

Afring News

An electronic journal published by SAFRING, Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town



Afring News online accepts papers containing ringing information about birds. This includes interesting ringing trips, interesting captures, faunistic observations relating to ringing, and analyses of ringing data. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, and any other interesting or relevant material.



Editor: H. Dieter Oschadleus

UMZUMBE RIVER FLOODPLAIN AS A CONSTANT RINGING SITE

Andrew Pickles

Recommended citation format: Pickles A. 2012. Umzumbe River floodplain as a constant ringing site. Afring News 41:19-21

URL: http://safring.adu.org.za/afring_news_current.php

Published online: 29 August 2012

-ISSN 2222-341X -



UMZUMBE RIVER FLOODPLAIN AS A CONSTANT RINGING SITE

Andrew Pickles

E-mail: barbet@venturenet.co.za

Since I started ringing just over 10 years ago, I have been ringing at the Umzumbe River floodplain (fig. 4). In fact, my first session as a qualified ringer was at this location and has been a firm favourite ever since. The floodplain is a large area surrounded by hills on all sides except for the southern side which is bordered by the Umzumbe River. I have on occasion used 2 shelf Taiwanese nets on the river to catch waders. The hills on the other sides are planted with sugar cane except for one section which consists of indigenous coastal forest/bush. Most people will tell you that sugar cane is not a good habitat for birds, however, my ringing success here has proven otherwise. Wherever possible I try to use the drainage streams as fly-through zones for the birds, and this has proven successful, but nets erected between cane fields is also very productive.

To date I have ringed a total of 4474 birds of 117 species. This figure could easily increase by another 300 to 400 birds ringed by visiting ringers are included. My ringing site for the massive Barn Swallow roost is on the floodplain although it is about 900m from the roosting spot in the reedbed. This does account for a large number of the total birds ringed, with 2108 Barn Swallows being ringed here to date. The site has also accounted for two recaptures, one a bird ringed in England and another was a bird I ringed on the floodplain and recaptured just short of 2 years later.

The next most commonly ringed bird is the Yellow (Eastern Golden) Weaver (Fig. 1) with 274 birds being ringed, and many recaptures including longevity records for the species (http://weavers.adu.org.za/wow_age.php). As can be expected, the most common birds are definitely weavers with Spectacled being the third most ringed at 190 birds. Both adult and immature weavers are caught and this can prove interesting when people battle to

identify the immature birds, with Village, Thick-billed, and Cape also being caught, along with Fan-tailed Widowbird (145). Something that would not be expected here would be the Dark-backed (Forest) Weaver but a few have been caught in the middle of the sugarcane.



Figure 1. Yellow Weaver, adult male

Cape White-eyes also feature strongly, being ranked as the fifth most ringed species with 125 birds being caught. Another very common bird is the Sombre Greenbul with 89 birds being ringed, ranging from very young birds just having left the nest to adults. Four species of robins have been caught, surprisingly the most common is the Cape Robin-chat with 65 birds being caught, followed by the Red-capped (Natal) Robin-chat with 54 birds; the other two species are Brown Scrub-robin and White-browed Scrub-robin in descending order.

This habitat is possibly the best place on the KZN South Coast for warblers with no less than 11 species being ringed. Recently local birders have been joining in at this location and are now honing their warbler ID skills - they are all finding it much easier in the field now than before. The warbler list is as follows:



African Reed (African Marsh) Warbler	73
Little Rush (African Sedge) Warbler	55
Great Reed Warbler	41
Marsh (European Marsh) Warbler	27
Lesser Swamp (Cape Reed) Warbler	21
Dark-capped (Yellow) Warbler	9
Eurasian Reed Warbler	5
Sedge (European) Warbler	4
Willow Warbler	3
Knysna Warbler	1
Garden Warbler	1

As you can see it is “Warbler Heaven” and anyone interested in learning more about these little birds are welcome to join the ringing sessions. November to January is the best time but anytime from October to March can be productive. Other LBJs include Rufous-winged Cisticola (58 birds), Tawny-flanked Prinia (10), Neddicky (6), Rattling Cisticola (3), Croaking Cisticola (3), Red-faced Cisticola (2), Levillant’s Cisticola (2), Plain-backed Pipit (2), Grassveld Pipit (1 bird) and Buffy Pipit (1 bird).

Some other species have only produced 1 or 2 birds but these are wonderful to see and they are known to be in the area at all times. These include Little Bittern (Fig. 2), Red-backed Shrike, Red-faced Mousebird, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Southern Tchagra, Fiscal Flycatcher, Little Swift, Eurasian Nightjar, Fiery-necked Nightjar, Water Thick-knee, Harlequin Quail (KZN rarity), Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Three-banded Plover, Blacksmith Lapwing, Spotted Thrush (in winter at the forest edge), Grey Waxbill, Orange-breasted Waxbill (Fig. 3), Little Bee-eater, Malachite Kingfisher, Pygmy Kingfisher and Red-headed Quelea.

In addition, the area can produce some great birding with Crowned Cranes being seen early on most mornings, Red-chested Flufftails can be heard, and rarely Greater Flamingo can be seen on the river. Waterfowl are often seen flying overhead as are raptors in

the form of African Fish Eagle, Long-crested Eagle, Black Sparrowhawk and African Goshawk.

In closing here’s to the next 10 years of ringing at this site and an open invitation to anybody to join the ringing sessions at this, one of the special birding spots on the coast.



Figure 2. Little Bittern



Figure 3. Orange-breasted Waxbill



Figure 4. Umzumbe Floodplain ringing sites