

GUEST EDITORIAL

TENURED RINGING SITES

Where should one go ringing? This is a question often asked by ringing groups. Younger members often suggest a different site for each ringing outing. While this may provide novelty, excitement and a variety of species, there are at least ten reasons why a permanent ringing site should be considered. These are:-

- A) Long-term studies. It is now apparent that Afrotropical birds, especially passerines, live much longer and have a lower rate of population turnover than birds of the same genera, but living in northern temperate climates. To establish this fact for southern African passerines it is necessary to undertake long-term studies; these usually last ten years, or more.
- B) In a permanent site the investment of time, effort and rings is protected.
- C) The study of territory is only possible at a permanent site.
- D) In order to study *ortstreue* (i.e. the annual recurrence of returning migrants) it is imperative that ringing be carried out at the same site, year after year.
- E) Moulting studies have extra meaning if the moulting birds are recaptured during the moulting cycle.
- F) Long-term trends may only be monitored if the same site is worked year after year.
- G) Constant effort sites may be established at permanent sites. There is a strong trend in the establishment of constant effort sites by the British Trust for Ornithology (B.T.O.) in Britain and Ireland. The B.T.O. has, for most of this century, led the way in the innovation of new methods for bird ringing and the introduction of this new technique is a trend that we should not ignore. Constant effort sites give precise estimates of both short-term and longer-term population variations and recruitment.

- H) Training of ringers may more easily be organised at permanent ringing sites. Such sites allow lift clubs to be formed and lead to a reduction in the time spent on organisation. I am now of the opinion that the establishment of ringer-training bodies in each of our major centres is a high priority in southern African ringing.
- I) Ringers, being a select and often idiosyncratic band, tend to ignore the bird clubs which gave them birth. Stable ringing sites act as gathering places for bird club members, especially the "purple-headed darlings", those older members, often ladies, who cannot manage the tougher outings, but still wish to participate in the club's activities. In these days of increased security risks, ringing sites often provide safe outings for ladies and children.
- J) The education of the public is an important function of permanent ringing sites. There is nothing like a bird-in-the-hand to interest passing members of the public.

Examples of the value of permanent ringing sites are Melville Koppies and Melrose Bird Sanctuary, both in Johannesburg; the Pietermaritzburg Sewage Works; Barberspan in the western Transvaal and Rondevlei in the Cape. These sites all have one characteristic in common: tenure. If the site you use does not have long-term tenure then you have no certainty that your efforts are secure. Thus it is vital that once you have chosen a site you negotiate with the owner for its long-term use. Avoid sites that may be easily sold or converted to other uses. The best sites are those already set aside as bird sanctuaries or nature reserves. However it is unfortunate that some of our official Nature Conservation Authorities in southern Africa, while having supported SAFRING for many years, still expressly forbid the ringing of birds in the nature reserves under their control. We hope that in due course they will come to see bird ringing as a legitimate use of these areas.

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