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GARDEN BIRD RINGING

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It's now 25 years since I began regular ringing in our Grahamstown garden, and six years since I last reviewed the results (Craig 2007). As described previously, this is a conventional suburban garden, with many exotic plants, large trees at the fringes and still a front hedge of *Tecoma capensis*, rather than a wall with electric wires along the top. There is a single bird feeder, furnished with seed only, and two shallow birdbaths. No nest-boxes have been set up during this period; an owl box was quickly occupied by bees, which had to be removed by a bee-keeper. Apart from the *Tecoma*, there is a large *Schotia brachypetala* tree, a small patch of *Leonotis*, and a *Halleria lucida* shrub which provide natural sources of nectar.

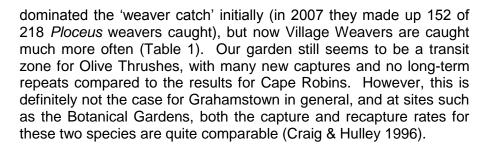
Several generations of dogs have been interested, or puzzled, spectators at the mist nets, but cats have always been discouraged from even visiting the garden. The birdlist now stands at 89 species, of which 53 have been ringed, although 11 of these are singletons. I have occasionally used clap traps for seed-eaters feeding on the ground below the bird feeder, and on one occasion caught seven juvenile Southern Grey-headed Sparrows at once. Baiting with beeswax attracted only Lesser Honeyguides at this site, and one colour-ringed individual was resignted over several weeks. Often I have set only a single 6-metre mist net, over a patch of lawn between the bird feeder and a birdbath, and I now routinely discard Laughing Doves. Table 1 lists the species for which > 5 birds have been ringed, and all those which have been recaptured or recovered.

Compared to my original report, there are now some notable longevity records. An Amethyst Sunbird, ringed as an adult male in full plumage, was caught by a neighbour's cat. There had been no recaptures since he was originally ringed – had he merely moved across the road, or had this bird been out of town during the interim? Another tantalizing mystery is a Cape Weaver, with a longevity record of at least 13 years. It was a male in full breeding plumage when first ringed, weighed exactly the same when recaptured, and must then have been no less than 15 years old.

Apart from these two records after > 10 years, four additional species have now been recaptured more than 1 year after ringing (Southern Puffback, Greater Double-collared Sunbird, Southern Masked Weaver and Bronze Mannikin). There was also a recovery of a Southern Boubou and a recapture of a Cape White-eye after > 5 years. Compared to the 2007 stock-taking, there have been only two further recoveries, but another 66 recaptures, which illustrates the value of ringing at the same site repeatedly.

No long-distance movements have been recorded. Three weaver species (Cape, Southern Masked and Spotted-backed) and two starlings (Common and Red-winged Starling) have been recaptured or found dead at other sites within the town. With only two birds ringed in the garden (and only seven in Grahamstown), it was a surprise to recapture one Black-backed Puffback in the Botanical Gardens. Two juvenile Olive Thrushes and a Cape Robin have been recovered elsewhere in town, apparently after colliding with vehicles.

Our garden has experienced some definite shifts in species occurrence. Fiscal Flycatchers were regular in the garden when we first moved here in 1980, but were then absent for about 20 years. Recently a pair has re-established a territory in this area. Greyheaded Bush-shrikes were initially categorised as winter visitors to this part of town, heard occasionally but seldom seen. Now they can be heard almost daily in our area, and sightings are quite frequent. Bronze Mannikins first appeared in the Grahamstown Botanical Gardens in 1995 (Craig 1995), and gradually spread through the town. Although I had seen them at a bird-feeder at a neighbour's house, they were not recorded regularly in our garden until we established a bird feeder, and the first Bronze Mannikins were captured here in 2010. Burchell's Coucal seems to be absent in dry periods, re-appearing during wetter years. Cape Weavers



Acknowledgements

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References

Craig, A. 1995. Bronze Mannikins in Grahamstown. Diaz Diary 23 (6): 15-16.

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Table 1. Numbers of birds ringed, recaptured and recovered at 3Florence Street, Grahamstown

Species	No	Recapt-	Recov-	Longest
	ringed	ured	ered	interval
Laughing Dove	20	2	2	5 y 0 m
Speckled Mousebird	151	26	2	3 y 2 m
Red-faced Mousebird	66	1		4 y 11 m
Brown-hooded Kingfisher	4	1		1 m
African Hoopoe	3	1		4 m
Black-collared Barbet	16			
Lesser Honeyguide	5	1		2 m
Fork-tailed Drongo	8			
Black-headed Oriole	10			
Dark-capped Bulbul	61	5		5 y 3 m
Olive Thrush	60	15	1	4 y 0 m
Cape Robin	22	6	2	5 y 10 m
Bar-throated Apalis	9	3		4 m
Neddicky	4	1		1 m
Cape Wagtail	7	1		3 m
Common Fiscal	34	9	1	3 y 0 m
Southern Boubou	5	2	2	5 y 7 m
Black-backed Puffback	2	1		2 y 5 m
Bokmakierie	5		1	2 m
Common Starling	24	1	1	1 y 1 m
Red-winged Starling	20	1	1	6 y 0 m
Southern D-c Sunbird	15			
Greater D-c Sunbird	31	1	1	1 y 1 m
Amethyst Sunbird	24	2	2	12 y 0 m
Cape White-eye	299	29	3	5 y 1 m
Southern G-h Sparrow	80	5	1	2 y 4 m
Spectacled Weaver	8	3		6 m
Cape Weaver	198	16	3	13 y 8 m
Spotted-backed Weaver	185	18	2	5 y 2 m
Southern Masked Weaver	10	2		1 y 6 m
Bronze Mannikin	48	2		1 y 1 m
Brimstone Canary	7			
Streaky-headed Seedeater	6			
Other species	21			
Total (53 species)	1483	154	23	13 y 8 m