

REPORTS

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE 1993-1994 RINGING YEAR

T B Oatley

Each year, it seems, is busier than the one before it. The period July 1993 to June 1994 has been an exciting and historic one for South Africa, and an eventful one for SAFRING. The SAOS thematic symposium on **Migration, dispersal and nomadism**, convened at Langebaan in September 1993, was preceded by a ringing workshop involving some 32 participants including several international visitors (see report in *Safring News* 22:74-75). The symposium itself was widely reported as a success, which was gratifying because the staff of the Avian Demography Unit and especially of SAFRING was actively involved in its organisation before, during and after the event.

The 1993-1994 ringing year has also been notable for a new dimension to bird ringing that has involved at least one third of the active ringers. The participation of those ringers in taking blood smears for the study of blood parasites from birds captured for ringing, began early in 1993 and has been in full swing during the review period (see report in *Safring News* 23:38-40). The number of new smears collected has now surpassed that previously catalogued for the whole Afrotropical region and the material will undoubtedly make a major contribution to our knowledge of blood parasites and their effects on our bird populations.

The enrolment of newly-qualified ringers continues unabated in South Africa, but there is an opposite trend in some of the countries to the north. All but one of the ringers in Malawi have departed from that territory and

Table 1. Comparison of regional ringing effort in the 1993-1994 ringing year.

Region	Number of ringers returning schedules	Number of species ringed	Number of birds ringed	Percentage of annual total
Cape	37	216	23 186	34,8
Transvaal	42	324	20 205	30,4
Botswana	2	94	11 393	17,1
Natal	10	168	3 373	5,1
Zimbabwe	6	153	3 008	4,5
Namibia	8	86	2 606	3,9
Orange Free State	6	100	1 034	1,6
Antarctic	2	8	886	1,3
Malawi	3	108	854	1,3
Totals	116	488	66 545	100,0

it is to be hoped that Zimbabwe will not suffer a similar decline. Overall, however, our gains in new ringers exceed our losses, and local regions are building up commendable networks of permanent ringing sites.

Ringing effort

Despite the enrolment of many new ringers over the past couple of years, only 116 ringers had submitted schedules for the 1993-1994 year by mid November. This is an increase of only five on the previous year and is disappointing, given that effort put into ringing is totally wasted if primary data is not

properly recorded and not timeously submitted to the Unit. Some established ringers as well as some of the 'new' ringers are guilty of failing to fulfil their obligations, and I hope that trainers of apprentice ringers will take note and impress on their charges that good record-keeping is as important as correct identification and good handling and ringing technique.

On the positive side, 51 ringers submitted schedules during the course of the ringing year and this total approximates the number of really active mistnetters who are using up ring series comparatively quickly.

Table 2. Top 20-ringers or ringing groups in the 1993-1994 ringing year.

Ringers	Region	No. of birds ringed
Bennie van den Brink	Botswana	10 371
George & Les Underhill	Southwestern Cape	4 581
Bruce Dyer & Rob Crawford	Offshore islands	3 569
Dries Nel	Transvaal	2 974
Norbert Klages & group	Offshore islands	2 712
Sam de Beer	Transvaal	2 408
Dave & Sally Johnson	Natal	2 163
Monika Pofertl	Transvaal	2 158
Tygerberg Group	Southwestern Cape	1 480
Frank & Maggie Douwes	Transvaal	1 459
Tommy Hall	Namibia	1 449
Colin Martin	Southwestern Cape	1 430
Jo Johnson	Southwestern Cape	1 409
Pete Bartlett & Yves Chesselet	Namibian offshore islands	1 337
Kobie Rajmakers	Transvaal	1 226
John & Dave Dalziel	Zimbabwe	1 171
Marc Herremans	Botswana	1 022
Dale Hanmer & Bill Chadder	Zimbabwe	1 019
Mark Anderson	Northern Cape	963
Henk Bouwman	Transvaal	921

Submitted schedules reveal a total of 66 545 birds ringed, not up to the 70 000 mark, but 10% up on the 1992-1993 total. Table 1 provides a breakdown of regional ringing effort, still in the old format of four South African provinces, but for the last time. It will be interesting to see the distribution of ringers in the nine provinces of the New South Africa, but there seems little doubt that

Northwest Province and Western Cape will top future regional ringing totals on present showing.

Table 2 lists the Top 20 ringers (or ringing groups submitting returns under a single ringer's number). This year I have included the hardworking professional groups that ring seabirds on the offshore islands – throughout

Table 3. Most-ringed birds for the period July 1993 – June 1994.

1993-94 Rank	Species	1992-93 Rank	Total
Landbirds			
1	European Swallow	1	10 376
2	Red Bishop	2	4 402
3	Masked Weaver	3	3 967
4	Cape White-eye	4	3 419
5	Cape Weaver	5	2 513
6	Redbilled Quelea	17	1 357
7	Laughing Dove	8	1 296
8	Cape Sparrow	7	1 132
9	Blue Waxbill	13	977
10	Sociable Weaver	-	780
11	South African Cliff Swallow	6	646
12	African Marsh Warbler	14	644
13	Cape Robin	-	605
14	Cape Sugarbird	11	600
15	House Sparrow	10	592
16	Blackeyed Bulbul	9	567
17	Common Waxbill	-	553
18	Cape Bulbul	18	519
19	Redeyed Bulbul	-	476
20	Olive Thrush	20	474
Seabirds			
1	Cape Gannet	1	5 149
2	African Penguin	2	2 232
3	Swift Tern	4	1 900
4	Wandering Albatross	3	485

the year in two out of three cases. Bernie van den Brink and his three compatriots from the Netherlands head the log following their very successful swallow-ringing expedition to Botswana in December-January. Dries Nel has more than doubled his previous year's total, and Monika Poferl is the leading lady.

Table 3 lists the birds most commonly caught by those listed in Table 2, the Top 20 terrestrial birds and the seabirds that fall within the same range of ringing totals. The list of land birds is similar to that of last year, with the first five species unchanged. The Redbilled Quelea has jumped from 17th to 6th place and the Blue Waxbill from 13th to 9th. Four species in this year's list that did not feature in the 1992-1993 Top 20 are the Sociable Weaver, Cape Robin, Common Waxbill and Redeyed Bulbul. The appearance of the Sociable Weaver in slot 10 is due to the efforts of Mark Anderson and Deon du Plessis in the northern Cape, whilst the Cape Robin, which is usually just outside the Top 20, is in slot 13 largely due to Jo Johnson who caught an incredible total of 180 of these birds at his ringing site at Koeberg Nature Reserve. A species which did not qualify for

the Top 20 but is deserving of mention is the Yellow Wagtail, 388 having been caught and ringed this year at a Zimbabwe reedbed roost by John and Dave Dalziel, a commendable single species effort. Similarly, Paul Martin deserves mention for ringing all of the Whitebreasted Comorants (292) and 233 of the 329 Kelp Gulls in this year's totals.

The other group of birds with a devoted following of ringers are the raptors. Their capture is necessarily much more effort-intensive and they are not caught in numbers large enough to make the Top 20, though this year the Pale Chanting Goshawk with 410 birds ringed (20 of which were chicks) narrowly missed inclusion at position 22. Table 4 lists the Top 10 free-flying birds raptors caught by means of Balchatri traps (birds handled by rehabilitation centres are not included in the totals). Although only five ringers are individually mentioned for scooping maximum numbers of the Top 10 birds listed, many others have put in a lot of mileage and dedication to catching these birds, as is apparent from the numbers of ringers who have contributed to the individual species totals.

Table 4. Top ten free-flying raptors caught in 1993-1994 ringing year.

Species	Total ringed	No. of ringers	Ringer with highest total of this species
Pale Chanting Goshawk	390	13	Abrie Maritz (116)
Steppe Buzzard	150	14	Manfred Schmitt (35)
Jackal Buzzard	116	12	Manfred Schmitt (35)
Rock Kestrel	110	13	Albert Schultz (42)
Black Shouldered Kite	104	11	Michael Raum (37)
Spotted Eagle Owl	40	15	Michael Raum (12)
Greater Kestrel	39	13	Abrie Maritz (8)
Dark Chanting Goshawk	28	3	Ted Robson (19)
Pygmy Falcon	27	2	Abrie Maritz (25)
Blackbreasted Snake Eagle	23	6	Ted Robson (11)

Table 5. Most frequently recovered species in the 1993-1994 ringing year.

Species name	Total recoveries
Cape Gannet	115
African Penguin	88
Swift Tern	28
Cape Weaver	15
Common Tern	13
European Swallow	13
Redwinged Starling	11
White Stork	10
Kelp Gull	9
Cape White-eye	9
Olive Thrush	8
Masked Weaver	7
Cape Cormorant	6
Pale Chanting Goshawk	6
Cape Bulbul	6
White Br. Cormorant	5
Rock Kestrel	5
Laughing Dove	5
Cape Robin	5

Recoveries

Table 5 lists the species for which recoveries were most frequently reported by members of the general public, and so the totals include foreign-ringed palearctic species. Over half of these are non-passerines, and seabirds predominate as usual. The total number of recoveries reported in the 1993-1994 ringing year was 486 birds of 98 species, including 35 foreign-ringed birds of 10 species. Although the grand total is down on the previous year's 498 recoveries, this is accounted for by the fewer foreign recoveries (48 in the previous ringing year) so the total of recoveries of SAFRING rings is 451 for this year as against 450 for the previous year. For the period 1985-1986 to 1989-1990 the

recoveries of local rings ranged from 354 to 433 and averaged 380 per year, so recoveries do seem to be on the increase.

Retraps

The most frequently 'retrapped' species is the African Penguin, which is not surprising, considering that you can walk up to a nesting bird and read off the band number without even the aid of binoculars. Records pour in throughout the year from all those who frequently fraternise with penguins. The rest of us don't have it so easy. Nevertheless, 18 ringers have submitted 10 or more reportable retraps for 1993-1994 and are listed in Table 6. This data set grows in value every year, and each annual set brings in new survival records for species that are seldom or as yet never recovered.

Table 6. Ringers reporting 10 or more retraps.

Ringer	No. of retraps
George Underhill	370
Frank Douwes	149
Dale Hanmer	117
Dave Johnson	97
Bob Medland	69
Dries Nel	53
Sam de Beer	51
Marc Herremans	45
Colin Martin	42
Alec Manson	32
Stewart Lane	24
Monika Poferl	22
Tony Tree	21
Mike Fraser	14
Stuart Mclean	13
John Bunning	11
Adrian Craig	11
Dawie de Swardt	10