

LETTERS & NOTICES

Dear Mr. Oatley,

I have just received the latest Safring News which contains nice articles on sexing and ageing. I have also noticed at other times short articles of a similar nature both in Safring News and elsewhere. These prompt me to suggest that 'somebody' should assemble a manual on the ageing and sexing of all South African birds which would be indispensable to all ringers.

The general style could be that of 'Svensson' used in Europe. A practical format would be a loose-leaf, ring-bound file of A5 size, each species being allocated a page. Then new entries could be added without difficulty and updating any sheet would also be simple. To start with the manual would be a trifle slim but the gaps and errors should prompt ringers to write up some of their observations.

SAFRING's rôle would be to co-ordinate the effort and produce the manual, continually updating it in the form of supplements. Ringers would be only too pleased to purchase it and the manual might even finance itself.

D. Johnson, Natal Parks, Game and Fish Preservation Board, P.O. Box 662, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200

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Dear Mr. Oatley,

Moulting birds do not usually co-operate with their investigators as well as did a male Thickbilled Weaver *Amblyospiza albifrons* which was trapped and ringed (Ring No. 4-66505) in my garden on 17.11.1982 at which time it was in first-year plumage, which closely resembles the plumage of the adult female. Moulting had not then commenced.

Trapped again on 30.01.1983, primary moult had started. P1 & P2 on both sides being half-grown with the black and white pattern of the adult male.

Retrapped once more on 13.06.1983, secondary moult was almost complete, S5 on both sides being a few millimetres short and rectrix moult being complete. S6 was fully grown on both wings.

These findings correspond with a duration of 5 months for total moult. In my paper (Ostrich, June 1982) on moult in this species, I state that the normal duration of moult is about 4 months. One wonders if the longer duration in this individual might be related to the severe drought currently afflicting Natal.

H.T. Laycock, 39 Armstrong Drive, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3201

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Dear Mr. Oatley,

We were very interested to read the letter from M. Fagan on ring sizes for the Cape Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus gracillirostris* in Safring News 11(2) 1982. In banding Clamorous Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus stentoreus*, we encountered a similar problem in a few birds. Submission was made to the Secretary of the Australian Bird Banding Scheme, and the official size was changed from 2,3 mm to 3,0 mm.

On examination of the tight bands some were found to have strips of moulted podotheca* preventing free movement. These were removed without much difficulty, except in one case where inflammation of the tarsus necessitated the removal of the band.

All birds are colour-banded - right leg one colour above metal, left leg two colours. In no case has there been any problem with the left leg, and presumably it is not the combination of colour and metal on the right leg as in one case the bird was

* cornified integument of the toes and tarsi