EDITORIAL

1986 has been an eventful year for SAFRING. In June, the Unit moved from its single-room premises in the old Zoology Building at the University of Cape Town into roomier quarters on the 1st floor of the P.D. Hahn building at the northwestern corner of the University campus. Then, at the beginning of July, Mr. J.A. Harrison took up his appointment as Co-ordinator of the Southern African Bird Atlas Project, thus inaugurating not only an ambitious new ornithological scheme, but also the first stage of SAFRING's expansion into the proposed Bird Populations Data Unit which will ultimately receive and curate a wide range of records concerned with avian biology in the sub-continent.

James Harrison has something to say about the Atlas project on page 57. The Nest Record cards and the Moult cards are all housed in the new premises and are curated for the Southern African Ornithological Society by George Underhill. Meanwhile, it is 'business as usual' for the Bird Ringing Unit; the new developments should not in any way be to the detriment of the ringing scheme.

This volume of Safring News comprises parts 1 and 2 in a single issue. The production of Part 1 was delayed partly because of the disruption of work routines occasioned by the move and partly because there really was not enough copy to produce it earlier in the year. However, several authors have been gratifyingly prompt in heeding my appeals for manuscripts and, as a consequence, I think that most ringers will find some stimulating reading in what now comprises a reasonable two-in-one issue.

LONG-TERM STUDIES

In 1964, Professor Charles Sibley, in his closing address to the second Pan African Ornithological Congress in Pietermaritzburg, made a plea for more long-term studies of African birds.

One of the delegates to the Pietermaritzburg P.A.O.C. was Rudolf Schmidt, and I am particularly pleased to be able to publish in Safring News his summation of the results of 25 years of study of the Whiterumped Swift (page 3). Long-term studies are virtually essential when one is able to ring only relatively few birds of a given species each year; if the annual effort is maintained, respectable sample sizes can ultimately be obtained and, in the process, some considerable insight may be gained into population trends and the effects of climatic fluctuations.

In 1984, Professor John Wiens printed an Editorial in Auk entitled 'The place of long-term studies in ornithology' (Auk 101: 202-203. 1984). In commenting on the current era of short-term funding and the need to produce quick results, Wiens pointed out that restriction of the duration of records makes for a snapshot approach to the study of nature, with the concomitant risk that such brief studies may miss critical events and lead to incorrect conclusions. In discussing the type of long-term investigations that will be most profitable he makes the point that the "...use of marked individuals is absolutely essential.". This underlines the rôle of ringing as a research tool.

Editorials in the first five volumes of Safring News were notable for reiteration of the call for RESULTS from ringing. In spite of this, most feature articles were descriptive and concerned techniques employed for ringing certain groups of birds rather than the results of such ringing. One of the first articles in Safring News to provide an analysis of data gathered in the course of ringing operations was Steve Piper's paper 'Moult of the European Swallow' which was published in Vol. 3 (3): 24-32. 1974. The data were accrued in the course of handling the birds and so were not ringing results *sensu strictu*. If we seek ringing results by way of recoveries only then we must expect, in most cases, long time lags before returns are sufficient to warrant analytical publications. Recapture data can be accrued more rapidly but, given the high adult survival rates of most of our birds (including the small insectivorous species), studies of less than ten years' duration are unlikely to monitor full population turnover though they may bring to light unsuspected features of species or community biology.

Over the past five years every issue of Safring News has featured at least one article providing results achieved directly or indirectly from bird ringing. The current issue gives evidence that some of the results of long-term ringing studies are now being addressed and interim data sets are also being used to good effect. Continuation of this trend will do credit to the ringing scheme and ensure that it comprises a vital part of the proposed Bird Populations Data Unit.

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