

EDITORIAL

When foreign-ringed birds are recovered in southern Africa, the finding details are sent by SAFRING by airmail to the appropriate overseas ringing scheme. The waiting period for the return of the ringing details varies, both within and between schemes. It is obviously important that such ringing details be supplied so that the finder can be given the full history of the bird and, hopefully, thereby be motivated to keep a look out for further potential recoveries. This applies irrespective of where the bird was ringed, but when a foreign ring is involved SAFRING acknowledges receipt of the recovery report and advises the finder that details of ringing date and locality will be supplied when received from abroad, but that this may take some time.

It may be flippantly remarked that a ringed bird can fly from Europe to South Africa and back in less time that it takes for us to get its primary ringing data, but such implied censure does not take cognizance of two important factors. The first is that most of the European-based ringing schemes have to handle vastly higher numbers of recoveries than we do. In 1980, for example, the British Trust for Ornithology processed 13 428 recoveries, roughly 28 times as many as SAFRING during the same period! The second point is that if a scheme hasn't received the primary ringing data from the ringer it cannot supply that information to the finder or correspondent, and additional delay ensues. The ringer has to be contacted and asked to supply the information. Presumably, as in this country, some ringers take a long time to reply or don't reply at all and have to be asked again. I doubt if the B.T.O. tolerates such lack of responsibility and, hopefully, the small minority of locally registered ringers who let us down in this way will either refamiliarise themselves with the use of pen and paper or start considering less demanding pursuits for their leisure time.

Rather more than a small minority of ringers have yet to submit their schedules for the 1981/1982 ringing year or, alternatively, advise us that they haven't been actively ringing. Because of this the local ringing statistics for this period will not be found in this issue despite my statement on page 9 of the last issue (Vol.11 (1)).

The recent recovery in Malaŵi of a Blackshouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* ringed four months earlier in the Warmbaths district of the Transvaal 1 328 km distant, is a fitting tribute to the efforts of the small but tireless band of balchatri enthusiasts

who travel thousands of kilometres on country roads to locate and capture their quarry. The Blackshouldered Kite recovery prompted a search through all the BSK recoveries in the SAFRING Data Bank. Every bird has a different ringing locality; Radium, Settlers, Immerpan, Mackenzie, Assen and Mara. The names evoke the special magic of the northern Transvaal bushveld. The nostalgia, the smell of dust, the illusory shade of a thorn tree at mid-day, the lengthening shadows and mellow glow of the afternoon and the hunt for yet another pole-sitting silhouette, transported me far from the shadow of Devil's Peak. The recent paper in Ostrich (Vol. 53: 74-78) and articles in this issue of Safring News are testimony to the high standard of bird handling and data recording which these raptor-catchers maintain and which do credit to bird ringing in southern Africa.

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