

JOINT EDITORIAL

There is only one issue of Safring News for 1998, packed with interesting articles. The number of issues published in a year depends on you submitting material!

Last year saw the 50th anniversary of bird-ringing in southern Africa, which was marked, *inter alia*, by a ringing weekend at Bonamanzi. Although bird-ringing in southern Africa started in 1948, the SAFRING database extends back to 1908 when the first stork recovery from Europe was reported. 1999 is the 100th anniversary of scientific bird-ringing on an international scale. This will be celebrated in Helgoland in Germany later this year (see announcements).

The half-century turning point was particularly significant for SAFRING. As it reached this milestone, the Unit made its move into the information age with the development of a brand new computerised database. Ringers have, no doubt, already noted its benefits during the implementation of the first phase of the project. This drive into the electronic era has greatly facilitated the speedy turn-around time of routine report processing, such as that of recoveries and schedules.

Secondly, all the recoveries recorded in the Unit's data bank have been compiled into a single comprehensive dataset, in such a way that a record can now be accessed at the push of a button. Gradually, as more and more ringers come on-stream and submit data electronically, it will be possible to formulate increasingly elaborate 'queries', for example, all birds ringed at a specific site. It is envisaged that, eventually, this immensely powerful and flexible database will permit a large array of different searches and dataset manipulations.

Of immediate relevance to many ringers, is the program's ability, already available, to capture **all** retraps of one day or longer, electronically. This retrap data will bring SAFRING up to the levels now set by international standards of mark-recapture statistical modelling requirements. It will also ensure that the wealth of potential data available from ringing birds, can be captured electronically and put to good use in the future.

The first fruit of this exciting new tool has been the publication, in 1998, in commemoration of Safring's half-century, of the first in a new series of reviews. These have been planned in order to draw on the abundance of information, already contained in the large number of southern African datasets held in Safring's huge databank.

The first review, titled, *Review of ring recoveries of birds of prey in southern Africa: 1948-1998*; covered the diurnal and nocturnal birds of prey. The major part of the work is vetting the recovery data, since errors were introduced in the 1950s and 1960s data. This means that every record (ringing and recovery parts) needs to be checked by finding the record in the files, checking each field and then making the corrections on the computer. A tedious process! This year we will be publishing a similar review of the recoveries of waterbirds (including the waders), in time for the *Bonn Convention for Migratory Species* to be held in Cape Town later in 1999.

The South African economy has had a severe effect on ring prices during 1998. It is encouraging to hear of several ringers taking initiative to obtain sponsorships from local bird clubs or other businesses and organizations. If

you are struggling to finance as many rings as you would like to use, you need to find a sponsor!

At the I.O.C., the Ringing Organiser actively contributed to several round table discussion groups involving bird ringing, some designed with a specific focus, such as quelea control and European Swallows surveys. Participation and cooperation at an international forum such as this, further emphasises the place of bird ringing as a tool which can, and does, make a

real and practical contribution to areas such as environmental-monitoring, conservation and agriculture. Thus, with the drive and enthusiasm so clearly abounding in the ringing community, a committed sponsor's support, and now, the new database to back up the ringing effort, there is endless scope for the aims and ambitions of any ringer on any scale, large or small.

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