

3. An attractive card, in colour, worded to give the impression that the recipient has made no small contribution to Science (or "Flora and Fauna", which seems to enjoy some respect among the farmers I have met) should be sent to every person who sends in news of ringed birds, usually "found dead". It should be something he can hang on the wall and use as a "conversation piece", and should be accompanied by a copy of the "Bird Ringing" leaflet. Hopefully the latter is already being done.

I would be happy to contribute to such a project, as I am sure that the results would be well worth while. The present computer print-out is fine for the ringer but hardly designed to cause the average member of the public any wild excitement.

It has recently been suggested that funds could be made available for deserving projects - may I suggest that it is difficult to imagine a project more worthy of support than one designed to encourage a larger percentage return of recovery data, coupled with a greater awareness of birds among the public?

FRANK VON MALTITZ, 51 Eighth Street, Linden, 2195 JOHANNESBURG.

#### COLOUR RINGS

This exchange between Messrs Dowsett and Bunning should alert ringers to the hazards of using celluloid colour rings in environments receiving large amounts of bright sunshine. - Ed.

Dear Mr Bunning,

I was interested to read in Safring News, 1979, 8: 26-27, of your experience with colour rings. However I'm a bit worried that your perhaps rather sweeping suggestion that popular belief is mistaken, might encourage people to ignore the undoubted limitations of colour rings. There are certainly documented cases in which some rings have faded. Here I've had populations colour-ringed only for up to 27 months, but already some cases of fading have been noted. This applies to birds of relatively open situations

(no trouble so far with forest interior species), and has most affected the colour red. If you look at the central ring enclosed, you will see that the red has faded to something that might be mistaken for orange (or pink, which is a colour I avoid using for this reason). This example is from a Bronze Sunbird Nectarinia kilimensis after two years: I've had even worse cases with Mountain Yellow Warblers Chloropeta natalensis.

It may, of course, be that colour fastness varies between manufacturers, and that you were lucky with yours. My present stocks are from the British manufacturer Hughes, who have a good reputation. Tropical light, especially here at 7 000 ft. above sea level, is likely to be very hard on rings in the open. Fading is perhaps the exception rather than the rule (I've rather few cases among the 100 or so retraps to date), but it does occur and could be misleading. I think one would need to be especially careful if evaluating, for example, longevity data based upon birds that are only colour-ringed.

R.J. DOWSETT, Nyika National Park, Private Bag Chilinda,  
P.O. RUMPHI, Malawi.

P.S. My wife studied a population of the migratory European Marsh Warbler in Belgium over a period of four years. She had several rings turn pinkish, and found that all of her pink rings turned white!

Dear Mr Dowsett,

Many thanks for your letter of 2 April 1980. I am pleased that you found my article in Safring News of interest.

I must apologise to you, and to other readers of the article, if I rather misworded the article so that it read as a sweeping statement that colour rings do not fade. I had intended to imply that the colour ring in question had lasted extremely well considering it was 68 months old.

I am in full agreement with all the points you mention in your letter - and in fact have had some of my own colour rings (especially reds and yellows) which have faded even worse than the ones you enclosed with your letter.

I think, however, that you have brought to light quite an important point - that amateur researchers/ringers like myself should be completely sure of all the facts and careful of the way one words reports! For instance I once nearly went into print, having read many reports of Fiscal Shrikes Lanius collaris removing colour rings, to say that provided the split ring was sealed with acetone, removal did not occur. Fortunately, before putting pen to paper, I retrapped two Fiscals which had either lost or removed their colour rings!

Many thanks for pointing out this mistake to me.

L. JOHN BUNNING, 7 Coronation Court, 38 de Beer Street, Braamfontein,  
2001 JOHANNESBURG.

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