

My final take-home messages to the ringers of southern Africa are as follows:

1. Any ringing of wild birds in a natural environment is worthwhile.
2. There are more unstudied birds in southern Africa than there are bird ringers. Choose one near you and study it now!

REFERENCES

- Laycock, H.T.** 1979. Breeding biology of the Thickbilled Weaver. *Ostrich* 50: 70–82.
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Organising ringing groups

Rihann Geyser

345 Frederik Burger St, Erasmia, 0183; email: rfgeyser@netactive.co.za

Working or ringing as a group has many advantages in making the ringing effort more successful. This short article is a summary of how bird ringing is organized in the Pretoria Bird Club (PBC) and the benefits of working in ringing groups.

PRETORIA BIRD CLUB RINGING GROUP

A bird-ringing subcommittee in the Pretoria Bird Club was established in 1996. Madeleen van Loggerenberg was chosen as Secretary and Andrew Tucker as Treasurer.

Meetings are held every 2–3 months where matters are discussed such as:

1. Organizing ringing camps to far-off places such as St Lucia and Messina Nature Reserve.
2. Identifying new ringing localities and localities to be visited in and around Pretoria, in order to establish local bird movement in the long term. The PBC ringers are also training ringers in the Rustenburg Bird Club to establish a ringing group there and also investigate bird movements along the Magaliesberg Mountain range. This idea was sparked

when Madeleen retrapped a Black Sunbird in her garden in Orchards, Pretoria: the bird had been ringed at Stafford Farm, Rustenburg, by the late Frank Douwes.

3. Sorting out ringing related problems, such as trainee progress.
4. Discussing general issues concerning ringing, such as trapping methods for catching different bird species, and methods of sexing and aging birds.

In the past all ringers and trainees attended the meetings but since the group has grown it is now restricted to qualified ringers. Having 'adopted a trainee', the ringers then pass on what was discussed at the meeting to trainees.

Since the ringing effort depends largely on the cooperation of the public in reporting recoveries of ringed birds, talks on bird ringing are given to several groups and schools to make them more aware of this project.

All new ringers receive a letter to welcome them to the ringing group and inform them of what they should do and know in order to qualify. This is also to motivate all new trainees. A file is kept to record the trainees' progress in the form of progress reports and questionnaires. The training includes trapping birds on Balchatri traps and in flap traps.

BENEFITS OF RINGING GROUPS

1. Communication: It makes it easier for SAFRING to communicate to all ringers in a group at once by phoning the local coordinator who in return reports to the rest of the group during meetings or by telephone.
2. The coordinator of the group knows which sites, say in and around Pretoria, are being ringed at and which sites need to be ringed in order to make the sites representative.
3. It is safer to ring in groups when visiting some areas.
4. A list of all ringers' ring numbers makes it easier to look up retraps by simply looking up the ring number on the list to see to whom the ring belongs and phoning the relevant ringer for the details of the bird.
5. Sharing vehicles when going on camps makes it cheaper.
6. The more nets available the more birds may be ringed. When more ringers attend a camp they can spread over a wider area to ensure that the area is thoroughly covered.

This makes the effort more worthwhile.

7. Probably the most important aspect is sponsorship. It is easier to get sponsorship for a group than for an individual. We have managed to get a sponsor for one ringing year, thanks to Andrew Tucker. The money has helped to cover costs such as petrol, equipment and rings in addition to the sponsorship of R2500 per annum from the Pretoria Bird Club for rings. The money is divided between ringers for the effort they expended in ringing as a percentage of the total birds ringed by all ringers in the group. The more birds ringed by a ringer, the more money he or she gets.
8. It is great fun, and great camaraderie and a place where best friends meet!

I would like to make use of this opportunity to thank the Pretoria Bird Club for their annual contribution towards bird-ringing and Andrew Tucker for getting the sponsor to cover the deficit needed towards the ringing effort in PBC ringing group.

SAFRING record keeping

H. Dieter Oschadleus

*Avian Demography Unit, Department of Statistical Sciences, UCT,
Rondebosch, 7701; email: dieter@maths.uct.ac.za*

Record keeping is as important as trapping and ringing a bird. Sending electronic schedules rather than on paper, means that the data has much more value as it is available for analysis. The following is a brief description of the fields to be filled in. More details are available in the Ringer's Manual or by request. Summaries and initial details (i.e. total rings used and dates of first/last rings), which were part of the Schedule 1 form, should be excluded.

Each column or field is discussed in detail

below. The fields are listed in italics, and are listed in the required sequence (see Fig. 1).

Ring

Each record must have a complete ring number, not just the last two digits. The format of the ring number should have no hyphens, blanks or other characters, i.e. the prefix and number should be continuous. For example, 456001 rather than 4-56001, and BC23001 rather than BC 23001.