

I HATE THE GENERAL PUBLIC

D.B. Hanmer

A South African, on seeing me ring a Malachite Sunbird *Nectarinia famosa* - "What do you catch them with, quick lime?" The same man accused a perfectly good tree fern of being a cycad and of being Royal game in R.S.A.

An American, watching me extract 20 Redbacked Mannikins *Spermestes bicolor* - "Your aviaries must be very full."

A Nigerian - "Do you eat them?" That was a Blackcollared Barbet *Lybius torquatus* which was busy eating me.

An Australian, rushing up and ripping the net - "Let me help you to rescue that poor little thing." I wish thrushes did not scream quite so loudly while being extracted.

An Italian couple, after having (as I thought) broken the wings of a Bully Canary *Serinus sulphuratus* and torn a large hole in the net - "But we were sorry for it." I informed them that since Italians net, kill and eat millions of little birds, I was surprised that they were sorry for this one, which probably did little for International Relations. As it turned out, they had not broken its wings; odd torn bits of net were tying the wings together so that it could not fly.

A German vet, watching me ring a Dusky Flycatcher *Muscicapa adusta* - "Oh, that's what the nets are for. I thought they were illegal, so I have been letting all the birds out." So that is why I only brought in ten that day, instead of the usual 20-25 at that site.

The Zimbabwean mother of a seven year-old birthday party that had just run straight across a flower bed and into twelve square metres of net - "How dare you set traps where children play!" Fortunately the manager of that Botanical Garden was not sympathetic to her views, as he was not amused about the state of his flowers afterwards.

A French lady - "Oh, there is a little bird tied up in black wire over there." Fairly sensible that one, as she obviously had not tried to get it out.

Another South African, from Pretoria, who had gone to the trouble of fetching her scissors in order to chop a neat hole in the net round a Yellowbellied Sunbird *Nectarinia venusta* - "I searched and searched for you, but you were nowhere to be found and the bird was dying." Oh yes? I was six metres away, on the other side of a hedge, rescuing a Miombo Doublecollared Sunbird *Nectarinia manoensis* and had looked at the other net

only three minutes previously, at which time it had been untenanted.

Two English ladies, doubtless members of the Animal Rights Movement - "You are a very cruel person, we will report you." Who to, I wonder? At least they did not start tearing up the nets.

A Japanese gentleman - "Why are you pulling all its feathers out? It will be cold now." I wish doves did not shed feathers quite so easily.

Some Central European, found clutching a Blackeyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus* (which fortunately did survive) - "Nets like this are illegal ... Well, they are illegal in my country." I neglected to enquire which his country was, but I did point out the National Parks ranger who was zizzing on a bench four metres distant from the net, which disposed of the question of illegality.

My daughter Julia was tightening up a 12 m net which just happened to span a 0,3 m drainage ditch, when some Mittel Europeans enquired if it was a fishing net. I, coming up behind, remarked "flying fish" which reduced Julia to giggles and the tourists to blank incomprehension.

These are the highlights of a year of coping with the General Public while trying to catch sunbirds, which is supposed to be my project, although incidentally I trap everything else, including children and gardeners (plus wheelbarrows).

The main problem seems to be that Zimbabwean sunbirds can only be found in large numbers in Botanical Gardens and National Parks and even though I trap on Wednesdays and Thursdays there are usually far too many tourists trotting about. I did once ask a *Homo sapient* predator why an apparently intelligent person like himself should, on finding a bird in a net, automatically assume that a) the nets were illegal, b) that birds in nets had been caught by mistake and/or c) that the net-setter must have gone home for lunch and forgotten to rescue the catch. Also, d) why people could not mind their own business? Unfortunately the poor man was so overcome that he was unable to reply. Pity, I should like to know.

Of course, I have met hundreds of people who have asked sensible questions about ringing, its objectives and my results. Some of the most interested have been Africans from this and neighbouring countries and discussion with them has run the gamut of conservation practises and the reasons for conservation, so from that aspect, trapping in very public places has had some good effects.

Still, from my point of view, the depredations of the few reduce the possibility of trapping birds with which to educate the many and, of course, reduce the number of birds which I

can ring. I did have eight new nets a year ago, totalling 72 metres, but now the effective length is about half this and shortly I shall have to buy more mistnets, at vast expense, for the odd difficult people to chop up.

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From Russia, With Love: this is an appeal to all birders in southern Africa, particularly those who look at waders. We would be grateful if this message could be announced at bird club meetings, and published in regional club newsletters, etc.

Thank you.

Les Underhill and Ron Summers

COLOUR-DYES AND LEG FLAGS ON WADERS IN SPRING 1991

There were four groups of ornithologists in the Taimyr Peninsula of the former Soviet Union in the 1991 northern summer. This is the breeding area for many of the migrant waders that spend the northern winter in southern Africa. The four expeditions each made a special effort to colour-dye as many waders as possible on the breeding grounds before they started their southwards migration. Many birds were also marked with coloured leg flags - essentially a colour ring with a small extension to make it more conspicuous.

Please be on the lookout for these colour-dyed birds anywhere in southern Africa from about late August onwards until mid-summer, when the dyed plumage is likely to have moulted. Record the species and both the colour of the dye, and the part of the bird dyed: breast, underparts, undertail feathers, rump, underwing. The leg flags will, of course, last longer. Record left leg/right leg colour combinations.

Please make reports of these (and any other colour-marked) birds to Terry Oatley at SAFRING, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7700 (telephone 021-650-2421).

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