

## LONGEVITY IN WEAVER BIRDS

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On 17.07.81 a female Thick-billed Weaver R804 (Ring 4-48219) was retrapped in a Pietermaritzburg garden four years and 299 days from the date of ringing in the same garden. This ringing-recapture interval is apparently the longest so far recorded for this species in southern Africa. In the same garden there are three aviary birds of the same species that are now over five years old and showing no signs of ageing. This suggested an inquiry into the potential life span of weavers in general. Estimates are based on (1) ringing-recapture data or, if the bird is found dead, ringing-recovery data and (2) records of birds in captivity.

(1) In estimating life spans from ringing-recapture (or ringing-recovery) data we must add on an unknown factor for the age at ringing, which in practice means one year for birds ringed as immatures and two if ringed when adult. Long intervals are more likely to turn up if large numbers of the species have been ringed. For example, SAFRING records show that up to mid-1980 33 700 Masked Weavers R803 had been ringed and 366 retrapped or recovered and the longest interval was eleven years and five months. By contrast, 1 520 Yellow Weavers R800 were ringed in the same period. 13 were retrapped or recovered and the longest interval was only 27 months.

The following list of record intervals for weaver species is derived from SAFRING records (marked S) and personal records by

D.B. Hanmer (marked H). These are all ringing-recapture intervals except the ones marked (D) which were ringing-recovery (bird found dead) intervals. They are given in decreasing order of duration.

Masked Weaver R803	11,5	years	S
Red-billed Quelea R805	10	"	S
Red Bishop R808	9	+ "	H
Brown-throated Golden Weaver R802	8,5	+ "	H
Spotted-backed Weaver R797	8	+ "	H
Spectacled Weaver R791	7	+ "	H
Cape Bishop R810	6,5	"	H
Cape Weaver R799	6,5	"	S
Red-collared Widow R813	6,5	"	S (D)
Lesser Masked Weaver R792	6	"	H
Yellow Weaver R800	5,5	"	H
The Indian Baya Weaver <i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	5	" (Wood 1981)	
Golden Bishop R812	27	months	S (D)
Golden Weaver R801	25	months	S (D)

The three recoveries were all made locally.

(2) Longevity records for 29 bird species in captivity, ranging from 40 to 68 years, the longest being for the European Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*, are given by Wood (1972), but none of these birds were small passerines. The same author (pers.comm.1980) has reliable records of a canary *Serinus canaria* living 34 years, a Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* 29 years and a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* 15 years.

The possible life span of a small bird living in security on an abundant diet is, of course, much greater than the life expectancy of a wild fledgling of the same species at the time it leaves the nest. Lack (1943) illustrates this in the case of the European Robin which has a life expectancy of not more than a year at fledging though ringed robins have been recaptured after many years (for example twelve years and eleven months - Wood 1981).

A special study of longevity in weavers has been made by Prof. N. and Dr. E. Collias working with Spotted-backed Weavers in aviaries at the University of California in Los Angeles (Collias, E. C. 1980). One male is now alive and apparently well at an age of more than 21 years. Another male was still fertile at 19, capable of guarding its territory, of nest building, courtship and copulation. A female, still living, laid eggs which were fertile and incubated them at 18. It was noted that in these elderly weaver birds breeding activity was usually slowed down around 15 years but this was variable. The average life span of these captive weavers, once they have attained the age of one year, is about eleven years. So it appears that in favourable conditions, small passerines are capable of living and breeding far longer than was formerly realised.

We are grateful to Dr Elsie Collias and Mr Gerald Wood for letting us use some of their data.

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#### UNUSUAL WADERS AT LANGEBAAN

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After mist-netting waders in a particular area for close on to ten years, one would not expect to catch anything new. Therefore, David Whitelaw could hardly believe his luck when he did just that and, at the same time, added two new species to those ringed so far by members of the Western Cape Wader Study Group (WCWSG). Whilst mist-netting at Geelbeek, Langebaan, David trapped one Mongolian Sandplover *Charadrius mongolus*, and one Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*, both rarities in the southwestern Cape which any twitcher would be only too delighted to see. Several months later Les Underhill caught a second Mongolian Sandplover, which seems to substantiate the comment in Roberts that this species is probably overlooked and not as rare as records reflect. However, Langebaan Lagoon is a favourite area for watching waders and I do not believe that this species would have eluded the keen eyes of twitchers like J.C. Sinclair and R. Summers, who both spend considerable time in the lagoon area. Despite these two records, Mongolian Sandplovers should still be considered as