EDITORIAL

SAFRING NEWS 19.

As in 1989, shortage of copy and financial stringency has obliged us to publish a two-in-one single issue of Safring News this year. I am grateful to all authors who have contributed to this volume, especially because they have done so voluntarily, in many instances in response to my last editorial. If there seems to be undue bias towards what is happening in the depauperate southwestern Cape, it is because that is where it IS happening - there has been no arm twisting by the Editor.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR RINGING.

The most what? Results? Satisfaction? Ideally, both; achievement of the first usually brings the second. What constitutes results? Numbers ringed? Variety? Recoveries in far-away places? Recoveries anywhere? Retraps of old birds? If ringing is your pastime and you haven't asked yourself these questions yet it is time you did because, as you may have noticed, it is COSTING you good money to catch and ring wild birds. Given that any form of recreation is becoming increasingly expensive these days, it nevertheless may come as something of a shock to learn that the cost of a cross-section of rings, nets and supplementary equipment for a start-up ringer is now in the region of R1 000. So it behoves all ringers to get the most out of their investment in rings.

For many ringers the excitement of never quite knowing what will turn up in the net (as ably expressed by Dale Hanmer on pp 43 - 44) is *raison d'etre* for ringing, the whole exercise justified in terms of contribution to the overall ringing effort. If you are one such, participation in the Measured Effort Site (MES) project could add a new dimension to your ringing activities since it obliges you to look more closely at your catch statistics than you might otherwise do. Hopefully you will find patterns that pose questions; answers to these may or may not be obvious, and obvious answers are not always the right ones (see article by Underhill & Underhill on pp 7 - 12). MES certainly provides one means to get more from your ringing.

Targeting for recoveries.

If, for you, results are measured in the number of recoveries you receive, then you are likely having a thin time of it. The overall recovery rate for SAFRING rings is, at 1,03%, less than

half that for the BTO (2,16%) and Finland (2,17%). On average, you must ring at least 100 birds before you can expect one recovery. It can be better or worse than that, depending on what and where you are ringing. Recovery rates of palaearctic migrants were given in the last issue of Safring News (Vol. 18, p.54). A cross-section of resident garden birds with percentage recovery rates (in brackets) better than the national average include the following: Rock Pigeon (3,19), European Starling (2,48), Olive Thrush (1,88), Cape Turtle Dove (1,44), Crested Barbet (1,40), House Sparrow (1,20), Cape Robin (1,18) and Spottedbacked Weaver (1,15). Why the Spottedbacked Weaver should yield more recoveries than the Masked Weaver (0,84) is not known. Similar intriguing discrepancies in recovery rates are exhibited by the three yellow-vented bulbul species: Blackeyed (0,79), Redeyed (0,35) and Cape (0,13). These differences may reflect variations in regional reporting rates or behavioural differences in the birds.

All the above species have four-figure (or higher) ringing totals. From smaller samples the common or garden bird with the highest recovery rate (5,65%) is the much-maligned Indian Myna! Only 283 have been ringed, compared with over 4 000 of the other alien, the European Starling. If only 1% of the effort that has been devoted to the ringing of European Swallows at their roosts had been diverted to ringing Indian Mynas at their roosts we would have learnt a great deal about some essential life history traits of this interesting starling.

Despite the vehement zeal of purists who campaign for its extermination, the Indian Myna is still abundant, still cleaning up army worm plagues and doubtless doing other useful things for which it is hardly ever given credit. Yet scarcely anything is known about the survival rates of the Indian Myna, and nothing about the age structure of its populations. This information is needed and likely to be of more than passing significance in comparison with similar data from other starling species in southern Africa. More importantly, if efficient efforts are ever to be made to control myna populations, a knowledge of dispersal movements, age structure and natural mortality rates (which ringing alone can supply) will be essential. So, a word for those ringers who share their environment with mynas: try bringing a trash bird onto your schedules. It could prove rewarding!

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