

GETTING OLDER IN MALAWI

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Ringling started at Nchalo, Malawi in March 1974. By mid 1981, 117 birds were known to have reached four or more years old (Hanmer 1981). By mid 1983, 115 birds of 45 species had reached six or more years old (Hanmer 1983), while in mid 1985, 165 birds were known to have reached six or more years old and 65 of 28 species had reached eight or more (Hanmer 1985).

In this paper Table 1 (overleaf) lists the 85 birds of 34 species which were known to have reached eight or more years old by July 1987. I had intended shortly to list the large numbers of birds which had reached six or more years old, but because some house painters made a bonfire of my records, it would be very difficult to do so at this time. I do know of four species which have not previously been reported by me as having reached an age of six or more; Woodland Kingfisher *Halcyon senegalensis*, Böhm's Bee-eater *Merops boehmi*, Natal Robin *Cossypha natalensis* and Purple Widowfinch *Vidua purpurascens*. There may be other species previously unrecorded which have reached this great age, but finding which they are will have to await the retyping of 33 000 records; this could take years.

As previously, birds were aged to the nearest half year, taking into account the breeding season, months of first and last capture and the apparent age of the bird when first ringed. Birds ringed when apparently adult could not be accurately aged and are given as '>' the minimum possible age.

As usual the weavers and bishops top the list with 35 birds aged eight or more. Large numbers of these species have been ringed and they return annually to either their breeding or their wintering sites in the trapping area, so the chance of retrapping them is great. The next two groups are 13 bulbuls and 12 warblers which have reached eight or more years old. Most of the species in both groups tend to be resident in the trapping area and fairly large numbers have been ringed, but the Palaearctic migrant reed warblers are noteworthy, although all three birds have returned regularly to the trapping area over the years.

Doves and sunbirds come next (five birds from each group being known to have reached eight years or more) and again the species involved tend to be resident, but far more sunbirds than doves have been ringed. Perhaps eight years old is getting towards the maximum age for sunbirds.

TABLE 1

SPECIES, SEX AND RING NUMBER OF BIRDS EIGHT
OR MORE YEARS OLD

Species	Sex	Ring No.	Age (years)
Mourning Dove <i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>	?	5-53176	> 10
Bluespotted Dove <i>Turtur afer</i>	?	4-35757	> 12
Greenspotted Dove <i>T. chalcospilos</i>	?	4-35661	> 9
	?	4-35512	> 8,5
	?	4-35885	> 8,5
Mozambique Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus fossii</i>	M	4-35790	9,5
	M	4-35755	> 8
	M	4-35615	> 8
Little Bee-eater <i>Merops pusillus</i>	?	E-04674	> 9,5
Wiretailed Swallow <i>Hirundo smithii</i>	F	AA-30144	9,5
	F	AA-52393	> 8
Blackeyed Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	M	2-97074	> 11,5
	F	BB-00334	> 11
	M	2-96837	> 10
	M	2-96724	> 8
Terrestrial Bulbul <i>Phyllastrephus terrestris</i>	M	2-96748	> 12
	F	BB-00275	> 9
	F	BB-00761	> 8,5
Sombre Bulbul <i>Andropadus importunus</i>	M	BB-00586	> 11
	F	2-96914	> 10,5
	F	2-96803	10
	M	BB-00620	> 9,5
	M	BB-34229	> 8
	M	BB-00274	> 8

Species	Sex	Ring No.	Age (years)
Heuglin's Robin <i>Cossypha heuglini</i>	?	BB-00384	11
	?	BB-00634	10,5
Great Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	?	BB-00025	> 8,5
Basra Reed Warbler <i>A. griseldis</i>	?	BB-00356	> 9,5
	?	BB-00519	> 8,5
Cape Reed Warbler <i>A. gracilirostris</i>	M	AA-52407	> 10,5
African Marsh Warbler <i>A. baeticatus</i>	?	AA-55891	8,5
Longbilled Crombec <i>Sylvietta rufescens</i>	?	AA-55759	> 8
Yellowbreasted Apalis <i>Apalis flavida</i>	M	AA-55801	> 10
	M	AA-52532	> 9,5
	M	591-17989	> 8
Bleating Warbler <i>Camaroptera brachyura</i>	?	591-17206	9,5
	?	AA-76405	> 8,5
Redfaced Cisticola <i>Cisticola erythrops</i>	M	AA-30883	> 8
Paradise Flycatcher <i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>	F	AA-30017	> 10,5
Brubru <i>Nilaus afer</i>	?	2-96695	8
Yellowbellied Sunbird <i>Nectarinia venusta</i>	F	AA-30421	> 8
Whitebellied Sunbird <i>N. talatala</i>	M	AA-34614	> 10
Scarletched Sunbird <i>N. senegalensis</i>	M	AA-52818	> 11
	M	AA-97464	> 9,5
	M	AA-34617	> 8
House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	M	2-96793	> 8

Species	Sex	Ring No.	Age (years)
Spectacled Weaver <i>Ploceus ocularis</i>	M	BB-14099	> 8
Lesser Masked Weaver <i>P. intermedius</i>	F	AA-40221	9
	M	AA-30505	8
Spottedbacked Weaver <i>P. cucullatus</i>	M	BB-11373	> 10
	M	2-93217	8,5
Brownthroated Weaver <i>P. xanthopterus</i>	F	2-93245	> 12,5
	F	BB-11915	12,5
	F	AA-30470	> 12
	F	AA-38983	> 11
	F	2-93015	11
	M	2-93122	> 10,5
	M	2-93307	> 10
	M	2-93446	> 10
	M	2-93206	> 9,5
	M	2-93321	> 9,5
	F	2-93292	> 9,5
	F	AA-38919	> 9,5
	F	AA-39010	9
	F	AA-44904	> 8,5
	F	AA-39274	8,5
	F	2-93040	8,5
	M	BB-12083	8
Masked Weaver <i>P. velatus</i>	M	AA-39279	> 12,5
Red Bishop <i>Euplectes orix</i>	M	AA-43731	> 11
	M	AA-40416	> 11
	M	AA-40772	11
	M	AA-39261	10
	M	AA-30496	9
	M	591-17435	8,5
	M	AA-39145	8,5
	M	AA-44921	> 8
	F	AA-40988	8
	F	AA-41141	8
Yellowrumped Widow <i>E. capensis</i>	M	BB-11673	> 9
	M	AA-43861	8
Melba Finch <i>Pytilia melba</i>	M	AA-52900	> 8

Species	Sex	Ring No.	Age (years)
Yelloweyed Canary <i>Serinus mozambicus</i>	M	AA-97439	> 8,5
Bully Canary <i>S. sulphuratus</i>	M	AA-43701	> 8,5
	F	AA-39074	> 8
Number of species = 34		Number of birds = 85	

Practically all the birds listed here are insectivorous or omnivorous. In fact, only the Mourning Dove *Streptopelia decipiens*, Bluespotted Dove *Turtur afer*, Bully Canary *Serinus sulphuratus* and adult Red Bishops *Euplectes orix* are not recorded as eating insects; perhaps they too are really omnivorous?

Life style does not seem to have much effect on longevity, despite what I said previously (Hanmer 1980, p 156) about Terrestrial Bulbuls *Phyllastrephus terrestris* living longer than Blackeyed Bulbuls *Pycnonotus barbatus* because they live in dense thicket, because there are terrestrial species, thicket dwellers and birds which normally fly and perch in the open listed in the Table. Also, some are solitary and some gregarious. However, sex does seem to have an effect on the length of time a bird may live. Previously among birds over five years old, 56 % were male and of those over eight years old, 59 % were male (Hanmer 1985). In this paper, among the 69 birds which could be sexed, the proportion of males eight years old or more was 65 %. Furthermore, in practically every species, the oldest birds were male.

As mentioned in Hanmer (1985), trapping figures have dropped over the last few years, hence the number of retraps is down, but I do not think that this is entirely responsible for there having been no birds of over the age of > 12,5 years caught in 1985/86 or 1986/7. In my previous publication there were three birds of > 12 or > 12,5 years (one bulbul and two weavers) and this time, two years later, there are five (one dove, one bulbul and three weavers) of which only the dove and the Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus* were not listed previously (Hanmer 1985). Admittedly a bird ringed as an adult 10-11 years prior to its last recapture could have been considerably older than 12 or 12,5 years when last caught, but it may be that it is extremely rare for a small to medium sized (less than 75 g) bird to live longer than 12-13 years in the wild.

REFERENCES:

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