

NOTES AND NEWS

THE ORANGE FREE STATE RINGING SCENE IN 1983

R.A. Earlé

Since the late Dr. Koos Geldenhuys reported on the bird-orientated projects in the Orange Free State (Geldenhuys 1980), very little news has been forthcoming from this Province. With his sole efforts in the ringing of ducks, or lately the Spurwing Goose (Geldenhuys 1983), Koos kept the O.F.S. from going off the southern African ringing scene completely. Less than 0,1% of all the birds ringed in southern Africa in 1981/1982 were ringed in the O.F.S. by a person other than Koos - that is what I call hanging on by one's finger nails! Incidentally, this 0,1% was ringed by a non-Free State resident! The only other persons who did some ringing in the O.F.S., mainly in the 70's, were Lonnie and Mathilda Roos. With the lack of support, moral as well as physical, they stopped their operations a few years ago but never lost their ringing appetite.

In the latter part of 1982 I accepted the post of ornithologist at the National Museum to "do whatever you like as long as you enjoy it" in the Director's words. Immediately I applied for a ringing permit and was issued with a hunting licence, costing (the Museum) R25! Lonnie and Mathilda also applied and nearly six months later they were issued with, yes you guessed, a hunting licence for R25 and that was only for Lonnie. Mathilda had to be a learner or pay R25 more! (She received a MSc for her work on Red Bishops).

Having an unhealthy temper at times, I started writing letters (can't remember how many) to the Director of the O.F.S. Nature Conservation Department asking him to issue free ringing permits to *bona fide* birdringers. After several questions, such as "What is a *bona fide* ringer?", the final reply came, "If you ring birds you are hunting and for that you have to pay.". After another letter I was called in for a personal interview with the person responsible for permits. After a lengthy discussion it was agreed that I should lay before them reasons why I thought permits should be issued free to ringers so that they could be submitted to the Executive Committee of the Province for approval. With the help of Terry Oatley I did that on 2 August 1983 and we are still waiting at the time of writing this on 11 April 1984. Lonnie Roos again had to pay

R25 for the privilege of ringing birds in 1984. I was told to sit in my office and look at my data until they had decided what to do with my application!

At present there are only two ringers in the O.F.S. (counting Lonnie and Mathilda Roos as one - having only one permit), all of them in Bloemfontein, with Deon du Plessis in Ladybrand reaching competence very quickly and we are at present trying to buy him a hunting licence. In Bloemfontein we are mainly busy ringing Laughing Doves and other garden birds on a regular basis as well as leading most of the O.F.S.O.S.'s ringing outings for young enthusiasts in the district. After the long lay-off they are only now starting to get into gear and are looking at several possible proper ringing projects for concentrated ringing in the future.

At the National Museum where two ringers are based, Carel Zietsman, the botanist, is mostly colour-ringing fruit-eating birds in his study area at Glen Agricultural College. The species involved are the Redeyed Bulbul, Cape White-eye and Olive Thrush. However, several very interesting bird species were caught and ringed, for instance, Icterine Warblers - not occurring near the O.F.S. according to reference books. Ziets and I are also ringing Cape Sparrows in our gardens - one streetblock apart - with good success. In the 1982/1983 year 451 of these sparrows were ringed and, to date, four recoveries have been reported - with a maximum movement of 1,2 km. The other major activity we are doing together is ringing or, more correctly, trying to catch waders for ringing, at a farm dam at Glen just north of Bloemfontein. We invariably end up with a keep box full of Sand Martins and Whitethroated Swallows and very few waders.

Except for the above 'pleasure' ringing and showing the young enthusiasts what it is all about, my main project is ringing cliff Swallows at several colonies around Bloemfontein. Nearly 6 000 Cliff Swallows have already been ringed, mainly to study intercolony movements, and some interesting results are already coming to light but it is too early to let the cat out of the bag.

While we grin and bear with the policy of the O.F.S. Nature Conservation Department towards ringing at this stage, we hope that it will change in the future so that birdringing in the O.F.S. will benefit.

REFERENCES

Geldenhuis, J.N. 1980. Voelkundige navorsing in die Vrystaatse Afdeling Natuurbewaring. Safring News 9: 14-18.

Geldenhuys, J.N. & Blom, J.J. 1983. Trapping, ringing and colour-marking moulting Spurwinged Geese at Sterkfontein Dam, Harrismith. Safring News 12: 17-26.

Roy A. Earlé, National Museum, P.O. Box 266, BLOEMFONTEIN, 9300

(A copy of the above report was sent to the Director of Nature Conservation of the Orange Free State for comment and I am pleased to print his reply below Ed.)

Dear Mr. Oatley,

PERMITS FOR BIRD RINGING

Your letter of May 3rd refers.

As regards the matter under consideration, I have to point out that several legal actions are involved when capturing birds for ringing purposes:

- (a) Birds are classified as Protected Game, Ordinary Game and Wild Animals according to species. Formerly some species were even regarded as classified vermin, but we do not use the category any more for any animal species. For the capturing, killing or pursuit of any species of animal of the first two categories, either a permit (for protected species) or a licence (for ordinary species) is required. For the remaining wild animal category no special authorization is needed.
- (b) Certain methods of capturing wild animals are prohibited except under permit, several of which are commonly used to obtain birds for ringing or examination. Some of these are the use of nets, traps, snares and stupefying substances.

If your correspondent has certain fixed ideas about the terminology used for describing these actions in law, it certainly is his personal prerogative but the term "hunting" is merely used in the legislation to describe all the actions detailed above. As such then a bird ringer will have to "hunt" the birds, and what is more, make use of a "prohibited hunting method" to do so. I can see no way of circumventing this.