

commence, may lead to some of the plumage ambiguities noted above.

Further work needs to be done on the timing and occurrence of the various races in our waters, but the careful use of a suitable grey colour chart will be necessary for use on birds in the hand. Certainly, dark birds of the nominate race were present on Bird Island and, subsequently, a very pale bird was seen at Cape Recife, possibly relating to the South Shetlands form *gaini*.

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### IN PURSUIT OF MY LICENCE

**Sandra Dantu**

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"Need someone to help you with the walk-in traps, Mark? Ask Sandra, she's already offered to help," says Rod Braby, Nature Conservation Officer.

So there I was – in the company of a long-haired ex-hippie from Gauteng, in a beat-up old Landie, off to my first exposure to this disease called bird ringing.

At the Saltworks there were waders in the traps, but there was mud between us and them, and this mud was already oozing between my toes. The next obstacle was putting my hand into the trap and actually touching a bird! "Don't they bite," I squeaked.

The reward for extracting my first wader from a walk-in trap was a palm full of wader poo. The next deposit was on my clothes. So that's what a Curlew Sandpiper looks like when it's not enshrouded in Atlantic Ocean mist.

Watching Mark process that first group of waders, I felt the disease take hold. Suddenly it didn't matter about my dirty hands, feet and clothes. I wanted to learn this skill too. Little did I know what I was getting myself into ....

Ankle-deep in mud, knee-deep in sludgy salt crystals, rubber-duck trips on Walvis Bay lagoon, enduring the heat at the Spitzkoppe to be able to mistnet a few birds in the early morning and late afternoon. Dirty hands were the least of my problems! "Look Mark, a Pied Barbet – *EINA!*" "Careful, they bite."

With the end of my training almost in sight, we attended the Cintsa workshop. I then realised that my case of this disease is relatively mild. It can become terminal! At about the same time, I met James Harrison and developed a complication: NERCS. Yet more skills to learn, along with all the theory.

And now, many months down the line, I am a Stone Chat in SAFRING terms.

Thank you Mark.