it must be to a recognizably different system such as that used by the National List. In the meantime, however, ringers must continue to use the old numbers when completing schedules.

Towards an 'Afro Svensson'

In the Guest Editorial in the last issue of Safring News, Robert Prÿs-Jones discussed the need to maximise information obtained

during the handling of birds caught for ringing, and mentioned the requirement for an equivalent of the Svensson identification guide to European passerines. Coincidentally two other ornithologists independently stated this need at about the same time: John Bunning in his address to the annual get-together of the Witwatersrand Bird Club's ringers and Neil Baker in a letter to me from Tanzania. Both comments appear in this issue (pages 75 and 81) and, to start the ball rolling, I requested Svensson-style write-ups from two ringers. These are included under the heading 'AGEING AND SEXING GUIDES'. Because the text for Safring News is formatted with a computer word processing package, we can store texts for subsequent retrieval. Every one or two-page guide on a particular species can thus be reproduced at any time in loose-leaf form. Once we have enough, these can form the nucleus of an 'Afro Svensson' as Neil Baker has termed it. The sooner other ringers contribute similar articles, the sooner there will be enough sheets to make up a respectable loose-leaf binder for field use.

Proposed Co-operative Ringing Project

If you do not have the time at present to accord this issue more than a cursory scan but have read this far, please turn to page 71 where Tony Tree and Roy Earlé have put forward a proposal that deserves your attention.

A co-operative ringing project on a subcontinental scale is an ambitious undertaking, but the subject is well chosen and we do now have active ringers in all four provinces, South West Africa and Zimbabwe. It is a project that the majority of ringers could get involved in, even if only indirectly. For example, itinerant raptor ringers could note and report the location of suitable sand martin colonies and capture sites to colleagues actively involved in the project. Please give the proposal your serious consideration.

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