

Editorial

This is a special issue of *Safing News*, covering the First National Ringing Workshop held at Witsand Nature Reserve, Northern Cape, in March 2000. The idea was born when Les Underhill, Director of the Avian Demography Unit, visited the reserve in 1999 and hundreds of birds were flying around. Planning started in the middle of 1999. Jeanene and Reinhardt Jessnitz, the reserve managers, were involved right from the start and handled the accommodation superbly. Les, Mark Anderson of Northern Cape Nature Conservation and I set up a programme for the training. Notices were sent out on the SABirdNet listserv and in local bird club newsletters.

This was the first course for training ringers in South Africa on a national basis rather than ringers getting together for a conference. Participants travelled from Swakopmund, Namibia, Kasane, northern Botswana, and from all the provinces of South Africa, except the Northern Province. Fifty people attended the workshop, about half being ringers and the rest trainees (from novices to about-to-qualify people).

During the week 2656 birds were ringed, an average of 53 birds per person. A highlight of the course was a trip to Ou Murasie Farm on the Orange River (near Groblershoop). The heavy rains had spoiled the vineyards and the farmer had left the fruit for the birds. There were hundreds of weavers, sparrows, white-eyes and other birds to be caught. A total of 648 birds were caught here. The high number of birds caught in and near Witsand (2003 birds) was due to ringing at colonies of Sociable Weavers and a roost of Red Bishops.

The general format of the week was to ring early in the morning and in the late afternoon. During the hot part of the day one or two lectures were given by ringers. In the evening the next day's ringing groups and locations were discussed. The group also went on several excursions to trap raptors and nocturnal birds. During the weekend more ringers arrived and the focus was on presentations and interactions more than on ringing. Most ringers managed to enter their ringing data onto computers that had been brought along. The week was a great success and participants started planning the next workshop.



The Sandgrouse Hide at Witsand Nature Reserve (picture by Mark Anderson).

Another highlight was the opening of the first Sandgrouse Hide in the world. Reinhardt constructed a pond at Witsand to attract the sandgrouse and other birds. The hide was built half underground so that the viewers inside have a ground-level view. Les Underhill declared the Sandgrouse Hide officially open at a special ceremony.

This issue of *Safring News* starts with the papers that were presented at Witsand. The papers have been grouped into broad themes. The first category is Localities, with six papers, starting with a description of Witsand itself. Abrie Maritz gave an excellent slide talk 'Kalahari insights' but no text would do his talk justice. The next section covers Bird Groups, from raptors to sunbirds. The last seven papers deal with various General issues, starting with a future vision of ringing. Finally there is a brief analysis of the ringing data.

Several techniques were demonstrated at the workshop. Rick Nuttall showed us his

pulley system to hoist nets to trap swallows roosting in trees. Stephanie Tyler and Herman and Zephné Bernitz showed us an effective way of furling mistnets they had learnt in Ngulia, Kenya. Rihann Geyser demonstrated the new flap trap which uses mealworm as bait. This trap will be described in the next issue of *Safring News*. Catching a Kori Bustard is described at the end of this issue.

Congratulations to Tracy Buchan and Nicky Bousefield from Botswana, and Hennie de Klerk from Vanderbijlpark who qualified as ringers after Witsand!

The draft manual was handed out to ringers and many useful comments were received. The ring-size guide now shows the number of primary feathers each species has, to help in determining primary moult.

Please visit Witsand to get retraps!

Dieter Oschadleus

