

YET MORE ON LONGEVITY

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The recent reports by Dale Hanmer and Professor Winterbottom have stirred my curiosity into analysing the information I have from ringing in the southwestern Cape.

Ringing has been carried out on the farm Ravensburg, near Sir Lowry's Pass Village (34 07S; 18 55E) since January 1974. Nets were set over weekends once or twice a month, depending on other commitments and the vagaries of the weather. Nets were set at a variety of sites, being rotated so that sites were not utilized on every occasion. Initially all birds netted were ringed, but later a degree of selectivity was introduced so that birds which were seldom trapped, such as European Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*, doves, as well as birds previously studied in this area (Cape Sparrow *Passer melanurus* and Cape Weaver *Ploceus capensis*) were no longer ringed. Consequently, these species do not appear in Table 1.

To date 923 birds have been ringed, and in the Table given I have tabulated the 20 birds which have been retrapped more than three years after being ringed. No attempt has been made to extrapolate to an estimated age. All birds, except two Cape Robins *Cossypha caffra* and a Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis*, were ringed in adult plumage. Age is expressed in months, days are rounded up or down; less than 15 days being disregarded while more than 15 days is regarded as a full month.

The oldest bird, a Cape Robin caught as an adult, could be estimated to be at least 120 months old. However, only 4 other birds were retrapped more than 6 years after ringing. Cape White-eyes *Zosterops pallidus* feature prominently with 7 (out of a total of 199) birds on the list, the oldest bird being retrapped 95 months after ringing. These figures are not as impressive as those of Howard Langley (1979), and an analysis of longevity at Rondevlei with its long ringing programme would be most valuable to this debate, and they fall into insignificance when compared to Terry Oatley's Chorister Robins *Cossypha dichroa* (1981). It may be of significance, however, that Cape White-eyes seem to fare better in the southwestern Cape than in the Karoo; 6 of 199 reaching 4 years compared with 4 of 344 in Winterbottom's series (1981). Cape Robins have comparable figures: 3 of 71 reaching 4 years, compared to 6 of 137 at Klaarstroom.

At this stage figures of longevity serve only as curiosity value

TABLE 1

SPECIES	TOTAL RINGED	INDIVIDUAL RINGED	LAST RETRAP	TIME ELAPSED (Months)
Cape Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus capensis</i>	30	05.10.74	24.12.82	99
Olive Thrush <i>Turdus olivaceus</i>	45	10.10.75 27.05.77	27.11.82 29.01.82	86 56
Cape Robin <i>Cossypha caffra</i>	71	13.02.77* 13.08.77 27.01.74 20.12.74*	06.09.80 01.08.81 27.11.82 03.10.81	44 48 106 82
Paradise Flycatcher <i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>	20	26.01.74 17.12.77*	17.12.77 27.12.82	48 59
Fiscal Flycatcher <i>Sigelus silens</i>	20	25.10.75 11.01.74	01.06.79 15.04.79	43 63
Cape White-eye <i>Zosterops pallidus</i>	199	16.04.76 18.03.77 17.12.77 26.12.73 27.01.74 20.12.74 06.08.78	05.06.80 09.11.81 14.02.81 19.11.77 26.12.81 26.07.80 25.12.82	50 57 39 60 95 67 53
Bully Canary <i>Serinus sulphuratus</i>	40	14.02.76	03.10.81	68
Cape Canary <i>Serinus canicollis</i>	194	11.01.74	31.12.77	48

* Bird ringed as juvenile

and confirmation of something well documented, i.e. that birds can live a long time. It is going to take some pretty dedicated ringing to establish just how important these long-lived birds are in the population. An enormous number of potential questions can be formulated. Do these birds bias results on survival curves by holding on to territory and forcing younger birds away? How certain can we be as regards longevity in highly mobile species such as white-eyes and canaries? Are these "oldies" in fact prejudicial to the species by holding on to territories while the bird itself has a low reproductive capacity? Ringers are going to be a lot older before questions of this nature can be answered.

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