

# AGEING AND SEXING GUIDES

A NEW BIRD PROJECT

L.J. Bunning

For some time now Mr. Peter Rohloff and I have used the 'Identification for Ringers' guide booklets (see below) as produced and issued by the British Trust for Ornithology (B.T.O.) for the identification of some of the more difficult European migrant warblers. We have been aware of the sad lack of such similar guide books or publications for the South African birdringer. If we were to look at a page of the B.T.O. booklet we would see the following data listed: colour of the soft parts; measurements; weight; notes on the ageing and sexing of the bird; wing formula and differences between the various subspecies and races, etc.



Here in South Africa if we wish to find similar data for our birds we must, for example, look for the measurements in 'Roberts' and be satisfied with these although they are taken on dried, shrivelled museum skins and often only on two or three specimens. If we are lucky we shall also find the bird's weight in the more recent editions. If we are searching for notes on the ageing and sexing of the bird we must start searching through editions of Bokmakierie, Ostrich, Safring News or maybe in past issues of the Clubs' News Sheets, etc. As for good plumage descriptions, we are probably best off with Prozesky's book 'A Field Guide to the Birds of Southern Africa', and as for the wing formulae - I don't think anything has ever been published on this work, although I do have some notes on the identification of cisticolas, larks, pipits and warblers compiled by Mr. Clive Hopcroft.

We have often discussed and considered how much easier it would be for the birdringer to take only one or two small booklets into the field on ringing excursions in which all the known and published data on identification is gathered together and we now consider that perhaps the time is ripe for someone to make a start on compiling such a series of booklets for our birds. Accordingly, Mr. Rohloff and I have started compiling measurements, colours of the soft parts and wing formulae of each and every bird we ring. We hope to later search the literature for all data on ageing and sexing. As we hope to collect this data on a minimum of fifty specimens of each species, this project will take many, many years to complete. (I don't suppose it will be done in my lifetime!).

The data will be fed into the computer as it is collected. The author has so far fed in the data of 148 individuals of 25 species to the Witwatersrand University's IBM main-frame computer.

If any reader is interested in assisting in this project and feels he could contribute by collecting the required data on a family or group of birds that he works on, the author would be pleased to send him/her details of measurement techniques, the way to record the data and the forms on which to do this.

L. John Bunning, 702 High Hylton, 21 Goldreich Street, Hillbrow, JOHANNESBURG, 2001

- o o o -