

adults during the middle third of the nestling period.

8. Some species seem more prone to desertion if caught late in the day.

However, Kania notes that even for relatively common species (in Europe!) the knowledge of what is and what is not safe is inadequate. There is a need for further investigations into the impact of catching adults on their behaviour and breeding success. To meet this need EURING has initiated a project called SCAN (Safety of Catching Adults at the Nest). Ringers record the method of catching and releasing the bird, the time of day, the time taken to catch the bird, the duration of handling, the ambient temperature and weather, the nesting stage, and the outcome (nest deserted or not deserted).

SAFRING ringers whose projects involve the trapping of adults at the nest could follow the same protocol. Once sample sizes reach, say, 30 nests they

could report their results in *Safring News*. For example, Bradley (1993) provided guidelines for the safe catching of Greater Striped Swallows *Hirundo cucullata*. Ringers who make incidental observations on small numbers of nests could submit their data to SAFRING, where it will be curated until pooled sample sizes are adequate for publication.

In many studies of bird behaviour and breeding biology it is essential to catch the owners of a nest. Anyone initiating such a study in southern Africa could profitably study Kania's results for the most closely related European species.

REFERENCES

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- KANIA, W. 1989. Brood desertion by Great Tits *Parus major* caught at the nest. *Acta Ornithologica* 25: 77-105.
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LARS SVENSSON. 1992. *Identification Guide to European Passerines*. Fourth, revised and enlarged edition. Stockholm: Lars Svensson. 368 pp.

For the ringer in Europe, a copy of 'Svensson' is about as indispensable as ringing pliers. Since the first edition, published in 1970, with revisions in 1975, 1984 and now 1992, Lars Svensson has produced the definitive guide to the identification, ageing and sexing of 229 passerine species a ringer in Europe could conceivably (or inconceivably) encounter. Each edition is an expansion on the previous one, and takes into account the comments and criticisms he has received. The new

edition also deals, for the first time, with the recognition of subspecies.

What is of interest to SAFRING ringers? The two introductory chapters are particularly relevant. The most useful part of the first chapter deals with assorted measurements and how to take them. Do you know the correct procedure for measuring 'wing-span', 'depth of bill', 'width of bill', 'tarsus', 'toe' or 'claw'? Or how to determine the 'wing-formula'? It's all here, with good descriptions, tips on how to take the measurements more easily, and clear line drawings to illustrate the procedures. If ringers develop their own idiosyncratic ways of taking measure-

ments, then comparisons between observers are valueless.

The second chapter is the one we all ought to study and write an examination on. It deals with the principles for ageing and sexing birds. The section headings under ageing include: shape of the tail feathers, 'juvenile tail feathers tend to be narrower and the tips more pointed than adult feathers'; shape, wear and gloss of primary coverts; moult; skull ossification; tongue-marks; and colour of bare parts. Under sexing, there are sections on the shape of the cloacal region, incubation patches and sex-according-to-size. Svensson repeatedly makes the point that what works for one species is frequently not true of the next, and certainly what works in Europe will have to be treated with great caution in Africa. All the same, the principles cannot be vastly different, and we need to explore the extent to which they do apply to southern African species.

Most of the book is taken up with species-by-species accounts. Much of it is written in code – the moult of the Garden Warbler is described as: "Ad: sp, WC; (SC*WC); (SC, wp?). Young: sp, WC." Until you have learnt three pages of abbreviations off by heart, you cannot get the full benefit of the book. Even for the Palearctic migrants, SAFRING ringers might find the book disappointing. The emphasis is on age-

ing them in Europe until they head off in our direction, and then being able to distinguish the one-year old birds from adults on their return from Africa in 'spring'.

Even the information on the European Starling and the House Sparrow, both introduced into southern Africa, would need to be re-assessed to determine if it is applicable here. For the European Starling, we read that first year birds may be recognized by "yellow on tongue as late as November. Juvenile moults to spotted plumage from late June (England) or mid July (Fenno-Scandia) to mid autumn." Can we simply read May instead of November, December for June and January for July (and leave autumn as it is)?

Although Lars Svensson has examined 35 000 skins in 12 major museums, plus live birds in Sweden, Italy and Israel, he acknowledges his indebtedness to all those who have written up 'ageing and sexing guides'. An Afro-Svensson is a long-felt need whose time will ultimately come. In the meantime, we need to provide our Afro-Svensson-to-be with our knowledge and experience of how to age and sex our birds. The number of ageing and sexing guides published in *Safring News* to date is only 26. The opportunities are wide open.

Les Underhill

ANNOUNCEMENT

Natal Bird Club

NATIONAL RINGING WORKSHOP

7-9 October 1994

The Natal Bird Club is pleased to announce it will host a Bird Ringing Workshop at Bonamanzi Game Park in Zululand from Friday 7 October to Sunday 9 October 1994.

The workshop is intended for anyone interested in ringing, from the novice to the experienced ringer. The focus will be on the practical side of ringing, with delegates afforded the opportunity of ringing Zululand birds. Additionally, a number of workshops on ringing topics will be held. Details will be advised once presenters and topics have been confirmed. Should you have any suggestions for workshops or would be willing to conduct a workshop, please contact GORDON HOLTSHAUSEN, the workshop organiser.

The venue for the weekend will be Bonamanzi Game Park, a privately owned reserve in Zululand, 10 km from Hluhluwe Village and \pm 5 km from Lake St Lucia. The habitat is basically sand forest and plays host to a variety of species such as Green Coucal, African Broadbill, Lemonbreasted Canary,

Pinkthroated Twinspot, Grey Waxbill, Narina Trogon, Squaretailed Drongo, Yellowspotted Nicator, Bearded Robin, Yellowbreasted Bulbul, Bluemantled Flycatcher, Neergaard's Sunbird and Rudd's Apalis.

Bonamanzi is known for its 12 tree houses. These comprise two 2-bedded rooms upstairs, with a kitchen and bathroom downstairs. Additionally, the Lalapanzi Camp has 10 2-bedded bungalows (en suite) and a communal living/cooking area overlooking a dam.

The cost for the workshop will be R180,00 per person sharing (self catering) for the weekend. Please advise your accommodation requirements together with a R40,00 deposit, made payable to the Natal Bird Club.

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