

SOME INTERESTING RETRAPS AT MELVILLE KOPPIES  
NATURE RESERVE, JOHANNESBURG

L. J. Bunning

Since August 1973, ringing sessions have been on-going at the Melville Koppies Nature Reserve, Emmarentia, Johannesburg, Transvaal (26°10S, 28°00E). The number of birds ringed has been steadily building up over the years as we have become more and more organised and the average seasonal total is currently about 1 800. Many of the species seem to be adult 'garden type' birds which move into the Koppies either to feed or to gather nesting material then return to their territories in the surrounding gardens. Others are considered to be juveniles which have been bred in the surrounding gardens, are then chased out of the parent's territory, and congregate on the Koppies in what appears to be a neutral area before dispersal to establish their own territories. This seems to be confirmed by a few recoveries of birds ringed as juveniles at the Reserve and recovered from gardens some distance away when adult.

Small numbers of a few species are resident on the Koppies. For example, an adult, female Cardinal Woodpecker was ringed (No. 4-46498) on 24 April 1982. This bird was retrapped on 2 January 1986 when a red colour ring was added. This made the bird individually identifiable and she has been spotted on almost every visit to the Reserve. She has since been retrapped again on 18 October 1986, 21 October 1989 and 21 July 1990. The metal and Darvic colour rings were both in good condition at the latest retrap.

A very small percentage of the birds caught are either intra-African or Palaearctic migrants. Recent retraps of some of these birds are especially interesting in terms of their survival and fidelity to the wintering or summer site:

Whiterumped Swift (Ring No. E-07730) Ringed 2 December 1984. Retrapped 9 December 1989.

Whitethroated Swallow (Ring No. AB-20933) Ringed 1 January 1986. Retrapped 27 November 1988.

Spotted Flycatcher (Ring No. AB-21173) Ringed 14 December 1986. Retrapped 26 November 1989.

Perhaps the most spectacular was the following retrap:

European Marsh Warbler (Ring No. AA-61153) Ringed 30 December 1983. Retrapped 20 January 1989.

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The following extract from the Eleventh Annual Report of the Middlesex Field Study Centre (M.F.S.C.) in Western Australia (See Safring News 13: 3-5) is reprinted with the permission of R. J and M. N. Brown. Although the subject is the Eurasian Coot, it could as well (well, almost as well) apply to our Redknobbed Coot, and the afterthought seems worth a try in trying circumstances.



EURASIAN COOT

A coot, drawn for us by Owen Roberts, appears on the cover of all the M.F.S.C. Reports, but how many mentions in the text? Apart from the annual appearance in the nests recorded list, too few. This is the epitome of the coot, universally known and universally unremarked.

At any moment it is a certainty to say - there are coots on the dam. A further certainty is that those coots will be doing something, swimming purposefully, fronting up to another even as far as fighting, or sailing around with raised wings like Sydney Opera House gone into mourning. It would be an alert observer who caught a coot loafing, rain or shine makes no difference, even after dark their calls come across the water. Do they never sleep?

A coot is industrious, a good parent, unaggressive towards other species, vegetarian, and disinterested in any of man's pursuits. Can it be that virtue inhibits appreciation and ornithological interest? They are rarely thought of as migrants, although contrary to the impression given when seen pattering over the surface of the water, they fly well. Coots banded in England have been recovered across the sea in Europe. Lack of publicity for such journeying could be due to ordinariness, a coot does not land at Vladivostock, or get picked up fainting from the Caliph's harem pond. A farm dam or municipal reservoir is journey's end for a coot. Fable and legend have passed them by, a careful search through many indices turns up coots mainly as prey, someone else's dinner. They are common, ordinary, ubiquitous and successful. There is no call for a campaign to save and protect the coot.

Afterthought - next time you are burdened with one of those travelled folk, full of the rare, exotic, and endangered, slip in the innocent query "Did you see many coots?". It stops them in full flow, doubt flickers, have they suddenly disappeared? Or did they miss out on some rare sub-species of coot? The setback is only temporary, but it will allow you time to escape.

Footnote:

25 450 Redknobbed Coots have been ringed in southern Africa; the recovery rate is high at over 3%. The longest-lived bird, ringed at unknown age, was shot 187 months later. The oldest 10% of all recovered birds survived a mean 62,4 months. Five birds have travelled distances of over 1 000 km, the furthest being 1 215 km. The mean distance travelled by 191 coots which were recovered more than 10 km away from the ringing locality was 282 km. Dean and Skead (1979, Ostrich 50: 199-202) have published details of moult and body mass of coots caught at Barberspan.

Editor

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COLOUR-DYED WHITE STORK

A Witwatersrand Bird Club reader, Mr G Trollope, of 80 Susman Avenue, Blairgowrie, 2194, submitted the following observation to SAFRING in February 1990:

"One of about 100 White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* (with about 60 Abdim's Storks *Ciconia abdimii*), seen at approximately 25°21S, 27°32E on 28.01.1990 at about 10 a.m., was neck-coloured. The colour was faded, being strongest about the back of the head and towards the breast, and approximated to Munsell 7.5 R 7/8 and may have been orange, shocking pink, or red originally."

If any of our readers in Europe know of a stork-dyeing project which could have been responsible for the colour and position of marking on this bird, we would like to hear of it.

Editor