

## NUBRA 1974

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Introduction: The end of 1974 sees the end of NUBRA's first three-year period. It finds the Unit on the one hand well-consolidated with its procedures running smoothly and results being produced. On the other hand, the end of the year has brought changes. There is to be a complete change-over of permanent staff. A new Ringing Officer and new Secretary will be taking over from the beginning of 1975. Then there has also been a change of habitat. The Unit's offices have been uprooted from the Old Chemistry building and re-planted immediately next to the FitzPatrick Institute. This has placed the offices conveniently close to the eagle eye of the Hon. Director and to the library facilities of the Institute. The latter move has disrupted operations over the last few weeks. If ringers have not received as prompt service as usual during this period, they are asked to remain tolerant. Similarly further tolerance will be required in the New Year while the new staff settle in.

Administration: From 1 July 1973 to 30 June 1974, NUBRA processed 1344 recoveries and handled ringing data on 54837 birds. Compared to 1972/73, this represents a 16% increase in recoveries and a decrease of 25% in ringing activity. As ringers know, the Unit has been campaigning since its foundation for more quality, less quantity in ringing. Therefore it is interesting to look at the trends.

Of the recoveries, 624 were reported by the public, an 18% increase. It cannot be certain what caused this upsurge, but the Unit has been trying to publicize ringing via the S.A.B.C., in the Press and through Escom and the Railways. Perhaps more people are getting to hear about rings as a result of these efforts. But it may be remembered that the 1972/73 ringing total went up by 16%, so maybe the increase is attributable only to the fact that more birds were ringed. Perhaps results in 1974/75 will throw more light on the question.

The major contributing factor to the 22000 reduction in totals ringed was the ringing of 9000 fewer birds at Barberspan by the T.P.A. Apparently this was mainly due to unusually heavy rains dispersing waterfowl and reducing the Barberspan population. The remaining 13000 appear to arise from a general decrease in ringing effort by amateur ringers i.e. it is distributed over more than 25 individual ringers. The reduction is partly due to very low catches in certain projects such as those on penguins and swallows, because of changed circumstances or the non-development of ringable roosts. However it is probable that the main reason for the reduction is that ringers are concentrating more on project ringing and less on the random ringing of large numbers of birds. If this is so, this is definitely a move in the right direction. It should in time lead to more productive ringing by all ringers and enhance the status of ringing in southern Africa.

A further interesting point coming out of the totals list computerisation is to note that 62493 retraps were recorded during the 73/74 season. This total actually exceeds that of birds ringed. It results almost entirely from the intensive studies on waterfowl at Barberspan and on doves at Assesgaibosch (C.P.A.)

At both stations, the total retrapped is about twice that ringed.

Other points of interest involving the administration are:- NUBRA's services are currently available to about 103 ringers including professionals, amateurs and trainees. 16 consignments of rings and equipment were received from overseas firms. A total of 146 deliveries valued at R 2397.54 were made to ringers.

The Technical Subcommittee met only once during the year but resolved a number of important technical matters. These included the production of a new Ageing Code which came into force on 1 October 1974. New regulations on colour-marking were decided upon and the Subcommittee will recommend to the Steering Committee that the ring address be changed to 'Notify Verwittig Museum Pretoria'. If the Steering Committee approves this idea, the change will be gradual since stocks of 120000 rings with the Zoo Pretoria address will have to be used up. The Technical Subcommittee also investigated a W.B.C. proposal for a publicity campaign for the return of rings by the public, using posters in Post Offices and Police Stations. It is likely that such a campaign will be introduced at about the same time as the new ring address appears on the scene.

Research: The major achievement of 1974 has been the finalising of the backlog recovery computerisation. The task of checking and computerisation of all the recoveries made since the start of ringing in southern Africa in 1948, has been NUBRA's major non-routine activity for more than two years. At the end of 1973, the total of recoveries had risen to over 11000 partly due to the inclusion of all local recoveries and to the discovery of some old unprocessed ones buried in the files. Recently we have been preparing a computer file of the coordinates and names of most ringing localities and a few of the more frequent recovery localities. This will allow future recovery print-outs to include the name of the ringing locality which should make them easier to digest.

The real importance of the backlog computerisation is that it will produce a print-out of all the recoveries made of each species. Since the recovery is the most obvious research return item from ringing studies this will open the way for research into all those species for which there are reasonable numbers of recoveries. Life tables, movements and causes of mortality etc. can be worked out with comparative ease.

Although the backlog computerisation work is complete, NUBRA still intends to carry out two further checks of the data. Experience has shown that even with the most clued-up assistants, errors are still made at a rate of 2%. It is intended that the NUBRA staff will check the print-out for such errors and will eliminate duplicates. At the same time, a second print-out will be produced sorting on Ringers' Number. Incidentally this will show the usefulness of the Ringers' Number, which quite a few people have been inclined to joke at, prefacing their letters with comments like 'Ringer 007 reporting'. This print-out will write a list of each ringer's or ringing station's recoveries and will be circulated for final checking. Each ringer should have a more intimate knowledge and for that matter, a personal interest in the ringing details and sometimes, the recovery details, than can be expected of NUBRA. We therefore hope that a number of errors will be spotted or items of extra information be made available. The corrections will then be fed into the computer. The resultant print-out, given your cooperation, will then be in as good a condition as possible. We hope that it will then be used as a source of research material.

Very little personal research was carried out by the Ringing Officer during 1974. Projects on the Curlew Sandpiper and the Rock Pigeon are more or less completed and have reached the writing up stage.

Liaison: This is the third copy of Safring to be produced this year. The magazine continues to be well-received and we have had a number of enquiries about its availability overseas.

During 1974 the Ringing Officer was requested to attend a meeting of W.B.C. ringers in Johannesburg. The details of this meeting were reported in Safring 3(2):5. I think that these meetings are beneficial both to ringers and to NUBRA. Other ringing groups should consider following the W.B.C.'s example and request the attendance of the R.O. at such meetings. These requests should be sent in the first instance to the Hon. Director. On the above occasion the W.B.C. was asked to provide half the air-fare of the R.O. but in future it is likely that funds will be made available by NUBRA.

Apart from the above, the R.O. attended several meetings of the W.Cape Wader Ringing Group where until recently he held the auspicious post of Catering Manager. Lectures were given to the Cape Natural History Club and to the Kenilworth Church group. The R.O. assisted the C.P.A. in the annual trip to ring Cape Vulture chicks on the Potberg.

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#### STEEL FOR SANDGROUSE

The first ever recovery of a sandgouse Pterocles bicinctus was made recently in S.W.A.

R.310	Double-banded Sandgouse	5-04626	(J.Dixon)
Ad.♂	04.03.72	Ganab Waterhole, Namib Desert Park, SWA	23.06 S; 15.31 E
Shot	09.11.74	Portsmut Farm, SWA	23.11 S; 16.25 E

An alarming fact about this recovery was that the ring though only 2yrs. 8mths old, was very badly worn. One digit (the 2) was invisible and a groove had been worn half way across the ring at one point.

Conclusion: Ring sandgouse with 6.0mm Stainless Steel or 5.25mm Incoloy rings.