

NOTES & NOTICES

FISH ATTACKING TRAPPED WADERS

On Saturday, 4 January 1986, I was carrying out a routine wader ringing operation at a large dam in the central Transvaal. The procedure on that occasion was similar to ten previous sessions since September 1985, all of which took place without mishap.

Single-shelf nets were set over the water in such a manner that any trapped birds would be suspended clear of the water. Once the light had deteriorated sufficiently to conceal the nets I flushed a small party of waders and succeeded in trapping 14 (two Curlew Sandpipers, two Ruff and ten Little Stints). All were hanging clear of the water surface by *ca.* 20 cm. On arriving at the nets to extract the trapped birds I disturbed a lot of rather large fish, which were probably Barbel, from the water beneath the nets. The water was between 30 cm and 100 cm in depth. While extracting the trapped birds the fish returned and proceeded to grab the netted birds in their mouths and pull them below the surface of the water. Obviously I immediately chased away the fish but unfortunately damage had already been done - three Little Stints were dead, a Curlew Sandpiper and two other Little Stints were in a very weak condition.

Since recording the above, an incident occurred on the 9th September 1986, when I was carrying out a similar exercise at the same place. Obviously aware of the fish threat, I erected the nets in such a manner that any trapped birds hung well clear of the water. As the light deteriorated, I trapped a number of birds. On approaching a Whitewinged Black Tern hanging clear of the water by about 30 cm, a fish, again probably a Barbel, made an unsuccessful lunge at the trapped bird from a water depth of 20 cm. I estimated that about 40 cm of fish emerged from the water.

The activities of Barbel and Egyptian Geese will probably result in the termination of my wader ringing activities at this site.

This is just another hazard for netted birds which ringers must beware of. Hopefully, through my experience, it is a risk that will in future be taken into consideration by ringers working in similar situations.

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