REPORT

ANNUAL REPORT ON THE 1991–1992 RINGING YEAR

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This report marks the attainment of a long sought-after goal – the publication of achievements and results of a year of ringing within six months of the ringing year's end. And what a year it has been. In addition to a notable increase in the numbers of birds ringed there have also been substantial numbers of new trainees achieving 'A' permit status. This bodes well for the future.

The expansion of ringing activities to new sites and new districts has the potential to increase detection of movements of non-migrant species as well as itinerant migrants. We should not be surprised at the back and forth wanderings that retrapping reveals since birds are, after all, rivalled only by bats in their ease of mobility. However, real records indicating the extent and frequency of local movements are infinitely better than mere supposition and are of immense value in understanding the ecology of the species concerned. New ringers should thus seek to set up new ringing sites as far as logistically convenient from existing ringing venues so that an effective network of ringing stations is created. This will increase the chances of tangible short-term results, whilst the overall increase in ringing effort will contribute to increased numbers of ring recoveries in the long term.

TABLE 1

BREAKDOWN OF RINGING EFFORT BY RINGER TOTALS

GROUP	RINGERS TOTALS		GROUP	PERCENTAGE OF	CUMULATIVE TOTALS	
	LOWEST	HIGHEST	TOTAL	ANNUAL TOTAL	PERCENTAGE	RINGERS
A	1 121	8 355	34 512	67,6	67,6	12
B	423	1 083	8 663	17,0	84,6	24
C	209	394	3 594	7,0	91,6	37
D	131	208	2 117	4,2	95,8	50
E	73	130	1 346	2,6	98,4	63
F	26	71	522	1,0	99,4	76
G	13	25	242	0,5	99,9	89
H	1	9	59	0,1	100,0	102

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF REGIONAL RINGING EFFORT IN THE 1991 – 1992 RINGING YEAR

REGION	NUMBER OF RINGERS RETURNING SCHEDULES	NUMBER OF SPECIES RINGED	NUMBER OF BIRDS RINGED	PERCENTAGE OF ANNUAL TOTAL
TRANSVAAL	30	295	20 052	39,3
CAPE	31	180	17 945	35,1
ZIMBABWE	6	183	3 628	7,1
NATAL	9	160	2 811	5,5
MALAWI	5	151	1 781	3,5
NAMIBIA	7	96	1 368	2,7
ORANGE FREE STATE	8	94	1 192	2,3
BOTSWANA	1	75	1 020	2,0
SOUTHERN OCEAN	4	7	959	1,9
MAURITIUS	1	6	299	0,6
TOTALS	102	481	51 055	100,0

TABLE 3

TOP 20 AMATEUR RINGERS OR RINGING GROUPS
IN THE 1991 – 1992 RINGING YEAR

RINGERS	REGION	NO. OF BIRDS RINGED
TED ROBSON	Transvaal	8 355
GEORGE UNDERHILL	Southwestern Cape	4 297
FRANK DOUWES	Transvaal	3 501
DAVE & SALLY JOHNSON	Natal	2 239
WILLIAM SCOTT	Transvaal	1 883
DALE HANMER	Zimbabwe	1 353
TONY TREE	Zimbabwe & E Cape	1 289
MEDLAND & MALLALIEU	Malawi	1 271
KOBIE RAIJMAKERS	Transvaal	1 121
SHONIE RAIJMAKERS	Transvaal	1 083
MARC HERREMANS	Botswana	1 020
JOHN & DAVE DALZIEL	Zimbabwe	770
PHOEBE BARNARD	Namibia	724
MIKE & LIZ FRASER	Southwestern Cape	711
SAM DE BEER	Transvaal	660
JOHN BUNNING	Transvaal	642
DAWIE DE SWARDT	O. F. S. & Transvaal	613
PAUL MARTIN	Eastern Cape	541
DARRYL DEETLEFS	Transvaal	425
GUY BRADLEY	Transvaal	423

TABLE 4

TWENTY MOST-RINGED LAND BIRDS FOR THE PERIOD
JULY 1991 – JUNE 1992

1991-92 RANK	SPECIES	1990-91 RANK	NO. OF RINGERS	MAXIMUM ON ONE RNGRS NO.	TOTAL
1	EUROPEAN SWALLOW	3	16	8 161	11 548
2	CAPE WHITE-EYE	2	35	785	1 981
3	MASKED WEAVER	1	37	320	1 851
4	RED BISHOP	5	24	264	1 052
5	CAPE WEAVER	4	16	786	910
6	BLUE WAXBILL	-	19	243	693
7	MALACHITE SUNBIRD	17	14	343	624
8	BLACKEYED BULBUL	10	27	128	607
9	CAPE SUGARBIRD	13	6	328	567
10	CAPE SPARROW	6	23	121	493
11	CURLEW SANDPIPER	8	9	252	476
12	LAUGHING DOVE	7	30	139	463
13	BRONZE MANNIKIN	-	14	178	443
14	CAPE BULBUL	9	3	385	409
15	YELLOW WAGTAIL	-	1	372	372
16	BLACK SUNBIRD	-	18	99	356
17	AFR. MARSH WARBLER	-	18	152	354
18	COMMON WAXBILL	14	17	139	349
19	REDEYED BULBUL	19	15	75	339
20	RUFF	-	5	301	317

RINGING EFFORT

By the end of October 1992, 102 ringers had submitted schedules for the 1991 – 1992 ringing year and the total of birds ringed during this period has reached 51 055. This is a substantial improvement over the totals achieved in recent years.

Table 1 shows the distribution of ringing effort and follows the pattern of recent years with one third of the ringers accounting for 90% of the rings used. Most professional and institutional ringing falls into this top third with Bruce Dyer and his team from the Sea Fisheries Research Institute banding 5 075 seabirds (mostly penguins and gannets) this year, a substantial contribution.

Despite this and other seabird banding totals the Cape Province has had to relinquish its top regional spot of the last two years to the Transvaal (Table 2). Zimbabwe, which has been climbing back up the ladder from its eighth position four years ago has got into the third spot.

It is good to see Botswana featuring again after an absence of many years. Regular readers may notice that 'sub-Antarctic' has been replaced by 'Southern Ocean'; this is because seabirds are now being ringed on the Antarctic mainland as well as on the sub-Antarctic Islands, and the new label is all embracing.

TABLE 5

TOP TEN FREE-FLYING RAPTORS CAUGHT IN 1991 – 1992 RINGING YEAR

SPECIES	TOTAL RINGED	NUMBER OF RINGERS	RINGER WITH HIGHEST TOTAL OF THIS SPECIES
STEPPE BUZZARD	125	7	TED ROBSON (101)
PALE C. GOSHAWK	63	8	JOHN MOORCROFT (21)
BLACK SH. KITE	30	10	GUY BRADLEY (13)
ROCK KESTREL	28	8	DONALD FRASER (9)
JACKAL BUZZARD	28	8	MANFRED SCHMITT (12)
DARK C. GOSHAWK	27	2	ALAN KEMP (19)
GREATER KESTREL	22	4	GUY BRADLEY (10)
MARTIAL EAGLE	21	2	ALAN KEMP (20)
LANNER FALCON	17	6	KOTIE HERHOLDT (10)
LIZZARD BUZZARD	17	6	BRUCE LESLIE (7)

Ted Robson has ensured that the number 1 position in Table 3 (and Table 5) is a hard act to follow and has made a really spectacular contribution to this year's totals with the swallow ringing that he and his helpers have carried out.

It is good to see several new names in the Top 20 ringers, and the fact that some of these, like Sam de Beer, only started ringing in the second half of the year, makes their totals even more creditable. With 11 of these 20 achieving four-figure totals perhaps the time is not far off when this table will be filled with annual tallies exceeding 1 000 birds.

Table 4 lists the most-ringed land birds in 1991 – 1992 and reveals six species that were not in the previous season's Top 20. The European Swallow well and truly dominates the totals; in fact more swallows were ringed than the following species of seabirds put together: Cape Gannet (5 412), African Penguin (4 791), Wandering Albatross (493), Kelp Gull (415) and Northern Giant Petrel (374). The appearance of the Blue Waxbill in the list is largely the result of Marc Herremans' efforts in Botswana.

One of the most pleasing new names at position 15 is the Yellow Wagtail, a palearctic migrant that has hitherto been relatively seldom ringed; Dave and John Dalziel have in one season increased the previous grand total of Yellow Wagtails ringed in southern Africa since the inception of the ringing scheme by 270%. Evidently this is no simple task as these birds' roosting habits are far less predictable than those of the European Swallow.

Table 5 shows that success in the capture of free-flying raptors was much more evenly shared amongst the Balchatri enthusiasts in the course of this ringing year. The numbers of raptors caught is down by some 23% on the previous two years; is this perhaps drought-related?

RECOVERIES

1991 – 1992 was an above-average year for recoveries with 510 birds of 99 species being reported; this includes foreign-ringed birds which were represented by 26 birds (5% of total) of 10 species.

Notable amongst these was the first recovery of a Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* ringed at Islas Chafarinas, Melilla, Spain on 31.07.85 and found dead at Torra Bay in the Skeleton Coast National Park, Namibia on 12.01.92. Also noteworthy was a Czechoslovakian-ringed Wood Sandpiper recovered at Chegutu, Zimbabwe and a European Marsh Warbler, ringed on passage at Ngulia, Kenya in December 1991 and subsequently reported from Malawi. A newspaper there, dated 31.03.92, featured an article about a man whose hobby is catching birds, who had caught a bird with a ring on its leg "last October". The article also alleged that the bird was "happily living on millet." Obviously, there were some inaccuracies in this account!

The following distant recoveries and controls were reported:

Cape Gannet ***Morus capensis***

9 80491 (Nestling)				
	10.03.92	Bird Is., Algoa Bay, E. Cape		
Dead	07.06.92	Numbi, Congo Republic	3 mth	3 641 km

Although gannet recoveries were frequent from the Gulf of Guinea in the 50's and 60's, this is the first to be reported from West Africa for over 23 years.

Southern Pochard *Netta erythrophthalma*

7 74609 (Juvenile female)

	26.06.89	Barberspan, Transvaal		
Dead	18.02.92	Lake Naivasha, Kenya	32 mths	3 089 km

One of two birds recovered this year at Lake Naivasha, both drowned in fishnets.

Knot *Calidris canutus*

4 19340 (Immature)

	04.03.73	Langebaan, Cape		
Control	10.10.91	Schiermannikoog, Holland	223 mths	9 693 km

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

6 69256 (Adult)

	22.02.85	Amsterdamhoek, Port Elizabeth		
Dead	10.09.91	Ukhta, Russia	79 mths	11 113 km

The first recovery in the northern hemisphere of a Whimbrel ringed in southern Africa.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

BB 67258 (Adult)

	10.01.87	Betty's Bay, Cape		
Control at nest	30.05.92	Wloclawek, Poland	65 mths	9 676 km

European Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

X 50125 (Immature)

	14.01.91	Otjiwarongo, Namibia		
Dead	13.07.91	Ferdinandshof, Germany	6 mths	8 245 km

AD 05498 (Adult)

	11.01.92	Pretoria, Transvaal		
Control at nest	27.06.92	Jvorkuna, Finland	6 mths	10 095 km

AD 15968 (Age unknown)

	22.03.92	Pretoria, Transvaal		
Dead	23.05.92	Veronez, Russia	2 mths	8 671 km

AD 15999 (Age unknown)

	22.03.92	Pretoria, Transvaal		
Controlled on passage	11.05.92	Chok Pak Pass, Kazakhstan	2 mths	8 748 km

AB 95735 (Age unknown)

	20.04.91	Mossel Bay, Cape		
Dead	01.09.91	Petrovsk, C.I.S.	5 mths	11 358 km

AB 95552 (Age unknown)

	10.03.91	Mossel Bay, Cape		
Dead	08.04.92	Cumbria, England	13 mths	10 173 km

Noteworthy southern African recoveries were as follows:

Secretary Bird *Sagittarius sepentarius*
9 18550 (Nestling)

	05.01.92	Sabi Sand Wildtuin, Transvaal		
Alive but weak	30.04.92	Tsumeb district, Namibia	4 mths	1 537 km

Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*
K 12126 (Adult)

	07.03.91	Kalahari Gemsbok Park, Cape		
Dead	09.06.92	Choma district, Zambia	15 mths	1 187 km

Mountain Buzzard *Buteo tachardus*
K 08547 (1-2 years)

	17.07.85	Tzaneen, Transvaal		
Dead, road casualty				
	12.05.92	Knysna, Cape	82 mths	1 302 km
	Remarkably the second long distance recovery (the first was from Natal) in the Knysna area.			

Little Swift *Apus affinis*
E 13551 (Adult)

	22.09.87	Bloemfontein, Orange Free State		
Control	15.11.91	Vanderkloof, Cape	50 mths	173 km
	No great distance involved but interesting evidence of movement between colonies.			

Redbilled Quelea *Quelea quelea*
AC 16910 (Adult)

	17.08.91	Lilongwe, Malawi		
Dead	22.01.92	Chiredzi, Zimbabwe	5 mths	838 km

The following recoveries provided evidence for significant longevity:

African Penguin *Spheniscus demersus*
P 4055 (Adult)

	15.03.72	Robben Island		
		Oiled bird rehabilitated by SANCCOB		
Dead	31.12.91	Tsitsikama Coast	19 years	10 months

Blackheaded Heron *Ardea melanocephala*
8 10732 (Adult?)

	10.04.71	Westdene Pan, Benoni, Transvaal		
Dead	29.06.92	near Potchefstroom, Transvaal	21 years	3 months

Swift Tern *Sterna bergii*
5 65202 (Nestling)

	30.04.77	Jutten Island, Cape		
Sick, subsequently died				
	16.05.92	Great Brak River, Cape	15 years	1 month

Red Bishop Bird *Euplectes orix*
AA 81553 (Adult)

	15.11.79	Johannesburg, Transvaal		
Dead	24.09.91	Johannesburg, Transvaal	11 years	10 months

Table 6 lists the most frequently recovered birds and includes 16 familiar species that featured in last year's list. A notable jump in position (from 20th to 5th) is that of the European Swallow, a result of recent ringing effort on this species.

TABLE 6

MOST FREQUENTLY RECOVERED BIRDS IN THE 1991-1992 RINGING YEAR

SAFRING CODE	SPECIES NAME		TOTAL NO.
044	CAPE GANNET	*Morus capensis*	96
002	AFRICAN PENGUIN	*Spheniscus demersus*	83
047	WHITE BR. CORMORANT	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	35
287	KELP GULL	*Larus dominicanus*	30
493	EUROPEAN SWALLOW	*Hirundo rustica*	17
298	SWIFT TERN	*Sterna bergii*	16
803	MASKED WEAVER	*Ploceus velatus*	13
775	CAPE WHITE-EYE	*Zosterops pallidus*	12
317	LAUGHING DOVE	*Streptopelia senegalensis*	11
231	AFR. BL. OYSTERCATCHER	*Haematopus moquini*	10
745	REDWINGED STARLING	*Onychognathus morio*	10
749	CAPE SUGARBIRD	*Promerops cafer*	9
080	WHITE STORK	*Ciconia ciconia*	8
291	COMMON TERN	*Sterna hirundo*	7
799	CAPE WEAVER	*Ploceus capensis*	7
294	ARCTIC TERN	*Sterna paradisaea*	5
553	OLIVE THRUSH	*Turdus olivaceus*	5
786	CAPE SPARROW	*Passer melanurus*	5
106	CAPE GRIFFON	*Gyps coprotheres*	4
545	BLACKEYED BULBUL	*Pycnonotus barbatus*	4
686	CAPE WAGTAIL	*Motacilla capensis*	4

RETRAPS

Not all expected retrap data sets had been submitted by the end of October but nearly 1 000 records have been computerised for the 1991–1992 ringing year, ranging from penguins to African Citrils. My thanks to all those ringers who have spent their time extracting and scheduling recordable retraps from their year's ringing records so that the SAFRING data bank can profit from their labours.

There are now 11 years of retrap submissions in the data bank (including the as yet incomplete 1991–1992 records) and the opportunity has been taken to compile files of 'final' retraps for groups of species, starting with pigeons and doves. These files will be updated annually and enable rapid reference to survival patterns. Data sets for each species are, in the majority of cases, too small to enable comparison between, for example, rural and suburban populations, and virtually all (with the notable exception of Dale Hanmer's Malawi data) are still too 'young' in years covered to permit potential survival spans to be revealed. There are some good South African data sets coming on however, especially in the southwestern Cape (Underhill, Fraser), Melville Koppies and Staffordtuin (Bunning, Douwes) in the Transvaal and Darvill (Johnson) in Natal.

Despite the relative immaturity of these retrap data sets some species records are numerous enough to provide some intriguing comparisons. As an example, take two common and widespread garden birds, the Olive Thrush and the Cape Robin. The numbers of these two species ringed, recovered and retrapped between July 1981 and June 1992 is shown in Table 7.

Looking at the recovery figures alone one might infer that the larger size of the thrush (approximately three times the body-mass of the robin) predisposes it to discovery when dead, and perhaps this is a factor, though both are frequent prey to domestic cats, many of which proudly carry the spoils of their hunting prowess into their owners' dwellings, thus improving the chances of the ring being reported.

But size difference cannot explain the sharp and significant discrepancy in recapture rates; Olive Thrushes are not, in my experience, adept at escaping from small-mesh nets. So what does the comparatively low recapture rate of the thrush imply? Two possible explanations are that (a) the thrush has a shorter expectation of adult life than the robin (greater susceptibility to predation?) and/or (b) that it is the more itinerant of the two species. The oldest surviving Olive Thrush to date is 77 months (Sir Lowry's Pass) whilst the oldest surviving Cape Robin is 142 months (Rondevlei) and the data set includes five other birds surviving more than 77 months. The better showing of the Cape Robin may be merely due to its larger data set rather than to a superior probability of survival.

More critical analyses may reveal other factors and suggest other explanations. In the meantime though, it is hoped that every ringer will appreciate the importance of retrap data, whether submitted as casual records on Schedule 2 forms or as part of more detailed Measured Effort Site projects.

TABLE 7: Ringing, Recovery and Retrap Totals for Olive Thrush *Turdus olivaceus* and Cape Robin *Cossypha caffra* from 1981–1992

Species	No. Ringers	No. Recovered	Recovery Rate	No. Retrapped	Retrap Rate
Olive Thrush	2 734	44	1,6	32	1,2
Cape Robin	2 169	26	1,2	120	5,5