

The whole thing could be an elaborate hoax, but in order to perpetrate it somebody must have taken the ring with them to Holland and posted it there. Alternatively, this Masked Weaver could have been a victim of the illegal traffic in wild birds, in which case it undoubtedly travelled to Europe in a crate in the freight compartment of a jet airliner, and this could have happened any time in the last several years. Presumably it escaped from captivity early this year, only to fall prey to a domestic cat.

Irrespective of how it got to Holland (if it did), it would appear that this bird lived for 99 months after being ringed and died in the town of Heemstede, 11 kilometres from Schipol International Airport and 9 020km from Johannesburg.

SNAKE EATS SNAKE EAGLE?

One of the more interesting recoveries in 1981 came by way of the following letter from Dizer:

Petit Seminaire,
B.P. 5 KABINDA,
Kasai Oriental,
Republique du ZAIRE.

Dear Sirs,

I am pleased to advise you that I found one of your birds a vulture, I suppose - in this country.

I am Belgian and I came here four months ago to teach English. The school where I'm living is 7 km from the little town Kabinda. I've always been interested in the flora and the fauna of the

countries I visit.

A few weeks ago some villagers brought me the ring of a bird. They said it was found in the forest, about 30 km from here. I wanted to see it but they told me it had been killed by a big snake and they had eaten it! I decided then to write to you immediately but the men were not prepared to give me the ring unless I paid for it! Otherwise they would sell it to somebody else if it was possible.....so I brought the money (don't worry it was quite cheap). Thus I have it here for the moment. The number of the ring is 9-15303. If you want some other information, I am ready to give it. Naturally I was very astonished by the lengthy distance the vulture had travelled - at least 2 500 km I think!

So ends the story of your bird. I am sending this letter via Belgium, it seems to be safer. I look forward to hearing from you at my address in Kabinda.

Yours faithfully,

GUY UYTTERHAEGEN

According to the ring number, the bird was an adult Brown Snake Eagle *Circaëtus cinereus* ringed at Assen in the Transvaal by Frank von Maltitz on 3rd March 1974. Its recovery in January 1981 near Kabinda gives an elapsed time from ringing of 82 months and the distance moved was 2 144 km, about due north. Whilst the story of the villagers could be dismissed by some as unreliable, it does

appear reasonable in this case. Brown Snake Eagles are well named and have been known on occasions to allow their predatory zeal to exceed their discretion. Perhaps this individual did tackle prey bigger than he/she could subdue.

LONG-LIVED ALUMINIUM RING

Just to confound the usual beliefs and bitter experience concerning the effective lifespan of an aluminium ring in the exacting marine environment, gannet 536-05922, ringed as a nestling at Malagas Island on 25.02.1954 by Dr. Geoff McLachlan, was washed up dead at Lambert's Bay in December 1979. The number on the ring was still clearly legible after 310 months. The recovery provides an interesting longevity record for *Morus capensis* and an unexpected reward for Geoff McLachlan who was subjected to much criticism 25 years ago for using aluminium rings on sea birds!

COLOUR RINGING CHAOS

The following extracts are from an article by Bruno Ens published in the Wader Study Group Bulletin No. 31 (April 1981). It was written because the author was genuinely concerned that "good opportunities to gather valuable information (thousands of colour-banded oystercatchers combined with an even greater number of enthusiastic birdwatchers) were being missed because of the disastrous complexity of ringing schemes."

"Having observed oystercatchers from three different ringing schemes I am convinced that inaccurate observations can no longer