

## LONGEVITY FROM RETRAPS

D.B. Hanmer

The ringing station at Nchalo, Malawi (1616S, 3455E) has been in operation since March 1974. By September 1981, nearly 20 000 birds had been handled and of these, about 30% were retraps. Many birds have been caught several times over one or two years, but a few, ringed between 1974 and 1977, are still being regularly caught. Many birds were ringed as immatures and were retrapped several times before they became fully mature, so that from a knowledge of the breeding seasons of the various species and of the plumage and soft-part colour changes with age, it is possible to calculate the approximate age of immatures or the minimum age of any bird when it was ringed.

The table lists 117 birds of 56 species, which are known to be over four years old. Only the oldest three birds of any species are given. Thirty-two of the birds listed were immatures of approximately-known age when ringed and many of the adults were known to be over one or over two years old when ringed. In the "age" column, the EURING code is used to indicate the approximate age when ringed, where 1 = pullus; 2 = fully grown, year of hatching quite unknown; 3 = hatched during calendar year of ringing; 4 = hatched before calendar year of ringing, exact year unknown; 5 = hatched during previous calendar year and 6 = hatched before previous calendar year, exact year unknown. Sex is given as M = male, F = female and the time elapsed between ringing and latest retrapping is given in the order

years-months-days. In the "known age" column, figures are given to the nearest six months.

Unless birds are recognisably immature when ringed, retraps reveal the minimum, rather than the actual, age attained, and the longevity is unknown while the bird is still alive. Ringing at Nchalo only started seven and a half years ago, so the maximum time which elapsed between ringing and latest retrapping cannot be longer than that and, in fact, there are only 32 birds which were retrapped more than six years after being ringed. However, when minimum age is calculated, 67 birds were over six years old. These include doves, a cuckoo, nightjars, a bee-eater, a swallow, bulbuls, warblers (Palaeartic and resident), flycatchers, shrikes, sunbirds, a sparrow, weavers, bishops, finches and canaries. Of these 38 were over seven years old and four weavers, a bishop, a sunbird and a warbler were over eight years. One weaver was over nine years old. This suggests that most small tropical lowland bush birds and small Palaeartic migrants, weighing 5-70g can live for at least six years.

Of the 78 birds whose sex was known, 48 were male. This is probably not a significant difference, but it is interesting to note that all three Black-eyed and Terrestrial Bulbuls, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Scarlet-chested Sunbirds and Spotted-backed Weavers which have survived longest were male, while the three longest lived Paradise Flycatchers were female.

Dowsett (1980) lists 52 birds recovered or retrapped in Zambia, which were ringed four or more years previously. Of these, 32

were small bush birds or small Palaearctic migrants of 26 species. The composition of the species list is similar to the Nchalo list, with a swift, a drongo, a babbler, bulbuls, robins, flycatchers, shrikes and a white-eye having reached over six years old.

Morant (1980, 1981) lists three swallows which lived over five years and one of these was over eight. Tree (1980) lists two doves and a warbler which lived over six years and Langley (1979) gives five white-eyes aged over eight years, while two bulbuls were recovered 10 years after they were ringed (Vernon & Ledger 1976). All this seems to bear out the suggestion that small birds can, if conditions are favourable, survive for a considerable number of years.

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TABLE

SPECIES	RING NO.	AGE/ SEX	FIRST RINGED	LAST RETRAPPED	TIME ELAPSED	KNOWN AGE
Mourning Dove <i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>	5-53196	6	02.08.77	24.08.81	4-00-22	> 5,5
Tambourine Dove <i>Turtur tympanistris</i>	4-35715	6M	26.05.76	21.06.80	4-00-26	> 5,5
Blue-spotted Wood Dove <i>Turtur afer</i>	4-35732	6	17.07.76	21.08.81	5-01-04	> 6,5
	4-35757	6	26.04.77	28.08.81	4-04-02	> 6
Emerald-spotted Wood Dove <i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>	4-35512	6	13.06.74	30.05.79	4-11-17	> 6,5
	4-35513	6	04.07.74	16.11.78	4-04-12	> 6
	4-35611	6	19.05.75	02.06.79	4-00-14	> 5,5
Diederik Cuckoo <i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>	4-35585	4M	01.02.75	23.03.80	5-01-22	> 6
	4-35690	3F	14.03.76	17.11.80	4-08-03	5
	2-96666	4F	24.04.74	02.04.78	3-11-08	> 5
Mozambique Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus fossii</i>	4-35720	6M	29.05.76	14.11.80	4-05-16	> 6
	4-35755	6M	07.04.77	24.08.81	4-04-17	> 6
Speckled Mousebird <i>Colius striatus</i>	4-47277	2	18.07.76	20.08.81	5-01-02	> 5,5
	4-27085	2	03.07.74	03.08.79	5-01-00	> 5,5
	4-27207	2	08.07.75	21.03.80	4-08-13	> 5

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SPECIES	RING NO.	AGE/ SEX	FIRST RINGED	LAST RETRAPPED	TIME ELAPSED	KNOWN AGE
Malachite Kingfisher <i>Alcedo cristata</i>						
	E-04046	6	19.08.75	30.08.81	6-00-11	> 7,5
Little Bee-eater <i>Merops pusillus</i>						
	E-04521	5	19.01.76	14.02.81	5-00-26	> 6
	E-04550	2	12.05.76	10.11.80	4-05-29	> 5
	E-04004	2	21.03.75	06.09.79	4-04-16	> 5
Greater Honeyguide <i>Indicator indicator</i>						
	2-96999	4	11.11.74	05.11.78	3-11-24	> 5
Wire-tailed Swallow <i>Hirundo smithii</i>						
	AA-52393	4F	24.09.81	02.09.81	5-11-08	> 7
Black-eyed Bulbul <i>Pyenonotus barbatus</i>						
	2-96837	2M	25.09.74	15.08.81	6-10-20	> 7,5
	2-96678	4M	27.04.74	24.11.80	6-06-27	> 7
	2-97024	2M	16.11.74	04.11.80	5-11-18	> 6,5
Terrestrial Bulbul <i>Phyllastrephus terrestris</i>						
	2-96748	4M	29.06.74	13.11.80	6-04-14	> 7
	2-96829	3M	23.09.74	08.12.80	6-02-15	6,5
	2-96625	4M	15.04.74	31.10.79	5-06-16	> 6,5
Sombre Bulbul <i>Andropadus importunus</i>						
	2-97025	3M	21.11.74	30.07.81	6-08-09	7
	2-96803	3F	30.07.74	12.01.81	6-05-13	7
	2-96914	4F	22.10.74	29.10.80	6-00-07	> 7
Natal Robin <i>Cossypha natalensis</i>						
	BB-00126	5	10.05.75	01.08.79	40-02-21	5

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SPECIES	RING NO.	AGE/ SEX	FIRST RINGED	LAST RETRAPPED	TIME ELAPSED	KNOWN AGE
Heuglin's Robin <i>Cossypha heuglini</i>						
	BB-00093	5	19.03.75	20.12.79	4-09-01	5
	BB-00384	3	11.07.76	13.10.80	4-03-02	4,5
Garden Warbler <i>Sylvia borin</i>						
	AA-52502	4	22.12.75	08.01.81	5-00-17	> 6,5
	AA-53008	5	16.01.77	16.02.81	4-01-00	4,5
	AA-30774	4	10.12.74	15.12.78	4-00-05	> 5,5
Basra Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus griseldis</i>						
	AA-52489	3	15.12.75	02.03.80	4-02-18	4,5
	BB-00356	4	29.02.76	21.02.80	3-11-21	> 4,5
Great Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>						
	BB-00347	5	23.01.76	29.01.80	4-00-06	4,5
Cape Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus gracilirostris</i>						
	AA-30387	4M	15.10.74	04.05.79	4-06-20	> 5,5
	AA-30229	4M	30.07.74	18.11.78	4-03-19	> 5
African Marsh Warbler <i>Acrocephalus baeticatus</i>						
	AA-53180	2	01.11.77	20.08.81	3-09-19	> 4,5
Marsh Warbler <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>						
	591-17875	5	09.04.74	22.03.80	5-11-13	6,5
Crombek <i>Sylvietta rufescens</i>						
	AA-30315	2	28.09.74	30.07.79	4-10-02	> 5,5
	AA-30142	4	14.06.74	30.10.78	4-04-16	> 5
Yellow-breasted Apalis <i>Apalis flavida</i>						
	AA-52344	4M	24.06.75	21.08.81	6-01-27	> 6,5
	591-17989	4M	21.04.74	17.07.79	5-02-26	> 6

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SPECIES	RING NO.	AGE/ SEX	FIRST RINGED	LAST RETRAPPED	TIME ELAPSED	KNOWN AGE
Lesser Masked Weaver <i>Ploceus intermedius</i>						
	AA-38965	6M	06.08.74	11.09.79	5-01-05	> 7
	AA-40983	3F	22.06.75	28.08.79	4-02-04	4,5
Spotted-backed Weaver <i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>						
	2-93217	6M	13.08.74	11.11.80	6-02-28	> 8,5
	2-96688	5M	29.04.74	14.12.79	5-07-16	6,5
	BB-11579	6M	25.03.75	21.03.80	4-11-27	> 7
Yellow Weaver <i>Ploceus subaureus</i>						
	2-93112	6M	13.07.74	06.08.79	5-00-24	> 7,5
	2-93289	3F	19.09.74	09.09.79	4-11-20	5,5
	AA-41130	3F	24.09.74	30.08.79	4-11-06	5,5
Brown-throated Golden Weaver <i>Ploceus wanthoapterus</i>						
	2-92122	6M	16.07.74	24.07.81	7-00-08	> 9,5
	2-93040	5F	24.06.74	14.06.81	6-11-20	8,5
	2-93291	4F	19.09.74	14.08.81	6-10-25	> 8,5
Masked Weaver <i>Ploceus velatus</i>						
	AA-39049	4F	26.09.74	26.02.80	5-05-00	> 7
	AA-39269	2F	05.11.74	14.01.79	4-02-09	> 5
	2-93167	3M	26.07.74	28.07.78	4-00-02	4,5
Red Bishop <i>Euplectes orix</i>						
	591-17345	4F	19.03.74	06.11.80	6-07-18	> 7,5
	591-17453	6M	28.03.74	04.11.80	6-07-07	> 8,5
	AA-38841	3M	11.06.74	20.11.80	6-05-09	7
Fire-crowned Bishop <i>Euplectes hordeaceus</i>						
	AA-39111	3M	10.10.74	09.01.81	6-02-30	7

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SPECIES	RING NO.	AGE/ SEX	FIRST RINGED	LAST RETRAPPED	TIME ELAPSED	KNOWN AGE
Fire-crowned Bishop <i>Euplectes hordeaceus</i>						
	2-97023	3M	21.11.74	24.01.81	6-02-03	7
Cape Bishop <i>Euplectes capensis</i>						
	AA-40555	5M	05.04.75	21.07.81	6-03-16	7,5
	AA-40794	4F	15.05.75	05.08.81	6-02-21	> 7,5
	BB-11673	5M	04.06.75	04.03.80	4-09-00	6
Melba Finch <i>Pytilia melba</i>						
	AA-52520	4M	01.01.76	28.08.81	5-07-27	> 6,5
	591-17366	4F	22.03.74	17.10.79	5-06-26	> 6,5
	AA-30819	2F	17.12.74	16.02.80	5-01-30	> 5,5
Jameson's Firefinch <i>Lagonosticta rhodopareia</i>						
	AA-34553	3M	17.04.75	21.06.79	4-02-04	4,5
	AA-53222	2F	24.11.77	01.09.81	3-09-07	> 4,5
Blue Waxbill <i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i>						
	AA-52616	4M	27.01.76	30.08.81	5-07-03	> 6,5
	AA-30271	2F	21.09.74	06.06.79	4-08-15	> 5
	AA-52318	4M	14.06.75	04.06.79	3-11-20	> 5
Common Waxbill <i>Estrilda astrild</i>						
	AA-52623	4M	31.01.76	14.03.81	5-01-14	> 5,5
	591-17410	4F	25.03.74	21.01.79	4-09-27	> 5,5
	AA-34527	4F	09.04.75	19.09.79	4-05-10	> 5,5
Steelblue Widow-finch <i>Vidua chalybeata</i>						
	AA-52329	3F	16.06.75	03.09.81	6-02-17	6,5
Paradise Widow-finch <i>Vidua paradisaea</i>						
	AA-52669	4F	05.03.76	25.02.81	4-11-20	> 6

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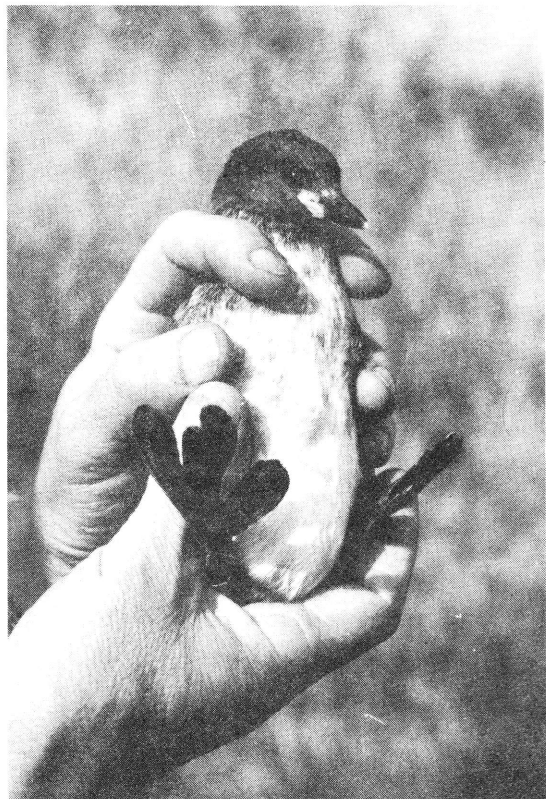
SPECIES	RING NO.	AGE/ SEX	FIRST RINGED	LAST RETRAPPED	TIME ELAPSED	KNOWN AGE
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Yellowed-eyed Canary *Serinus mozambicus*

AA-34472	4M	25.03.75	21.08.81	6-04-27	> 7
AA-30104	3M	26.05.74	04.01.79	4-07-09	5

Bully Canary *Serinus sulphurata*

AA-39074	2F	30.09.74	01.09.81	6-11-29	> 7,5
AA-43701	4M	16.07.77	30.08.81	4-01-14	> 4,5



Dabchick *Podiceps ruficollis* photographed by Mike Fagan in the Olifantsvlei Nature Reserve, Johannesburg. This bird was caught and ringed deep in *Phragmites* reed bed some distance from open water. Captured in a walk-in rail trap.