

## Conclusion

Les Underhill spoke on future projects and then Aldo Berruti led the meeting into the feedback session. Steve Piper started off by giving a summary of events during the workshop. Aldo then led the discussions that followed.

A show of hands indicated that most of the ringers were from Natal and the Transvaal, with other ringers coming from as far as Namibia. About 40% of the attendees were novices.

Everybody felt that the workshop was a great success and there was very strong support for another to be held in 1995. Rick Nuttall responded with an offer to organise one in the Sandveld Nature Reserve near Bloemhof.

There was a suggestion for ringers to give short formal presentations on their projects and posters. A vote showed that the attendees were in favour of the current balance of techniques versus formal presentations.

There was also a suggestion to establish a formal programme to allow both ringers and novices to watch other ringers at work at their

ringing stations. It was recommended that novices be allowed the opportunity to do practical ringing with ringers during the workshop.

Techniques used by ringers should be published in *Safring News* and notes on ringing techniques and equipment design should be brought to the next meeting to be handed to interested ringers. The Wesvaal Bird Club's set of ringing instructions is being updated and will soon be available to learner ringers.

At the end of the discussion there was a request to SAFRING to enhance feedback on retraps. This would also include some form of interpretation, although Aldo Berruti felt that time may be a restraint.

Thus ended the first, and definitely not the last, ringing workshop. A couple of ringers had to leave, while many stayed on for another night to enjoy the birds and peace offered by Bonamanzi.

Gordon Holtshausen must again be thanked for a splendid weekend, well organised and full of events and activities to please everyone.

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## RINGING IN THE POTHEFSTROOM AREA

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### Introduction

With about 80 members, the Wesvaal Bird Club does not rate as a very big bird club, but it is a very active bird club. The club is not very old either, but it has a very solid foundation, based on the enjoyment of birds, the conservation of birds and the study of birds. Although a lot of time is spent bird-

watching, members are also encouraged to work on other bird related projects. The club was very active during the South African Bird Atlas Project. Their efforts were mainly centred in the areas west of Potchefstroom and vast tracts of the western Transvaal, northern Cape and Kalahari were atlased by members of the club.

As the Atlas Project went into its final stages, members realised that a new activity will have to be found to take the place of the Atlas. The Wesvaal Bird Club started a ringing programme in 1991 when Sam de Beer started his C-permit training under the Raijmakers brothers in Vanderbijl Park.

## The Beginning

It was realised then that there was very little material available for the prospective ringer to learn from. Everything regarding ringing was centred around the efforts of the Wits Bird Club and the birder out in the sticks who wanted to become a ringer had to travel very long distances to attend ringing sessions and to do the ringing exams. They also had to meet a certain set of requirements to get an A-Permit. When William Scott arrived in Potchefstroom from Natal with an A-permit, things really got going. There were several birders who wanted to do ringing, but they had no notes or anything from which to learn the theory of ringing. The Zoology Department of Potchefstroom University for CHE realised the potential of ringing for post graduate studies and it was not long before a short course in Bird Ringing was presented at the University. The notes for this course were compiled from pirated information and practical experience by William Scott and Sam de Beer and the course was presented by them, with help and practical demonstrations by Kobie and Shonie Raijmakers.

From this weekend course in the basics of ringing about 10 prospective ringers came to the fore. After a meeting between ringers in the Transvaal, Transvaal Nature Conservation officials, members of the Wits Bird Club ringing unit and SAFRING officials, it was decided that training and examining of C-permit holders will be done on local bird club level and that more than two A-permit ringers must train and test a C-permit holder before a recommendation for an A-permit will be sent to both Transvaal Nature Conservation and SAFRING. These C-permit ringers worked very hard and after another year, there were 10 A-permit ringers in the area.

The 1991-1992 season saw 1½ ringers ringing 2 543 birds in the region. A total of 5 994 birds out of 183 species were ringed by 10 ringers during the 1992-1993 ringing season and during the 1993-1994 season a total of 11 030 birds from 206 species were

ringed by 12 ringers. At present there are 11 A-permit and five C-permit holders in the club, with three A-permit ringers who have left the region and two who are not ringing with their own rings. The ringers who left will keep on ringing and will also train new ringers in a new region.

## Training

The Wesvaal way of training prospective ringers is quite simple. A-permit ringers promote ringing and make contact with birdwatchers or university students who are interested in bird ringing. Interested people are invited on a ringing trip with an A-permit ringer and shown what it is all about. If this person wants to go on, he/she is first given the set of notes to work through and then a C-permit is obtained from the Provincial Administration. This apprentice ringer is then taken out on ringing trips as often as possible.

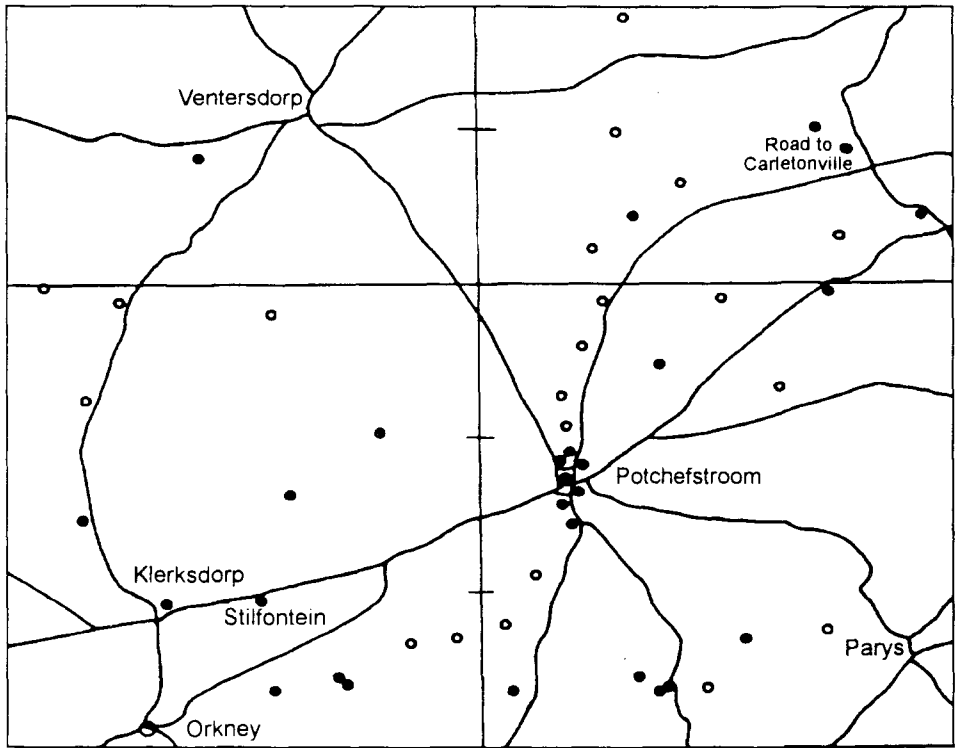
The set of notes is partly in Afrikaans and partly in English. Topics discussed in the notes are: Introduction to bird capture and ringing, Ethics, Equipment, Siting of nets, Handling and erection of nets, Removal of birds, Handling and storage, Identification, Anatomy, Processing, Moulting, Release of birds, Instructions to ringers for the completion of SAFRING Schedule 1 forms, Other information and the Conclusion. The notes were written in understandable language and are very user-friendly.

An apprentice is taken out and taught how to select ringing sites, how to erect nets, how to take birds out of nets, how to take birds out of the bags, how to ring the birds, how to measure them and how to release them. Other than the technical things he/she has to learn, bird identification is taught, as well as the ethics and right attitude towards birds and bird ringing. The A-permit ringer is expected to be with the C-permit holder all the time and to teach him or her through example and by allowing the students to do things by themselves. The C-permit ringer is not the A-permit ringer's servant or skivvey! A C-

permit ringer is expected to ring a minimum of 500 birds and 50 different species, and to ring with at least five other A-permit ringers, one of which should be from outside the Wesvaal fraternity. As the training process goes on, C-permit ringers are expected to do more and more on their own, and they are allowed to work more independently as time goes on, but still under supervision. If the C-permit ringer has reached his targets in numbers and species, can correctly identify birds, erect nets, take birds out of the nets and process them without injury or stress, he or she may ask the A-permit holder to recommend him for an A-permit. This can only be done if two or more qualified ringers are satisfied with the student's skills and attitude. If, according to any qualified ringer,

the student is not ready, the ringer is informed and immediate action is taken to rectify the particular problem. We have had C-ringers whose numbers were close to a 1 000 birds, but their identification skills were not up to standard, and they had to attend an ID course and satisfy the A-permit ringers before they were allowed to go on. The same happened to C-permit ringers who took too much time to take the birds out of the nets and to process them. Only when the A-permit holders are satisfied can the ringer's C-permit be replaced with an A-permit.

The club also organises ringing weekends to places where interesting birds can be caught. This is done to promote ringing, to expose both A and C-permit ringers to new species,



**Figure 1.** Ringing sites in the Wesvaal Bird Club region: ● = existing ringing sites ○ = proposed ringing sites

to expose the C-permit ringer to other ringers' techniques and to have a good time. Weekend camps were held in the Kalahari, at Vaalkop Dam in the northern Transvaal and in the far western Transvaal.

Ringers and apprentices from other regions are always invited to join the Wesvaal group, and C-permit holders from Middelburg, Leeupoort and Johannesburg have joined us in the past. More than a thousand birds can easily be ringed on a weekend and birders also get a thrill from seeing rare and beautiful birds from up close.

### **The ringing effort**

Different ringers have different thrills in ringing: some want to hit the high numbers, others are going for a high species list, some concentrate on raptors and others try to catch waders. Since Dr Henk Bouwman, of the University's Zoology Department, expects his post graduate students to obtain an A-permit, there are also some ringers who concentrate on only one species or only one group of birds.

However, for a ringing effort to be really successful and meaningful, it has been proved that the same sites must be visited as often as possible. While a C-permit ringer is in training, he is expected to identify at least one "good" ringing site, obtain permission to ring there and to keep on ringing at that site after he obtains his A-permit. One such site, identified by a C-permit ringer, has produced two Redchested Flufftails.

Every ringer is also expected to ring at the O P M Prozesky Bird Sanctuary every first Sunday of the month. This allows the ringers to keep in contact with each other, to do as much ringing as possible at the reserve and allows interested birders and members of the public to see what the ringers are doing. A couple of present and prospective ringers have been attracted to ringing by what they

saw on one of these Ringing Sundays at the O P M Prozesky Bird Sanctuary.

At this stage we have 27 ringing sites in the region that are frequently visited. These are marked by the dark spots on the map (see Figure 1). We aim to ring at each one of these sites at least once a month, and if that is not possible, at least once a quarter. The open circles are areas we have identified where we would like to get a ringing site going. It must also be borne in mind that a very active group of ringers, led by the Raijmakers brothers, are at present ringing just to the east of the region shown on the map.

The sites are located on the three main rivers in the area and at areas between them. We hope to pick up movement both up and downstream and between the streams, and to establish the home ranges and ranges of movement of certain bird species.

Although we have only been ringing for three years, we have already retrapped a Redbilled Firefinch more than 70 km downstream from its original ringing site and a Masked Weaver which had travelled 25 km between the sanctuary and the Vaal River. A Halfcollared Kingfisher was ringed north of Boskop Dam and picked up on a road 17 months later near Rustenburg, 90 km away. Cape White-eyes and Olive Thrushes have also proved to be highly mobile, in town and along the rivers.

### **Conclusion**

It is obvious that, since we are only in the initial stages of ringing, good results that can compare with the results from the southwestern Cape, will only be obtained later. But we are positive that these results will tell us a lot about the birds, their movements and their home ranges. In the meantime, we are training as many new ringers as possible and filling up the gaps in our proposed ringing sites.