

THE 1989-1990 RINGING YEAR

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In 1982 I started publishing an annual report on the previous year's ringing activities in Safring News. This, the tenth such report, differs a little from the early reports as a result of gradual change in structure and emphasis over the years. I would like to think that the reports have 'evolved' though in truth I have received very little comment on them that could be termed 'selective pressure'. The objective has always been to provide you, the ringer, with feedback on the local ringing scene and with incentive to maintain and, when possible, increase your efforts. Bird ringing is not an activity which produces rapid results and most ringers work in relative isolation. Yet all of you make a contribution and it is my privilege to integrate all the individual efforts and, through the medium of these annual summaries, enable you to keep abreast of the overall scene.

A regrettable feature of these reports is that they are so out of date. This one refers to the 1989-1990 ringing year, but we are already halfway through the 1991-1992 year. Ideally, the summary of any ringing year ending in June should be published by December of the same year. It could be done if ALL ringers submitted their schedules in July. But this, I have come to realise, happens only in a Utopian world. My efforts to chivy the delinquents seems to have earned me an image (see page 37) but that is one of the occupational hazards of the Ringing Organiser's job. However, matters are improving, and I would like to place on record my appreciation of the increasing number of ringers who not only take pride in sending their schedules promptly at the end of June, but submit schedules as and when they use up series of rings throughout the ringing year. Such co-operation really facilitates our work at SAFRING and is very heartening.

Well now, let's look at what was achieved 18 months ago.

RINGING EFFORT

Ringing effort in the period July 1989 to June 1990 suffered a marked drop, the total of 37 425 birds being 13% down on the updated 1988-1989 total of 43 038. A politician might claim, in the face of the downturn, that the ringing year was a period of consolidation. The simple truth is that we didn't ring as many birds as in the previous year or the one before that. Schedules were submitted by 104 ringers, compared with 106 in 1988-1989, similar numbers but not all the same people.

The average number of birds ringed per ringer (360) is an arbitrary and misleading statistic. A much clearer picture of the thrust of ringing effort is obtained if the individual totals of the 104 ringers who returned schedules are arranged in numerical order from lowest to highest. These 104 sequential totals can then be divided into eight equal groups, each containing 13 ringers, and the number of birds ringed by each group expressed as a percentage of the annual total, as shown in Table 1. From this it is apparent that the A, B and C groups (39 ringers) ringed 92,6% of the birds and that half of the ringers who contributed managed fewer than 80 birds each. If any of the A group stop ringing for any reason then there will naturally be a substantial effect on the total.

TABLE 1
BREAKDOWN OF RINGING EFFORT BY RINGER TOTALS

GROUP	RINGERS TOTALS		GROUP TOTAL	PERCENTAGE OF ANNUAL TOTAL	CUMULATIVE TOTALS	
	LOWEST	HIGHEST			PERCENTAGE	RINGERS
A	950	3 409	25 155	67,2	67,2	13
B	317	835	6 691	17,9	85,1	26
C	152	292	2 809	7,5	92,6	39
D	82	150	1 401	3,8	96,4	52
E	48	79	792	2,1	98,5	65
F	16	47	379	1,0	99,5	78
G	9	15	150	0,4	99,9	91
H	1	8	48	0,1	100,0	104

Regional ringing effort is shown in Table 2. The Cape Province total benefits from the ringing of seabirds on the offshore islands by the staff of the Sea Fisheries Research Institute, Provincial Conservation and Port Elizabeth Museum staff and the Benguela Ecology Research Programme of the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology. The Transvaal's total is swelled by the contribution of the Provincial Administration's Barberspan Ornithological Research Station. If the offshore islands ringing is excluded from the Cape total and the Barberspan figures subtracted from the Transvaal total, the Transvaal comes out on top with a margin of over 2 000 birds.

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF REGIONAL RINGING EFFORT IN THE 1989-1990 RINGING YEAR

REGION	NUMBER OF RINGERS RETURNING SCHEDULES	NUMBER OF SPECIES RINGED	NUMBER OF BIRDS RINGED	PERCENTAGE OF ANNUAL TOTAL
CAPE	32	184	12 691	33,91
TRANSVAAL	28	269	10 817	28,9
NATAL	9	175	5 835	15,6
SUB-ANTARCTIC	3	7	3 033	8,1
MALAWI	6	154	1 886	5,0
ZIMBABWE	7	129	1 217	3,3
NAMIBIA	8	80	878	2,3
ORANGE FREE STATE	9	65	740	2,0
MOZAMBIQUE	1	47	317	0,8
MAURITIUS	1	1	11	0,03
<u>TOTALS</u>	104	482	37 425	100,00

TABLE 3

TOP 20 AMATEUR RINGERS OR RINGING GROUPS : 1989-1990

RINGERS	REGION	NO. OF BIRDS RINGED
GEORGE UNDERHILL	SOUTHWESTERN CAPE	3 460
DAVE JOHNSON	NATAL	3 200
JOHN BUNNING	TRANSVAAL	2 137
WILLIAM SCOTT	NATAL	1 957
FRANK DOUWES	TRANSVAAL	1 479
TED ROBSON	TRANSVAAL	1 456
SHONIE RAIJMAKERS	TRANSVAAL	1 265
KOBIE RAIJMAKERS	TRANSVAAL	989
MIKE AND TETÉ ROBERTS	MALAŴI	835
TONY TREE	ZIMBABWE & E. CAPE	835
DAWIE DE SWARDT	O.F.S. & TRANSVAAL	679
MARIUS VAN ZYL	TRANSVAAL	614
ROD BRABY	NAMIBIA	591
STEWART LANE	MALAŴI	535
WALTER NESER	TRANSVAAL	489
KOTIE HERHOLDT	NORTHERN CAPE	475
PAUL MARTIN	EASTERN CAPE	437
MIKE & LIZ FRASER	SOUTHWESTERN CAPE	434
MANFRED WALTNER	SOUTHWESTERN CAPE	363
JAN HOFMEYR	SOUTHWESTERN CAPE	343

TABLE 4

TWENTY MOST-RINGED BIRDS (EXCLUDING SEABIRDS) FOR THE PERIOD
JULY 1989-JUNE 1990

1989/90 RANK	SPECIES	88/89 RANK	NO. OF RINGERS	SINGLE RINGER MAXIMUM	TOTAL
1	EUROPEAN SWALLOW	1	18	1460	3707
2	CAPE WHITE-EYE	3	36	755	1976
3	MASKED WEAVER	2	34	609	1601
4	RED BISHOP	6	19	283	942
5	CAPE WEAVER	5	20	438	769
6	LS. STRIPED SWALLOW		9	705	734
7	LAUGHING DOVE	8	29	133	704
8	CAPE SPARROW	9	22	149	625
9	CURLEW SANDPIPER	7	7	288	520
10	BLACKEYED BULBUL	11	28	221	496
11	CAPE BULBUL	16	9	382	424
12	REDKNOBBED COOT		3	412	418
13	L. D.C. SUNBIRD		11	268	388
14	MALACHITE SUNBIRD		14	150	356
15	SOUTHERN POCHARD		3	332	334
16	WHITEBELLIED SUNBIRD		14	198	302
17	OLIVE THRUSH	14	25	107	294
18	REDBILLED TEAL		1	269	269
19	CAPE ROBIN	20	30	55	268
20	BLUE WAXBILL	12	14	126	268

The 20 ringers (including group leaders) with the highest tallies are listed in Table 3. These are the 'amateurs' (it is difficult to draw the line sometimes); in the ranks of the professionals the Sea Fisheries Research Institute (2 471), Port Elizabeth Museum (1 950), Marion Island (2 809) and Barberspan Ornithological Research Station (1 081) all achieved four figure totals.

Table 4 lists the 20 species (excluding seabirds) with the highest ringing totals. The European Swallow is still in the number 1 spot, albeit with a reduced total compared to the previous year. The Cape White-eye has edged into second place over Masked Weaver, and was caught by the greatest number of different ringers, attesting to its widespread distribution and susceptibility to mistnet capture. The Curlew Sandpiper is in position nine due to the sustained effort of the relatively small and scattered numbers of wader enthusiasts. The intrusion of the Coot and two species of ducks into this list reflects a good season for Keith Morgan and his staff at Barberspan.

TABLE 5

TOP TEN FREE-FLYING RAPTORS CAUGHT IN 1989-1990 RINGING YEAR

SPECIES	TOTAL RINGED	NUMBERS OF RINGERS	RINGER WITH HIGHEST TOTAL OF THIS SPECIES
STEPPE BUZZARD	115	8	TED ROBSON (80)
PALE C. GOSHAWK	65	6	KOTIE HERHOLDT (30)
LANNER FALCON	57	5	KOTIE HERHOLDT (38)
GREATER KESTREL	50	5	TOM ARCHIBALD (21)
ROCK KESTREL	47	11	ANT VAN ZYL (24)
YELLOWBILLED KITE	33	3	ANDREW HART (29)
LIZARD BUZZARD	32	3	TED ROBSON (20)
B.S. KITE	30	8	ADRIAN LOMBARD (10)
BLACK KITE	29	2	ANDREW HART (28)
JACKAL BUZZARD	29	8	MANFRED SCHMITT (14)

TABLE 6

MOST FREQUENTLY RECOVERED BIRDS IN THE 1989-1990
RINGING YEAR

SAFRING CODE	SPECIES NAME		TOTAL NUMBER
044	CAPE GANNET	MORUS CAPENSIS	66
002	JACKASS PENGUIN	SPHENISCUS DEMERSUS	26
298	SWIFT TERN	STERNA BERGII	18
080	WHITE STORK	CICONIA CICONIA	17
291	COMMON TERN	STERNA HIRUNDO	16
317	LAUGHING DOVE	STREPTOPELIA SENEGALENSIS	14
296	SANDWICH TERN	STERNA SANDVICENSIS	12
553	OLIVE THRUSH	TURDUS OLIVACEUS	10
013	S. GIANT PETREL	MACRONECTES GIGANTEUS	8
287	KELP GULL	LARUS DOMINICANUS	7
749	CAPE SUGARBIRD	PROMEROPS CAFER	7
803	MASKED WEAVER	PLOCEUS VELATUS	7
493	EUROPEAN SWALLOW	HIRUNDO RUSTICA	6
799	CAPE WEAVER	PLOCEUS CAPENSIS	6
047	W.B. CORMORANT	PHALACROCORAX CARBO	5
114	LANNER FALCON	FALCO BIARMICUS	5
581	CAPE ROBIN	COSSYPHA CAFFRA	5
775	CAPE WHITE-EYE	ZOSTEROPS CAPENSIS	5
048	CAPE CORMORANT	PHALACROCORAX CAPENSIS	4
392	REDFACED COLY	COLIUS INDICUS	4
545	BLACKEYED BULBUL	PYCNONOTUS BARBATUS	4

One important group of birds never figure in Table 4 (or its equivalent in earlier years) because, being at the top of the food chain, they are thin on the ground (or in the air, so to speak). Nevertheless, the devoted fraternity of ringers that specialize in their capture put as much effort into this task as other ringers and travel even further in pursuit of their quarry than do the wader fraternity. Table 5 lists the 10 most commonly caught raptors and the most successful raptor-catchers. It is to be hoped that the Bal-chatri brigade will be FOWE for this long-overdue recognition of their efforts. The totals in this table do not include chicks ringed in the nest or birds released by rehabilitation centres.

RECOVERIES

In the 12 month period July 1989 to June 1990, SAFRING received notification of 417 recoveries of 97 species; 63 of these (15,1%) involved foreign-ringed birds of 13 different species. 212 (50,8%) of the 417 recoveries were of seabirds. Table 6 lists the most frequently recovered birds of all species (including foreign birds) and represents the numbers actually reported by the general public. More than one third of these are seabirds and they account for over 62% of this subsample.

The following 7 birds, ringed in southern Africa were recovered elsewhere:

Cape Gannet *Morus capensis*

9 41489 (Nestling)

	17.02.85	Bird Is., Algoa Bay		
Controlled	15.01.90	Amsterdam Island	59 mths	4 583 km

(This individual had already been recorded off the coast of W. Australia, and has flown approximately halfway back).

Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi*

9 18523 (Adult)

	03.11.89	Sabe Sand G. R., Tvl.		
Trapped	16.03.90	Kaoma, Zambia	4 mths	1 309 km

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

BB 43773 (Juvenile)

	26.10.85	Port Alfred		
Trapped	00.10.89	L. Manzala, Egypt	48 mths	7 220 km

Knot *Calidris canutus*

4 70231 (Adult)

	16.11.85	Skeleton Coast, Namibia		
Controlled	09.08.89	Jastarnia, Poland	45 mths	8 264 km

4 84849 (Immature)

	04.03.73	Langebaan, Cape		
Controlled	22.04.90	Vendée, France	205 mths	9 124 km

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

BB67206 (Adult)

	06.01.87	Betty's Bay, Cape		
Controlled	21.05.90	Rostock, Germany	41 mths	9 831 km

European Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

AB76214 (Age unknown)

	27.03.89	Pretoria, Tvl.		
Dead	07.07.89	Bungay, England	4 mths	9 071 km

Respectable movements or noteworthy longevities were revealed by the following local recoveries:

Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*

G 18348 (Adult)

	19.01.89	Kalahari Gemsbok Pk		
Dead	06.12.89	Tarkastad Distr.	11 mths	925 km

Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*

646-03272 (Nestling)

	22.09.72	Harare, Zimbabwe		
Died	19.10.89	Seki, Zimbabwe	205 mths	27 km

(See letter on page 42, Safring News 19, 1990)

6 58702 (Immature)

	11.12.89	nr Grootfontein, Namibia		
Died	02.02.90	Middelburg Distr.	2 mths	1 528 km

Speckled Mousebird *Colius striatus*

4 48926 (Adult)

	24.01.82	Sabi, Transvaal		
Found sick	31.10.89	Sabi, Transvaal	93 mths	0 km

Olive Thrush *Turdus olivaceus*

4 79894 (Adult)

	28.08.88	Rustenburg Distr., Tvl.		
Dead	06.09.89	Pretoria, Tvl.	13 mths	92 km

Malachite Sunbird *Nectarinea famosa*

AB61157 (7-12 mths)

	23.07.89	Bloemfontein, O.F.S.		
Injured	04.01.90	Ficksburg Distr., O.F.S.	6 mths	149 km

LOCAL RECOVERY CENTRES

Over the years of handling incoming recoveries at SAFRING, I've formed the subjective impression that, all things considered, the chances of recoveries being reported are higher in some areas than in others. There are an enormous number of variables that can affect reporting rate, so while it is possible to show that ring recoveries are more likely to be reported from area x than from area y, the reasons for this may be complex and not easily determined. Nevertheless, where you live, (as well as what you ring) may perhaps influence the number of local recoveries that you receive.

To array some evidence, I have merged all recoveries reported by members of the public to the Zoo or to SAFRING for the ringing years 1987-1990, and sorted these by region and species. The Cape Province, Natal and Namibia have coastlines and therefore experience a proportion of ringed seabirds in their respective recovery totals. Table 7 provides the totals of recovery reports from each of eight regions and lists the numbers of these that were seabirds. The Cape Province gets ten times as many seabird recoveries as Natal, not really surprising in view of its long western and southern coastline and diversity of inshore species and breeding colonies. Namibia has a long coastline but much of it is closed and/or inaccessible to the general public.

The balance of recoveries for each region comprise the 'landbirds' (including freshwater species) and some new patterns begin to emerge. The percentage of these which have been reported from towns and cities or from rural areas are provided. By inspection there is probably no significant difference between the percentages for the Cape, Transvaal and Natal; Namibia and Zimbabwe show an opposite trend with rural recoveries predominating. In Namibia much of the ringing is in rural areas, rather than in towns and the same may be true for Zimbabwe where the incidence of foreign-ringed White Storks also boosts the rural recovery figures.

TABLE 7

DISTRIBUTION OF RECOVERIES REPORTED BY GENERAL PUBLIC
IN THE PERIOD JULY 1987 TO JUNE 1990

REGION	ALL RECORDS	SEABIRDS	LANDBIRDS	PERCENTAGE FROM	
				TOWNS	RURAL
CAPE PROVINCE	488	336	152	68	32
TRANSVAAL	156	-	156	77	23
NATAL	84	33	51	71	29
NAMIBIA	60	41	19	16	84
O.F.S.	38	-	38	53	47
ZIMBABWE	30	-	30	17	83
MALAWI	18	-	18	33	67
TRANSKEI	9	9	-	-	-

TABLE 8

NUMBERS OF RECOVERIES FROM BUILT-UP AREAS
FOR THE PERRIOD JULY 1987 TO JUNE 1990

AREA	RECOVERIES
WITWATERSRAND	77
CAPE TOWN	51
PRETORIA	22
BLOEMFONTEIN	19
DURBAN	13
PIETERMARITZBURG	9
PORT ELIZABETH	7
SECUNDA	7
SOMERSET WEST	7
VANDEBIJLPARK	7
STELLENBOSCH	5

However the majority of ringers live in built-up areas and a fair amount of local ringing takes place. How do the different population centres compare? Table 8 gives the breakdown, with hotspots listed in descending order. The Witwatersrand records come primarily from the area between Randburg and Benoni, 'Cape Town' includes the Peninsula and neighbouring Cape Flats, and 'Durban' includes Pinetown. To some extent the ranking of the centres does reflect the level of ringing effort, but that certainly is not the whole story. Does the life-style of the different communities play a role, or is it rather the numbers and inclinations of the domestic cats that is influencing the return rate?

You can make your own speculations and conclusions, but give a thought to how you might improve the reporting rate from your local area by publicising bird ringing and its objectives. I am aware of a case in which a ringed offering brought in by the cat was consigned to the dustbin because the houseowner was aware that the bird had been ringed locally and didn't think it worth reporting! In many more cases the rings on dead birds are not even noticed, let alone reported. Most people need only to be made aware of the potential value of every reported ring in order to show more interest. So tell your neighbours that if their cat brings in one of your ringed bird YOU want to be told. Who knows, they might be quietly burying their cats' prey to avoid a feared confrontation with you, and perhaps it wasn't one of your birds but a ringed palaeartic warbler from Czechoslovakia.