

NOTES & NOTICES

A MOULT SCHEME FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA

This note announces the inauguration of a moult scheme for southern Africa, organized jointly by the Southern African Ornithological Society (S.A.O.S.) and SAFRING. Moult forms a key component in the annual cycle of birds, and information on it can be easily and quickly collected by anyone involved in ringing birds. However, thus far the only moult schemes organized within southern Africa have been on a local level, notably that undertaken by the Witwatersrand Bird Club.

The southern African moult card has been closely modelled on that currently used by the British Trust for Ornithology, which itself is a product of European standardization under the auspices of EURING. The card, which is the same size as the S.A.O.S. nest record card, covers both passerines and non-passerines, and one should be completed, where possible, for any bird showing active or arrested moult. Abbreviated instructions are given on the back of the card, and detailed instructions and explanations will be provided separately to each person requesting a batch of cards. In addition, a most useful handbook 'Moult in Birds' by H. B. Ginn & D. S. Melville (1983, B.T.O. Guide 19, 112 pp) is available from SAFRING at an approximate price of R17,00.

Experience elsewhere indicates that many people unfamiliar with recording moult are put off from doing so because of the supposed complexity involved and time required. Neither of these objections is valid. Adequate competency in recording moult can be attained from a few hours instruction from someone proficient or, alternatively, from study of a handbook such as 'Moult in Birds' followed by brief but careful examination of an array of moulting birds caught while one is ringing. More prolonged and closer scrutiny can be made of any recently dead birds one comes across, e.g. road casualties (but not museum specimens which pose severe problems for anyone not highly experienced), which will help in appreciating potential pitfalls such as the overlooking of missing or in pin flight feathers. As regards time, the moult card instructions provide a priority list for data to be recorded. The minimum, but still extremely useful, details required are: species, date, locality, observer and primary moult. In most cases noting these would only take a minute or so. Thus, although there will be no compulsion on ringers to record moult, it is hoped that many will come to regard it as a standard component of their ringing effort. Knowledge of the timing and duration of the moult of most southern African birds is poor or non-existent at present, and ringers have a potentially important role to play in rectifying this.

Cards may be obtained (free) from, and completed cards should be returned to: Moulting Enquiry, SAFRING, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7700, South Africa. (When stocks are adequate, duplicates for private use may be purchased at the cost price current at time of application). In the light of large losses of unreturned cards experienced by the nest record card scheme, initially no more than 250 moulting cards will be supplied to any ringer. However, batches of completed cards may be returned at any time, whereupon further issues will be made as requested. At the end of a ringing year (1 July - 30 June), all ringers are requested to return any completed cards still in their possession at the same time as their ringing returns, in order that an annual summary of the progress of the moulting scheme can be prepared for publication in Safring News.

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ERRATA

P. Le Roux has kindly drawn my attention to a couple of typographical errors that escaped detection during proof-reading of my paper 'Movements, mortality and the annual cycle of white-eyes in southern Africa' Safring News 14 (1): 25-35 (1985):

1. At the bottom of p. 26, the equation should read

$$1 - s = \frac{27}{76} = 0,355$$

2. The headings to columns 4 and 5 of Table 1, p. 28, should read $\mathcal{E}(d_x)$ and $d_x - \mathcal{E}(d_x)$ respectively. $\sum(d_x)$, given in error, is, of course, the summed total of column 4.

In addition, the first part of the penultimate sentence of the third paragraph on p. 25 should read:

"38 recoveries at a recovery rate of 0,36% imply ca 10 600 birds ringed;".

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