

# REPORTS, NOTES & LETTERS

## ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE 1992-1993 RINGING YEAR Ringing Effort

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The 1992-1993 ringing year has been an exciting and very busy one for the Ringing Unit. Many new names have been entered in the register of qualified ringers and their efforts have contributed substantially to the ringing totals achieved.

We are still a long way from achieving the spread of ringing stations that we would like to see, but real progress is being made in the western Transvaal and the southwestern Cape.

A debating point in the Ringing Unit over the past year has been on whether the total of over 51 000 birds ringed in the 1991-1992 ringing year would be equalled or surpassed. Thanks to those ringers who submitted completed schedules throughout the year it was possible to plot the ringing totals on a monthly basis. Figure 1 shows what happened. Les Underhill confidently predicted that the 1992-1993 line would not cross (fall below) the previous year's line, but was proved wrong. However, the lapse was shortlived. By the end of July it was evident that a total of 60 000 birds ringed might be achieved.

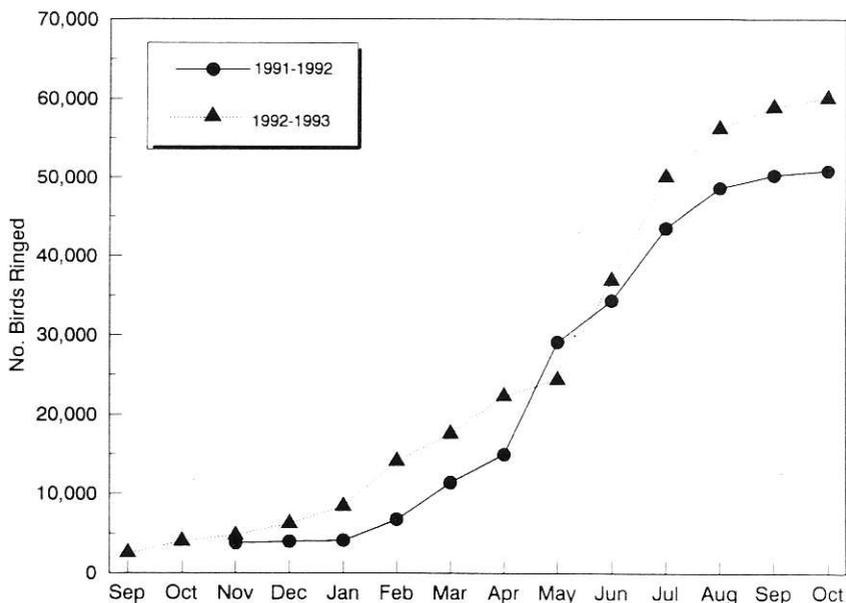


Fig 1. Number of birds ringed per month: 1991-1992 and 1992-1993 ringing years

**Table 1.** Comparison of regional ringing effort in the 1992 – 1993 ringing year

Region	No. of ringers returning schedules	No. of species ringed	No. of birds ringed	Percentage of annual total
Transvaal	38	324	25 165	41,7
Cape	35	202	20 055	33,2
Zimbabwe	5	162	3 399	5,6
Natal	8	161	3 345	5,5
Botswana	2	110	3 143	5,2
Orange Free State	7	102	1 500	2,5
Southern Ocean	4	8	1 334	2,2
Malawi	4	130	1 280	2,1
Namibia	8	82	1 227	2,0
Mauritius	[1]	[?]	[1 000]	[1,6]
Totals	111	484	60 448	100,0

Inevitably there are still a few returns outstanding; those from Mauritius are on their way and Carl Jones advised me telephonically that over 1 000 birds were ringed there.

At the time of going to press the ringing total for the year stands at 60 448 and we expect that the final total will exceed 62 000! Last year's total has climbed to 51 642 since the publication of the 1991-1992 report, so we are looking at an increase of some 20% in the ringing

effort in the review period.

We do not know what the all-time highest annual total of birds ringed in southern Africa was because when ringing peaked in the 1970's, only a combined three-year total was published. However, the single year maximum must have been approximately 70 000 birds ringed. We are now in striking distance of that total, and may pass it this year if the current momentum in ringing effort can be maintained.

**Table 2.** Top 20 amateur ringers or ringing groups in the 1992-1993 ringing year

Ringers	Region	No. of birds ringed
Ted Robson	Transvaal	9 207
George Underhill	Southwestern Cape	4 809
Bennie van den Brink	Botswana	1 937
Sam de Beer	Transvaal	1 903
Guy Bradley	Transvaal	1 762
Dave & Sally Johnson	Natal	1 747
Frank Douwes	Transvaal	1 309
Dries Nel	Transvaal	1 303
Tony Tree	Zimbabwe	1 215
Meyrick Bowker	Natal	1 206
Marc Herremans	Botswana	1 206
Dale Hanmer	Zimbabwe	1 171
William Scott	Transvaal	943
Steven Evans	Transvaal	907
Bob Medland	Malawi	828
John & Dave Dalziel	Zimbabwe	784
Colin Martin	Southwestern Cape	749
Kobie Raijmakers	Transvaal	733
C Cairncross	Transvaal	732
Dave Philip	Transvaal	701

In 1992-1993, 51 ringers submitted batches of completed schedules throughout the year, another 21 sent in all their returns in July, 22 in August, 11 in September, and nine in October. It will streamline our operations if all ringers would submit schedules as and when series or part-series of rings are used up.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of regional ringing effort. The increase in numbers of ringers in the Transvaal and

the Cape is in contrast to other areas which show little change. Perhaps this will be the last time some of these regional names will appear in a SAFRING report in view of the pending restructure of regional areas and boundaries.

Table 2 lists the top 20 land-based bird ringers or ringing groups. Ted Robson (a hard act to swallow) and George Underhill are still unassailable in 1st and 2nd place respectively.

**Table 3.** Twenty most-ringed land birds for the period July 1992 – June 1993

1992/93 Rank	Species	1991/92 Rank	No. of ringers	Maximum on one ringers no.	Total
1	European Swallow	1	27	8 770	11 790
2	Red Bishop	4	35	484	2 820
3	Masked Weaver	3	44	322	2 571
4	Cape White-eye	2	47	701	2 430
5	Cape Weaver	5	29	1 163	1 588
6	South African Cliff Swallow	-	9	990	1 455
7	Cape Sparrow	10	40	112	929
8	Laughing Dove	12	43	269	838
9	Blackeyed Bulbul	8	38	99	700
10	House Sparrow	-	32	186	694
11	Cape Sugarbird	9	6	388	682
12	Bronze Mannakin	13	8	433	677
13	Blue Waxbill	6	27	288	657
14	African Marsh Warbler	17	30	132	621
15	Little Stint	-	18	230	574
16	Curlew Sandpiper	11	12	114	543
17	Redbilled Quelea	-	24	127	494
18	Cape Bulbul	14	6	261	462
19	Malachite Sunbird	7	17	161	446
20	Olive Thrush	-	39	75	445

Below that there are several new names amongst the tried and trusted achievers.

It is also apparent that the goal posts have moved, and those aspiring to get their name into these ratings are going to have to accumulate 4-figure ringing totals in future (as predicted in last year's report). The seabird ringing groups operating on the offshore islands are already in this league: Rob Crawford and Bruce Dyer of the Sea Fisheries Research Institute with 4 716, Norbert Klages & Meredith Thornton with 2 500, and Yves Chesselet & Pete Bartlett with 1 738 birds ringed.

Table 3 reveals which birds were caught in largest numbers by those ringers using mist and zap nets. Five of these did not appear in last year's top 20, notably the Cliff Swallow, which is once again attracting the attention of some highveld ringers. The Cape White-eye was the species that appeared in the greatest number of schedules and this in spite of the fact that Zimbabwe and

Malawi ringers are not included because they catch only Yellow White-eyes. The high total of European Swallows ringed is once again due largely to the efforts of Ted Robson and his band of helpers.

Table 4 shows that the Bal-chartri brigade are still active despite petrol-price increases. The total ringed of these top 10 raptors is up by 85% on the previous year and far and away the highest total recorded in the four years reported since the 1989-1990 season. So some quite sterling effort has been put in by all the raptor ringers, who numbered 25 in the 1992-1993 ringing year.

### Recoveries

Ringers will have noted that both the issues of this volume of *Safring News* include a separate report of noteworthy recoveries received by the Unit, and it is intended to make such reports a permanent feature. Ringing reports such as this will henceforth contain recovery rate statistics to show trends.

**Table 4.** Top ten free-flying raptors caught in 1992-1993 ringing year

Species	Total ringed	No. of ringers	Ringer with highest total of this species
Pale Chanting Goshawk	146	10	Abrie Maritz (52)
Steppe Buzzard	127	9	Manfred Schmitt (31)
Black Shouldered Kite	99	10	Guy Bradley (39)
Jackal Buzzard	96	11	Manfred Schmitt (30)
Rock Kestrel	75	8	John Moorcroft (30)
Greater Kestrel	45	7	Guy Bradley (15)
Longcrested Eagle	41	3	Michael Raum (37)
Dark Chanting Goshawk	28	4	Michael Raum (16)
Yellowbilled Kite	25	1	Guy Bradley (25)
Lizzard Buzzard	19	3	Bruce Leslie (9)

The provisional total of recoveries (birds found sick or dying) and controls (birds alive and well, retrapped or resighted elsewhere than at the recovery site) for the period July 1992 to June 1993 is 498 records of 102 species. This figure includes 48 foreign-ringed birds of 11 species.

Table 5 lists the most frequently recovered species. As usual the list is dominated by seabirds. The high return for Wandering Albatrosses is boosted by

nine controls of Australian and French-ringed birds observed on Marion Island, and Marion-ringed birds observed in the Crozet Islands.

It is unlikely that the current increase in ringing effort will influence the recovery totals to any significant extent in the near future, though the current year total and the previous one are both above average for annual totals over the past decade. However, the factors influencing reporting rate are complex.

**Table 5.** Most frequently recovered species in the 1992-1993 ringing year

Safring code	Species name	Total no.	% Recov. rate	
044	Cape Gannet	<i>Morus capensis</i>	104	1,27
002	African Penguin	<i>Spheniscus demersus</i>	89	1,97
493	European Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	20	0,40
287	Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	19	2,24
007	Wandering Albatross	<i>Diomedea exulans</i>	16	0,22
048	Cape Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i>	13	1,86
047	White Br. Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	10	3,19
296	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	10	2,86
745	Redwinged Starling	<i>Onychognathus morio</i>	10	3,57
553	Olive Thrush	<i>Turdus olivaceus</i>	9	1,87
291	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	8	2,28
803	Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus velatus</i>	8	0,79
289	Hartlaub's Gull	<i>Larus hartlaubi</i>	7	3,35
317	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	7	1,49
368	Spotted Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo africanus</i>	7	5,91
799	Cape Weaver	<i>Ploceus capensis</i>	7	1,20
775	Cape White-eye	<i>Zosterops pallidus</i>	6	0,28
165	Pale Chanting Goshawk	<i>Melierax canorus</i>	5	2,48
581	Cape Robin	<i>Cossypha caffra</i>	5	1,23

Perhaps the best guide to what we might expect is provided by the recovery rate, given in the final column of Table 5 for each species listed therein. This figure is derived from the total of recoveries for each southern African-ringed species divided by the number of individuals of that species that have been ringed. Controls are not included in the recovery totals, neither are recoveries of foreign-ringed birds. Recovery rates are not always what one might expect for a given species.

The overall recovery rate for all SAFRING rings is 1%.

The surprisingly high rate of almost 6% for Spotted Eagle Owl is probably due to two related factors, one being the high mortality rate of ringed 'rehabilitated' young birds, the other the propensity of immature birds of this species (not only rehabilitated ones) to stand on roads at night and become traffic casualties.

## Retraps

Of the 110 ringers who submitted Schedule 1 forms, 23 also sent in Schedule 2 forms. These, (together with sundry records submitted telephonically throughout the ringing year) amount to 1 104 retraps for 1992-1993. Many of the new ringers are not yet in a position to submit retraps because of the 12-months that must elapse after ringing date before a retrap becomes reportable. The following ringers reported 25 or more retraps:

George Underhill	307
Frank Douwes	174
Dale Hanmer	102
Bob Medland	89
Alec & Cecilia Manson	60
Kobie Raijmakers	44
Marc Herremans	40
Stewart Lane	27
Dawie de Swardt	25
Mike & Liz Fraser	25

**Table 6.** Most commonly recaptured species in the 1992-1993 ringing year

Safring code	Species name	Total retraps	LS 10 <sup>1</sup> (mths)
803	Masked Weaver <i>Ploceus velatus</i>	99	98,9
799	Cape Weaver <i>Ploceus capensis</i>	88	66,9
775	Cape White-eye <i>Zosterops pallidus</i>	80	89,0
543	Cape Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus capensis</i>	49	92,7
839	Blue Waxbill * <i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i>	37	48,1
749	Cape Sugarbird <i>Promerops cafer</i>	32	55,1
766	Olive Sunbird * <i>Nectarinia olivacea</i>	30	79,7
581	Cape Robin <i>Cossypha caffra</i>	27	91,2
545	Blackeyed Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	22	102,3
751	Malachite Sunbird * <i>Nectarinia famosa</i>	22	73,3
317	Laughing Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	20	68,8

<sup>1</sup> Mean longest surviving 10 species in the SAFRING data set – see text.

Table 6 lists the most frequently retrapped birds. Those species marked with an asterisk still have less than 100 records in the data set; others, like Masked Weaver and Cape White-eye are represented by substantial numbers of records. The single oldest or longest surviving bird in any data set is always exciting, especially with the small passerines, but what percentage of birds actually achieve such ages? One only begins to find this out when 10 or more years of netting have been undertaken at the same site.

Long term netting sites are rare however, and there is the further problem that recaptures can only be made when birds are being ringed. If a ringing site is operated for a few years and then ringing operations are discontinued, the recapture periods are truncated. This, unfortunately, is what usually happens, and the SAFRING data bank has lots of 'young' data sets. These bias the data to the extent that they add to the total number of records and necessarily depress the mean age of the top 10 percent of the longest-surviving birds. To get some comparative indications of potential age achieved by a proportion of individuals (rather than a single individual) I have determined the mean elapsed time (in months) from ringing to retrap of the 10 longest surviving birds in the whole retrap data set for each of the species listed in Table 6. This is given in the final column, headed LS 10 (= longest surviving 10).

This enables the results of long-term studies to be used, wherever they occurred, and avoids the dilution that is imposed by the young and incomplete data sets. For those species marked with an asterisk (data sets totalling less than 100 records) the figure is obviously based on more than 10% of the available records.

The figures are interesting, especially with regard to differences or similarities between related pairs. The substantial difference between Masked Weaver and Cape Weaver may be influenced by the marked itinerancy of *capensis*, making it less subject to retrap at the original ringing site. The Blackeyed Bulbul appears to be the best survivor of the lot, with the Cape Bulbul not far behind. The figure for Cape Sugarbird is almost certainly too low and no doubt due to the fact that intensive ringing of this species only got underway some seven years ago. The Blue Waxbill has the lowest figure of all and this is in keeping with the results of the late Dave Skead's studies of waxbills in the Transvaal Bushveld (see *Ostrich* supplm. 11, 1975).

Meanwhile, we have some new species added to the data set with the current year's batch, and some with respectable survival times — most of these have come from Alec and Cecilia Manson, whose forest site in the Vumba is now of a very respectable long-term status. Notable amongst their retraps were the following (elapsed time in brackets): Yellowstreaked Bulbul (104), Stripeckeed Bulbul (146, 141, 90), Swynerton's Robin (66), Roberts's Prinia (49), Cape Batis (97), Yellow White-eye (109) and Redfaced Crimsonwing (65).

On the highveld, attention to Cliff Swallow colonies has yielded several retraps of 7-year-old birds and a Whiterumped Swift (97) is also noteworthy. Other non-passerines that deserve mention are a White Pelican (236), a Jackal Buzzard (214) and the first Damara Tern (96). The best wader retrap of the year was a Knot (94) at Langebaan.

As I have mentioned in previous reports, but it is worth reiterating, many of the

common bush birds are hardly, if ever, reported as recoveries, and retraps of ringed birds provide the **only** firm information on survival of such species. As Ian Rowley has pointed out in the Guest Editorial to this issue, we do need to gather basic information on our own indigenous birds. So please keep careful

records of your retraps and submit those which qualify. Also, wherever possible, try to ensure long term continuity of ringing at your site. If you have to move elsewhere, try to arrange for another ringer to carry on the ringing there. Mistnetting at long-term sites can be really exciting!

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*Safring News*, the biannual journal of the South African Bird Ringing Unit (SAFRING), has been in publication since 1972. The journal publishes articles reporting the results of ringing activities in southern Africa, reports on bird capture techniques, ageing and sexing guides to southern African birds, and book reviews. Many of these papers relate to migratory birds, and therefore their immediate interest transcends a purely southern African relevance. Papers in *Safring News* are included in *Wildlife Review* and similar services. Previously, *Safring News* has had a limited circulation, with copies being sent only to SAFRING ringers and to ringing scheme offices. In response to requests from researchers and institutions in many parts of the world, it has been decided to make *Safring News* available on subscription. Within southern Africa, the subscription rate for volume 23, 1994, has been set at R30 for individuals and R60 for institutions, including VAT.

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This change in distribution policy was approved by the SAFRING Steering Committee at its meeting in May 1993. The editorial policy will remain unchanged and *Safring News* will continue to publish the same mix of articles and news as in the past. The main implication for SAFRING ringers is that, with *Safring News* enjoying a wider circulation, papers in the journal will be more accessible and more widely read, enhancing its value as an outlet for publishing the results of your ringing activities.