



A Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* photographed by T.B. Oatley in the Ndumu Game Reserve.

Three percent of the almost 15 000 of these birds ringed (mostly as nestlings) in southern Africa since 1952 have been recovered and five per cent of these were found more than ten years after being ringed. The mean age of the 'over-tens' was 12 years and the oldest Cattle Egret recovered to date was shot in its seventeenth year.

# NOTES & NEWS

## THE OLDEST PASSERINE?

Ex-Zimbabwe ringer, John Foggin, has recently settled in Natal and has commenced ringing forest birds in the Kilgobbin Forest at the Dargle, on land belonging to Miss M.A. Fannin. He is being assisted in the project by pupils of the Howick High School.

On 14 April 1981, they netted a Chorister Robin *Cossypha dichroa* with two colour rings on the left leg: black/yellow and white, reading from top to bottom. The bird had no metal ring so they placed an aluminium ring number 2-95904 on the right leg.

John wrote to me reporting the capture and saying he assumed that it wasn't one of my birds as it had no metal ring, and he would be interested to know who had colour-ringed this bird.

The reason that it didn't have a metal ring was that I didn't start using metal rings at Kilgobbin until July 1972, and this particular Chorister had been caught and colour-ringed by me on 27 May 1956. At that time I had not learnt to distinguish first year birds from older birds and classed it as an adult, but it was probably a 6-month old bird and I never saw it again. A contemporary Chorister, caught and ringed as an adult on Christmas Day 1955, was last retrapped on 14 April 1971, at which stage it was at least in its seventeenth year (Oatley 1974, Safring News 3: 9-12). Black/yellow white would have been in his 26th year in April, a respectable age for any wild passerine bird and, perhaps.

**the oldest on record anywhere.**

This retrap highlights several important points. It obviously is a significant addition to the growing body of evidence that the life expectation of terrestrial birds, particularly insectivorous ones, in tropical and sub-tropical climates is much longer than was previously believed. It underscores the fact that the non-recapture of marked birds does not necessarily mean that they have died, and at the same time it materially lengthens the period during which recaptures can potentially occur. Most important, it shows that one should not base too much confidence in capture-recapture data obtained at a single site. All my netting was done in a very restricted area of the Kilgobbin Forest, and though I did search for, and check, the identities of colour-ringed robins in other parts of the forest, I never saw this bird. John Foggin caught it in a net placed approximately 300m from my traditional netting site, a fact which ought to provide food for thought for quite a few readers. An obvious interpretation is that the bird left the area and recently returned, but this is inherently unlikely in terms of Chorister Robin behaviour. The bird is almost certainly a male and has set up its territory on the forest fringe which is bounded by a stream, where it can drink and bathe. It had no need, therefore, to visit my netting site, which was the only other surface stream in the forest.

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