years. It would be interesting to see if trapping figures for other parts of Africa show similar declines in the summers which were poor at Nchalo, or whether a reducation in the numbers of Palaearctic passerines can be related to bad weather conditions at any other trapping site.

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SAFRING STATISTICS FOR THE 1984-1985 RINGING YEAR

T.B. Oatley

INTRODUCTION

Previous reports in this series have been entitled 'Local bird-ringing statistics .....'. At the most recent meeting of the SAFRING Steering Committee in June 1986, members agreed that a condensed version of the annual report made to the Steering Committee should be published in Safring News. This seems a good idea for, apart from other considerations, it will give ringers some understanding of what the Ringing Organiser and his assistant achieve in the day-to-day administration of the Unit. There seems to be little point in having a condensed annual report and a separate local bird-ringing report, so they are here combined under one heading. The annual report is based on a calendar year and the ringing statistics on a July-June year; there are, as a consequence, apparent discrepancies in some of the figures presented.

1985, the 14th year of operation of the South African Bird Ringing Unit (SAFRING), was notable chiefly for the escalation in costs for rings and equipment which have, of necessity, to be imported. The demand in southern Africa for such specialised items as bird rings and mistnets is far too small and also too unpredictable for the local manufacture of such items to be a commercial proposition. Rising costs of material, especially of metal alloys, have forced up the producer prices, but the unfavourable exchange rates experienced in the latter half of the year, together with import surcharges and taxes, have exacerbated the problem. As a consequence, the face value of rings and equipment held by SAFRING rose by 48,7% in 1985 (it increased by 23,4% in 1984) to stand at R37 200,00 at the end of December.

This underlines the financial muscle needed to maintain adequate levels of stock, without which the research effort of some nationally-funded programmes could be jeopardized. Any breakdown in the supply of rings would also result in widespread frustration amongst the scores of active ringers, both amateur and professional.

It is important that the current momentum of bird ringing in southern Africa is maintained. Amateurs seldom use the largest rings which now cost from 40 to 60 cents each, and they will be affected mainly by cost increases in nets and scales.

The Ringing Organiser was away for six months on Research and Study leave from April to September. During this period Mr. I. Newton of the staff of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology (P.F.I.A.O.) was employed to assist Mrs Rammesmayer with the running of the Unit. Mr. F.J. Vandewalle was employed on an ad hoc basis to check and verify all records of European Swallows in the SAFRING recovery databank. This is the third largest single species block in the databank comprising 1 309 recovery records in all. Other species records checked and verified by Mr. Vanderwalle and Mr. Newton were Cattle Egret, Sacred Ibis and Steppe Buzzard. The year 1985, therefore, saw considerable progress in the verification of records in the old databank. The new databank (containing records from July 1981) was incremented with the 1984 recovery and retrap records.

SERVICES TO BIOLOGISTS

SAFRING's services were extended to a total of 107 ringers in the Republic, South West Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Malawi; 62 of these ringers were amateurs, 29 were professionals and 16 were using rings in research studies for post-graduate degrees at Universities.

24 consignments of rings and equipment were received and 189 orders totalling R12 230,90 in value were despatched to ringers and professional scientists in museums, universities and wildlife management departments. Compared with 1984, the figures given above represent an 18% increase in orders despatched and a 19% increase in value of goods supplied. Equipment demands from non-ringers are primarily for spring scales. SAFRING is the only importer in southern Africa of the Swiss 'Pesola' scales used by bird ringers; these precision instruments are available in a range of sizes and are in demand by other biologists in several disciplines.

Recovery and retrap records for 17 species were extracted from SAFRING's databanks and supplied on request to 11 ornithologists of local institutions and one in the U.S.A.

RINGING EFFORT

In the year under review 28 518 birds were marked with SAFRING bands. This is 9% less than the total ringed in 1983-1984 but is 4% above the 1982-1983 total. Table 1 shows the ringing effort by province or region, listed in descending order of total number ringed. Totals of the numbers of ringers are based largely on those who have submitted schedules but because these are in some cases leaders of ringing groups, the figures do not always reflect the actual numbers of people involved.

TABLE 1

RINGING EFFORT IN THE 1984-1985 RINGING YEAR

Region	Number of Ringers	Number of species ringed	Number of birds ringed	% Of annual total
Cape Province	26	153	9 386	32,9
Orange Free State	6	92	5 560	19,5
Transvaal	20	171	3 979	13,9
Natal	9	163	2 803	9,8
Sub-Antarctic Islands	9	13	2 355	8,3
Malawi	2	161	2 097	7,4
South West Africa/ Namibia	11	113	1 430	5,0
Zimbabwe	5	120	908	3,2
OVERALL TOTAL	88	447	28 518	100,0

Previous reports have listed amateurs who have ringed 100 or more birds of a single species in the ringing year. It is perhaps unfair that those professionals who have put a lot of hard work into their ringing are excluded and, in any case, it is becoming difficult to draw the line between official group projects and amateur group projects in some respects. A list of the over 100s would fill a few pages in this report, so instead Table 2 (overleaf) names those ringers or ringing groups achieving the 20 highest totals for a single species in the review period. Ringing operations on sub-Antarctic islands are excluded from these totals.

TABLE 2

RINGERS OR RINGING GROUPS ACHIEVING THE 20 HIGHEST TOTALS FOR A SINGLE SPECIES IN THE 1984-1985 RINGING YEAR

RINGERS/GROUP	REGION	SPECIES	TOTAL RINGED
John Colclough & Graham Ross	Eastern Cape	Cape Gannet	3 204
Roy Earlé	O.F.S.	S.A. Cliff Swallow	2 036
Benguela Ecology Programme	Western Cape	Jackass Penguin	772
John Cooper & African Seabird Group	Western Cape	Swift Tern	748
S.A.N.C.C.O.B.	S.W. Cape	Jackass Penguin	600
John Bunning	Witwatersrand	Masked Weaver	564
Lonnie & Mathilda Roos	O.F.S.	Cape Sparrow	559
John Patterson	Skeleton Coast, Namibia	Larklike Bunting	336
Roy Earlé	O.F.S.	Red Bishop	288
John Bunning	Witwatersrand	Cape White-eye	247
Deon du Plessis	O.F.S.	Red Bishop	238
Mike Jarvis	S.W. Cape	Red Bishop	231
John Bunning	Witwatersrand	Blackeyed Bulbul	201
Rod & Bridget Randall	Eastern Cape	Jackass Penguin	189
Derek Solomon	Zimbabwe	European Swallow	177
John Bunning	Witwatersrand	Whiterumped Swift	170
Dave Johnson	Natal	Red Bishop	169
Mike Fraser	S.W. Cape	Orangebreasted Sunbird	163
Dave Johnson	Natal	Bronze Mannikin	159
Mike Jarvis	S.W. Cape	Cape Sparrow	152

Table 2 gives a general picture of ringing effort across the country. Another aspect of ringing achievement is given in Table 3 which lists group leaders or individuals who have ringed more than 1 000 birds during the 1984-1985 year. Those listed were collectively responsible for 26,5% of the annual total of rings used.

RECOVERIES AND RECAPTURES

Table 4 (overleaf) gives an indication of the volume of records handled by SAFRING over the three ringing years culminating in June 1985. The totals, particularly of recoveries, remain provisional and are usually subject to increase with time because of late reports. The adage 'better late than never' is particularly applicable in this context. Although there appears to be a sharp drop in the number of recoveries for the year under review, this trend is less marked in the totals of 'meaningful recoveries' which are those records involving movement from the place of ringing and/or an elapsed time since ringing of at least 12 months. The 1982-1983 records were boosted by an exceptional number of Cape Gannet recoveries, so it can be claimed that the 1984-1985 ringing year was about average in terms of numbers of recoveries reported.

TABLE 3

RINGERS AND RINGING GROUPS THAT HAVE RINGED MORE THAN 1 000 BIRDS IN THE 1984-1985 RINGING YEAR

RINGER/GROUP LEADER(S)	TOTAL SPECIES	TOTAL BIRDS
John Bunning	86	1 974
Lonnie & Mathilda Roos	31	1 756
Dale Hanmer	114	1 422
Dave Johnson	72	1 243
Digby Cyrus	86	1 174

TABLE 4

RECOVERY AND RECAPTURE STATISTICS FOR THREE-YEAR PERIOD JULY 1982 TO JUNE 1985

	1984-85	1983-84	1982-83
Number of recoveries	428	547	544
Number of recaptures	2 337	1 734	1 149
Total records processed	2 765	2 281	1 693
Total species	178	170	162
Foreign-ringed birds	49	37	29
Meaningful recoveries	353	367	390

There were 43 recoveries of gamebirds (waterfowl) of which seven were known to have been shot by hunters. A Cape Shoveller ringed in the Bredasdorp district of the Cape in 1976 was recovered in the Umvoti District of Natal, a Great Circle distance of 1 130 km, and a Redbilled Teal ringed at Barberspan in 1977 was shot near Harare Airport in Zimbabwe, 1 114 km distant.

Vultures, eagles and hawks contributed 32 recoveries which included a Finnish-ringed Osprey, found injured near Petrusville in the Cape, 10 059 km distant from its birthplace. The gamebirds, vultures and raptors together made up 17,5% of the year's recoveries. Seabirds accounted for 45,6% of the recovery total and included a Shy Albatross from Tasmania, an Arctic Skua from Fair Isle, an Arctic Tern from Iceland, six

European Storm Petrels and ten Southern Giant Petrels, one of which notched up the longest journey for any giant petrel yet, assuming that it travelled east (downwind) from Marion Island where it was ringed as a chick in February 1985. It was recovered on the coast of Chile three months later. Our computer program works out the shortest (Great Circle) distance between ringing and recovery points and in this case computed 8 429 km. The actual distance is likely to be close to 20 000 km, past Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, where other Marion Island-ringed giant petrels have been recovered.

The year brought in a mixed bag of other interesting recoveries. A glint in the desert north of Rossing Mine in South West Africa/Namibia proved, on investigation, to be a stainless steel bird ring encircling the bleached tarsometatarsus and foot of what had been a Rock Kestrel, ringed 1 157 km to the south near Clanwilliam. A dead Blacksmith Plover was found next to the N2 Freeway near Faure, a few hundred metres from where it had been ringed 175 months earlier in 1970. A Common Tern, ringed at Cape Recife in 1972, was recovered in May 1985 in Sweden and an African Marsh Harrier, ringed as a nestling in the Wilderness area of the southern Cape, was recovered seven months later near Benoni in the Transvaal, 1 025 km distant.

Of the recoveries reported by the general public, 39,9% went to the National Zoological Gardens in Pretoria and 51,4% were routed direct to SAFRING; 22% of all these reports were from Afrikaans-speaking people.

Table 5 (overleaf) lists the regional distribution of recoveries and recaptures in descending order of numbers of recoveries by the general public. The Cape heads the list, probably as a result of its long coastline, because 79% of the recoveries reported by the public were of seabirds. Over half (53%) of the recoveries reported from Natal were also seabirds, as were all the Transkei recoveries and recaptures.

As is evident from Table 4, the numbers of foreign-ringed birds recovered in southern Africa in 1984-1985 is higher than in the previous two ringing years and the majority of these were seabirds.

The differences in totals of recoveries and recaptures between Table 4 and Table 5 is because the latter does not include overseas recoveries, some of which have already been mentioned.

In addition to processing ring recoveries and ringing schedule summaries and attending to other tasks aforementioned, SAFRING's staff also produced two issues of Safring News, updated and revised the Safring Guide to Ring Sizes and computerized some

TABLE 5

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN RECOVERIES AND RECAPTURES IN 1984-1985

REGION	RECOVERIES REPORTED BY		RECAPTURES REPORTED BY		TOTALS
	PUBLIC	RINGERS	PUBLIC	RINGERS	
CAPE PROVINCE	147	7	11	76	241
TRANSVAAL	42	45	1	41	129
NATAL	32	2	4	66	104
ORANGE FREE STATE	17	39	1	1 207	1 264
SWA/NAMIBIA	16	3	-	3	22
ZIMBABWE	14	1	1	-	16
MALAŴI	6	9	-	155	170
TRANSKEI (COAST)	5	-	4	-	9
BOPHUTHATSWANA	1	-	-	-	1
MOZAMBIQUE	1	-	-	-	1
OFFSHORE ISLANDS	-	12	-	507	519
SUB-ANTARCTIC ISLANDS	-	16	-	258	274
TOTALS	281	134	22	2 313	2 750

45 00 records for the South West Africa/Namibia Atlas Project. The Ringing Organiser also managed to ring one bird during the review period!

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RECOVERIES AND PALAEARCTIC ORIGINS OF STEPPE BUZZARDS RINGED IN SOUTH AFRICA

John Mendelsohn

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 25 years about 1 035 Steppe Buzzards *Buteo buteo vulpinus* have been ringed in South Africa, many of which have been used to obtain information on ageing, moult and measurements (Broekhuysen & Siegfried 1971a, 1971b, Schmitt *et al.* 1980). A substantial number of buzzards have subsequently been recovered or retrapped both in South Africa and in the Palaearctic. This paper reviews those recoveries on record (up to June 1985) at the South African Bird Ringing Unit.

RESULTS

The great majority of Steppe Buzzards were ringed in two areas in South Africa, roughly 1 200 km apart: in the southwestern Cape (33°S - 34°S x 18°E - 21°E) and in the south and central Transvaal (24°S - 27°S x 27°E - 29°E). Most of the southwestern Cape buzzards were ringed during the latter half of the 1960s while most of those in the Transvaal were caught during the 1970s. Much of the information in this paper, therefore, comes from birds caught in these two areas. However, Steppe Buzzards occur commonly in other regions of South Africa and a few additional records are available from these areas.

A total of 57 recoveries or retraps is available for analysis, 19 being birds ringed and recovered (17) or retrapped (2) in South Africa. The remaining records consist of 36 buzzards ringed in South Africa and recovered in, or en route to, the Palaearctic, and two nestlings ringed in Finland and later found in southern Africa. Intervals between ringing and recovery ranged between one and 134 months, with an average of 35,4 months. Seven of the birds had lived seven or more years, being found 81, 84, 85, 106, 109, 109 and 134 months after ringing. From the data in Table 1 (overleaf), it would appear that intervals between capture and recovery of buzzards ringed in the southwestern Cape were shorter (average 25 months) than those of other recovered buzzards (average 40 months). The difference in the frequency distribution of data in Table 1 is, however, not statistically significant. The shortest interval between a bird being ringed in South Africa and recovery in the Palaearctic was 110 days, although it is likely that the bird covered the distance of 10 575 km in a shorter period. Many of