

FEATURE ARTICLES

Features on species studies, on ringing localities and major happenings at the Ringing Unit will be carried here.

KNOB-BILLED DUCK RINGING

By: Ken Cackett (R.O.S.)

Chiredzi.

RHODESIA.

Large numbers of Knob-billed Duck invade the south-eastern lowveld of Rhodesia during the summer months from October to April, attracted by natural pans in the veld and more especially by the numerous storage dams that have been constructed in recent years on the irrigation schemes.

One such dam on Chiredzi Research Station has proved to be particularly popular with this species, due largely to the attraction offered by regular daily feeding with grain at the bottom of a garden adjoining the waters' edge. The dam is small, about 0.75 hectare in extent, but it provides a perfect site for trapping and ringing. A small walk-in trap is sited permanently on the lawn near the water, and grain is scattered in and around the trap every evening. The entrance to the trap is left open unless a ringing session is planned, when the funnels are set in place.

Ringing was started on a very small scale in October 1967, and after four years a total of only 163 knobbies has been banded. However, the project has proved to be extremely rewarding with 18 recoveries recorded to date, representing 11 per cent of the total number of birds ringed. Seven of these have been local recoveries from within a 50-mile radius of the ringing site, two have come from about 150 miles to the west, one from Potgietersrus to the south, and three have been reported from the north, viz. 20 miles north of Salisbury (\pm 300 miles distant), Senanga in Zambia (\pm 600 miles), and Lake Sibdu in Sudan (\pm 2500 miles). The remaining five recoveries have all come from Mocambique, ranging from near Beira in the north to the Incomati River in the South.

Although there have been insufficient recoveries to indicate any seasonal or directional trends, it is hoped that the successes recorded from this small effort will stimulate a more active interest in this species. Recoveries are largely dependent on the activities and co-operation of hunters, and the fact that the knobbie male is a popular target for sportsmen should ensure a reasonably high recovery rate from any such ringing project.

Knob-billed Duck ringing is also carried out by Mr. H.F. Meyer at Mlezu Agricultural School, Que Que. His ringing is strictly limited since it is important to show to the students how wildlife and agriculture can be integrated and so disturbance must be kept to an absolute minimum. Mr. Meyer writes "I catch the birds in a walk-in trap. I started ringing duck in 1964/65. Since then I have ringed 208 Knob-billed Duck out of a total of 474 birds ringed. The following are the furthest recoveries I have had:-

- 27.6.66. Dar Fur, Sudan (12.00N, 24.55E). The finder reported knobbies breeding in the area.
- 1.4.69 Namwala District, Zambia (15.44S, 22.44E).
- 30.11.70 Shinyanga District, Tanzania (no co-ords.)
- 15.8.71 Fort Lamy, Tchad (11.42N. 15.34E).

H. F. Meyer (R.O.S.)

QUE QUE.

(These two articles show how tremendously interesting this species is. It is also clear that the capture technique is easy once the trap is built. It has been suggested that the Knobbie may be a species that breeds at both ends of its migration route - more information needed - ED.)