

REPORTS, NOTES & LETTERS

SAFRING STATISTICS FOR THE 1988-1989 RINGING YEAR.

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Well, another year has flown past and it is time again to look at the achievements and results of the 1988-1989 ringing year. For the Unit itself, the period July 1988 to June 1989 was memorable chiefly for the replacement of the University's mainframe computer; the old machine being withdrawn from service at the end of January 1989. SAFRING'S computer software was custom-written for operation on the old Sperry mainframe in 1980. The programs made extensive use of certain special facilities of the Sperry fortran compiler which are not standard on other machines. This meant that our programs were not 'portable'. To exacerbate matters, it transpired that our documented source codes, supplied when the new programs were written 10 years ago, were 'undebugged' versions. For those not familiar with computer jargon, that means that the programs did not do what they were supposed to do. The old Sperry was withdrawn at the end of January 1989. By June we had all nine programs in the SAFRING suite up and running on the new Vax - just in time for the influx of schedules, and I was able to sleep peacefully again without dreaming about fortran sub-routines.

Apart from the suspension of recovery processing for the six weeks it took to get that first program to function, routine activities were maintained at the Unit; for example, 194 orders for rings and/or equipment were despatched to a total value of over R25 000. Mirella (in addition to many other tasks) checked out and computerized the summaries of over 2 000 schedule 1 forms that were submitted for the previous year. While these figures pale to insignificance next to those of some overseas ringing schemes, their staff rosters are several times larger than ours.

So much for the Unit's year. What sort of a year was it for the ringers? Read on.

RINGING EFFORT

On the basis of schedules received to date, a total of 41 630 birds were ringed during the review period. This is close to a 10% increase on the previous annual total and represents an

encouraging growth rate. The ten-year trend line for ringing effort is shown in Figure 1 and it can be seen that ringing totals have virtually doubled over this time span.

The Transvaal ringers have consolidated their position at the top of the regional ringing effort log (Table 1) with the widely-scattered Cape Province's ringers holding second place way ahead of the rest. Natal would have been in third slot had the Durban group submitted their schedules. As it is, Malawi's few ringers have turned in very creditable totals. It should be noted that the figures in column 2, 'Number of active ringers' is based on the number of ringers who have returned schedules and is, consequently, conservative, taking no cognizance of trainee ringers or of partners using a single ringer's number.

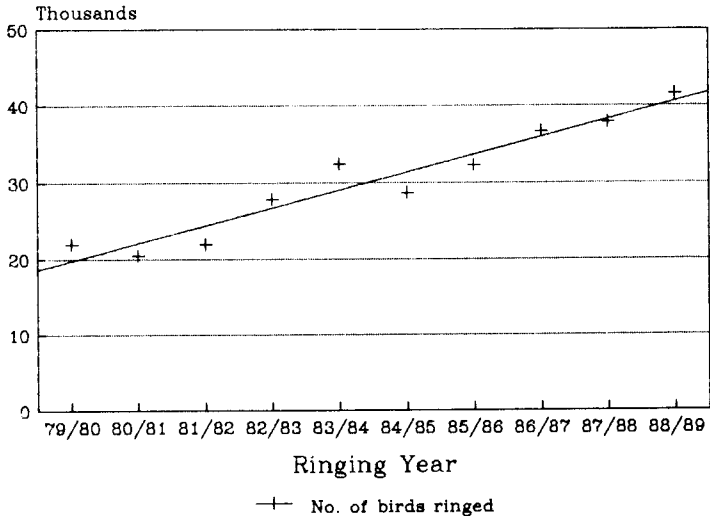


FIGURE 1

TEN-YEAR TREND LINE FOR RINGING EFFORT

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF REGIONAL RINGING EFFORT IN THE 1988-1989 RINGING YEAR

REGION	NUMBER OF ACTIVE RINGERS	NUMBER OF SPECIES RINGED	NUMBER OF BIRDS RINGED	PERCENTAGE OF ANNUAL TOTAL
TRANSVAAL	25	264	14 241	34,2
CAPE	32	198	12 251	29,4
MALAWI	4	168	3 620	8,7
NATAL	10	175	3 317	8,0
ORANGE FREE STATE	7	154	3 041	7,3
SUB-ANTARCTIC	7	8	2 441	5,9
NAMIBIA	12	183	1 567	3,8
ZIMBABWE	5	121	980	2,3
MOZAMBIQUE	1	31	172	0,4
<u>TOTALS</u>	103	509	41 630	100,0

The top 20 ringers (or pairs or groups) with the highest annual totals are listed in Table 2 (page 32). This list does not include totals achieved by professional and institutional ringing projects. The top 10 all achieved four-figure totals (as in the 1987/1988 year) and collectively caught 56 % of the birds ringed. With the numbers of active ringers increasing (over 100 for the first time since the early 70s) the prospects for maintaining the upward trend in ringing effort look good.

Table 3 (page 33) shows the top twenty species (excluding seabirds). Once again the European Swallow heads the list. Column 4 shows how many ringers contributed to the species total and column 5 gives the highest total for the species achieved by a single ringer or ringing group. Thus the Cape White-eye appeared on the greatest number of ringers' totals, closely followed by Masked Weaver, Laughing Dove and Cape Robin. Six species not in last year's Top 20 list are the Blue Waxbill, Cape Wagtail, Cape Bulbul, Common Waxbill, Greyheaded Sparrow and Cape Robin.

RECOVERIES

There were 399 recoveries of 115 species from July 1988 to June 1989. Nine species of foreign-ringed birds contributed 29 recoveries to the total, including 9 White Storks and 8 Common Terns. Ten birds ringed in southern Africa were recovered overseas.

<u>Steppe Buzzard</u>	(Adult)		
	09.02.87	Assen, Transvaal	
	25.10.88	Bekovo, USSR	21 mths 8 773 km
<u>Knot</u>	(Adult)		
	10.03.84	Langebaan, Cape	
Controlled	27.07.88	Ottenby, Sweden	53 mths 9 929 km
<u>Knot</u>	(2nd year)		
	29.03.87	Langebaan, Cape	
	24.08.88	Zoommeer, Holland	17 mths 9 501 km
<u>Sanderling</u>	(Adult)		
	16.10.87	Walvis Bay	
	01.05.89	Malta	19 mths 5 988 km
<u>Common Tern</u>	(Adult)		
	23.12.87	Betty's Bay, Cape	
	02.06.89	Rugen, DDR	18 mths 9 894 km
<u>European Swallow</u>	(Immature)		
	01.01.88	Maun, Botswana	
	20.05.89	Vinaroz, Spain	17 mths 7 157 km

European Swallow (Immature)
 01.01.88 Maun, Botswana
 01.08.88 Jahnsdorf, DDR 17 mths 7 956 km
 (Unknown)
 27.01.88 Pretoria, Transvaal
 05.09.88 Imatra, Finland 8 mths 9 668 km
 (Unknown)
 18.02.88 Pretoria, Transvaal
 13.08.88 Novosibirsk, USSR 6 mths 10 377 km
 (Immature)
 04.01.87 Pietermaritzburg, Natal
 11.09.88 Belgorod, USSR 20 mths 8 940 km

It is encouraging to see Russian recoveries coming in after a gap of several years. For this breakthrough we are indebted to the good offices of Mr Eddie Fritze, a Danish ringer and correspondent of SAFRING, who spent almost a week at the Moscow Ringing Centre tracing recovery records for us. On the local scene, several recoveries yielded some interesting longevity figures:

Cattle Egret (Chick)
 08.01.66 Soweto, Johannesburg, Transvaal
 10.05.89 Zoo Lake, Johannesburg
 280 mths 21km

Yellowbilled Duck (Juvenile)
 19.09.75 Barberspan, Transvaal
 30.07.88 Glencoe, Natal
 154 mths 478 km

Turnstone (1-2 years)
 12.07.77 Walvis Bay
 27.02.89 Mile 72, Namibia
 140 mths 116 km

Cape Dikkop (Juvenile)
 04.04.72 Port Elizabeth Golf Course, Cape
 06.02.89 Walmer, Port Elizabeth
 202 mths 6 km

Greyheaded Gull (Chick)
 06.05.73 Westdene Pan, Benoni, Transvaal
 27.08.88 Secunda, Transvaal
 184 mths 97 km

About one-third of recoveries received are not significant in terms of distance moved or elapsed time from ringing to recovery. Table 4 (page 34) shows the most frequently recovered birds. The list is compiled from significant records only (movement of not less than 10 km and/or survival from ringing date of not less than 12 months) and foreign-ringed birds are excluded.

TABLE 2

TOP 20 AMATEUR RINGERS OR RINGING GROUPS: 1988-1989

RINGERS	REGION	NO. OF BIRDS RINGED
TED ROBSON	TRANSVAAL	5 803
GEORGE & LES UNDERHILL	SOUTH WESTERN CAPE	3 925
DAVE JOHNSON	NATAL	2 591
DALE HANMER	MALAŴI	2 210
ROY EARLÉ	ORANGE FREE STATE	1 877
JOHN BUNNING	TRANSVAAL	1 671
KOBIE RAIJMAKERS	TRANSVAAL	1 608
FRANK DOUWES	TRANSVAAL	1 290
SHONIE RAIJMAKERS	TRANSVAAL	1 265
KOTIE HERHOLDT	NORTHERN CAPE	1 139
STEWART LANE	MALAŴI	712
MIKE & TETÉ ROBERTS	MALAŴI	691
WALTER NESER	TRANSVAAL	607
TONY TREE	ZIMBABWE & E. CAPE	557
ROD BRABY	NAMIBIA	535
PAUL MARTIN	EASTERN CAPE	518
MIKE FRASER & LIZ MCMAHON	SOUTH WESTERN CAPE	491
JAN HOFMEYR	SOUTH WESTERN CAPE	485
GEOFF LOCKWOOD	TRANSVAAL	422
ALEC MANSON	ZIMBABWE	395

TABLE 3

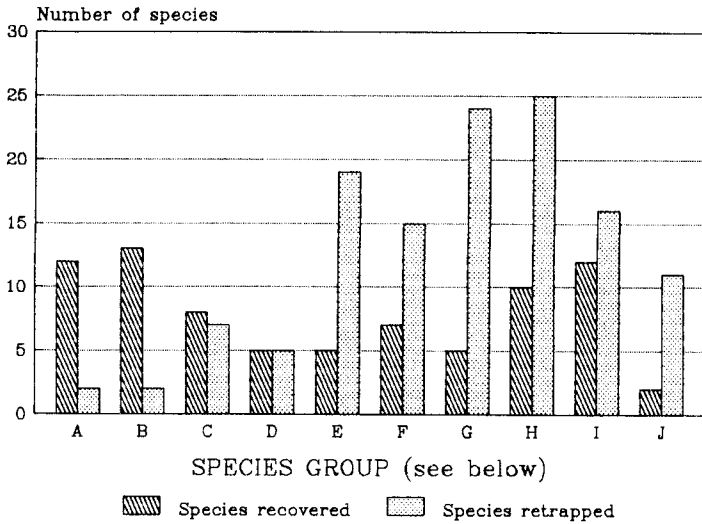
TWENTY MOST-RINGED BIRDS (EXCLUDING SEABIRDS) FOR THE
PERIOD JULY 1988 TO JUNE 1989

1988/89 RANK	SPECIES	87/88 RANK	NO. OF RINGERS	SINGLE RINGER MAXIMUM	TOTAL
1	EUROPEAN SWALLOW	1	17	5 366	6 876
2	MASKED WEAVER	3	32	453	1 631
3	CAPE WHITE-EYE	5	35	506	1 604
4	S.A. CLIFF SWALLOW	2	5	1 262	1 517
5	CAPE WEAVER	12	18	1 017	1 211
6	RED BISHOP	4	17	285	1 057
7	CURLEW SANDPIPER	7	11	248	771
8	LAUGHING DOVE	9	32	110	724
9	CAPE SPARROW	6	27	133	701
10	REDHEADED FINCH	11	5	403	593
11	BLACKEYED BULBUL	8	26	157	519
12	BLUE WAXBILL	-	19	245	468
13	CAPE SUGARBIRD	10	5	326	423
14	OLIVE THRUSH	16	26	118	421
15	CAPE WAGTAIL	-	20	294	408
16	CAPE BULBUL	-	7	353	379
17	GARDEN WARBLER	17	13	192	360
18	COMMON WAXBILL	-	19	157	334
19	GREYHEADED SPARROW	-	17	137	306
20	CAPE ROBIN	-	32	64	272

TABLE 4

MOST FREQUENTLY RECOVERED BIRDS IN THE
1988-1989 RINGING YEAR

OLD ROBERTS NUMBERS	SPECIES	TOTAL NUMBER
044	CAPE GANNET	52
002	JACKASS PENGUIN	20
287	KELP GULL	15
803	MASKED WEAVER	15
317	LAUGHING DOVE	10
047	WHITEBREASTED CORMORANT	6
289	HARTLAUB'S GULL	6
007	WANDERING ALBATROSS	5
047	CAPE CORMORANT	5
493	EUROPEAN SWALLOW	5
786	CAPE SPARROW	5
089	EGYPTIAN GOOSE	4
288	GREYHEADED GULL	4
504	SOUTH AFRICAN CLIFF SWALLOW	4
553	OLIVE THRUSH	4
775	CAPE WHITE-EYE	4
165	PALE CHANTING GOSHAWK	3
286	SUB-ANTARCTIC SKUA	3
311	SPECKLED PIGEON	3
368	SPOTTED EAGLE OWL	3
439	CRESTED BARBET	3
581	CAPE ROBIN	3



- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| A Waterbirds and related groups | F Broadbill - Bulbuls |
| B Vultures and birds of prey | G Thrushes - Prinias |
| C Waders (Painted Snipe - Dikkops) | H Flycatchers - White-eyes |
| D Sandgrouse - Coucals | I Sparrows - Widowbirds |
| E Nightjars - Wryneck | J Waxbills - Buntings |

FIGURE 2

NUMBERS OF SPECIES RECOVERED AND RECAPTURED
DURING 1988/1989 RINGING YEAR

There are 22 birds listed so that all those with 3 recoveries could be included. It is quite apparent from this list that seabirds in particular, and non-passerines in general, dominate the recoveries. The smaller passerines which appear in the list are, with the exception of the two swallows, common garden birds of built-up areas. The most common reported causes of mortality (other than 'unknown' which accounts for about 90 %) are domestic cats and collision with vehicles, so the suburban garden birds stand better chances of recovery than their country-dwelling relatives.

This is why retrap data are of value. Figure 2 shows the evidence of significant recoveries and of retraps received for the 1988-1989 ringing year. Generally speaking, recoveries (birds found dead or dying) are usual for the larger non-passerines and retraps most common for the smaller birds that are easily mistnetted, especially the insectivorous species. The two types of record complement each other well, so please don't neglect to send in your reportable retraps (birds caught more than 12 months after ringing, one record per bird per ringing year).