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As he mentioned in his article "SAFRING - how it all began" (Safring News 8 No 1, 1979), Hugh Ashton decided to hand over the Ringing Scheme during the year 1956-57. At first I was to run the actual ringing data side while Mr Heard, Treasurer of SABS dealt with the finances, maintained the stock of rings and issued them. As can be imagined this led to frustrated correspondence on both sides and soon all aspects of ringing, including finances, were transferred to Port Elizabeth.

After taking over the scheme, officially from the 1st July 1956 and operating it for some time, it seemed that the following three problems required to be solved, the first urgently:-

a) Each ringer had been following his personal fancy when submitting prime ringing data. Clearly if the scheme continued expanding as it has in the past it would become unwieldy and ultimately quite unworkable. Some ringers used foolscap sheets vertically, some horizontally; some put only one species on a sheet, others dozens, sometimes in numerical sequence but more often not. The worst forms were long thin strips of paper written on longways which defied any form of filing!

could think of. After some thought I decided to ask all ringers to use cards or pieces of paper measuring 5 x 3 inches, a standard filing card size in those pre-metric days. Suitable filing cabinets, paid for by SAOS were purchased at the same time allowed all the old style records were transcribed and the originals packed away.

b) It seemed wrong that amateur ringers had to pay for the rings they used. While the small rings were cheap enough the larger sizes were expensive. I therefore applied to CSIR for sufficient funds to cover the expenses of rings issued to amateurs i.e. not Government or Provincial bodies engaged in ringing. CSIR agreed and from 1958 onward granted funds to cover the issue of rings free.

c) The third difficulty was to get ringers to send in their schedules on time, or worse, to persuade them to send them in at all. It was most frustrating to get recoveries and not have the data to solve them. In Annual Reports to Council I outlined these difficulties and council therefore appointed a Ringing Sub-Committee consisting of Ernest Middlemiss, Bob Rand and myself; we all met in August 1967. As a result of this meeting Council issued a "Code of Practice" in the Ostrich 1958.

Unfortunately due to some oversight only half was published in the September issue, without any indication that it was to be continued. The second half appeared belatedly and rather disjointedly in the December issue. All this caused no little confusion so the whole Code was reprinted and sent to ringers

as a separate.

The Code, among other recommendations provided for the appointment of Ringing Organisers at each Bird Club. Their duty was to issue rings and see that ringers sent in their data promptly and accurately each month. They were also to check that correct ring sizes were used and that birds were not released away from their original ringing site.

In spite of the Code, non-submission of data continued and I became so frustrated that finally in 1961 I loaded the entire scheme into the back of the Land Rover - threw in a mattress for the children to play on and set off round some of the major ringing centres, to try and find as much missing data as possible. This was very successful but some data seemed to have disappeared for all time. This was disturbing as it meant that not only were some recoveries not traceable but any statistical work on rates of recovery etc. were suspect if the exact number of birds ringed originally was not known. At a rough estimate some 6 - 7% of original data were not sent in - not a high figure but a regrettable loss.

The scheme continued to grow: Annual numbers of birds ringed were as follows:

56/57	57/58	58/59	59/60	60/61	61/62
28 000	33 237	13 422	11 510	11 398	13 809
62/63	63/64	64/65	65/66	66/67	67/68
17 410	24 620	35 601	45 298	40 535	42 342

The number of birds ringed grew until 1957-8 when the Department of Entomology drastically reduced their Quelea-ringing programme. However, this did not greatly reduce the paper work because queleas had been ringed in vast numbers on the same date and at the same place. Hundreds could therefore be entered on one card. It was the garden ringers who used a new card for each bird who created the main bulk of ringing data.

With this vast amount of data accumulating, the compilation of Annual Reports became quite a problem especially Schedule "B" which listed the numbers of each species ringed. This could not be arrived at by simply adding the Club reports together as there were many ringers who did not belong to any Club. I appealed to Council to allow me to scrap schedule "B" but this they would not allow.

In order to reduce the work to manageable proportions I decided to ask CSIR for funds to put all the data on Hollerith cards. These had the advantage that the data on the card was typed across the top so that the Hollerith cards could act as a duplicate set which could be stored elsewhere in case of fire or other disaster. Furthermore the Hollerith cards could be stored by species so that if a research worker required data about one species, only a few cards had to be processed.

CSIR agreed and a start was made with the newest data and as time allowed we worked backwards to Hollerith the entire scheme. Annual Reports were thus speeded up especially the compilation of Schedule "B" which took twenty seconds once the cards had been delivered to the Hollerith people.

However as can be seen from the yearly totals the scheme grew and grew until the number of birds ringed in 1965 - it reached the enormous total of over 45 000. At the end of 1965 I left the museum and as I would in future not be attached to a Museum, University or similar institution it seemed the appropriate time to hand over to some larger organisation, properly funded and staffed. The entire scheme was therefore moved into the FitzPatrick Institute where it was run on a temporary basis until the organisation, as we know it today, could be formed.

Over the years many interesting recoveries came in. Perhaps the most rewarding was the young White Stork, ringed as a nestling near Bredasdorp and recovered in southern Tanzania. As a result of intensive ringing, migration patterns of birds such as Sacred Ibis, Quelea, Red-billed Teal, Cape Gannet, Cliff Swallow, Cape Vulture and Cattle Egret have been elucidated. These results amply justified the founding of the scheme and its continued existence.
