

be put to the SAFRING Steering Committee.

A third important result was a strongly-supported proposal to run an annual ringers' workshop at a suitable locality. This would be a 'hands-on' exercise during which ringers can swap ideas on techniques and equipment, upgrade skills and handle new birds. It is also hoped that the Ringing Organiser would be able to attend this event. The first 'ringers' bash' is being organised at Bonamanzi near St Lucia by Gordon Holtshausen in October 1994 (see Announcement on page 84).

I see the potential for the annual ringers' bash to be the **primary source** of motivation and technical improvement for licensed ringers in the future. For these bashes to really succeed, it is vital that the event be as inclusive as possible, and should take place at widely spaced localities, so that all ringers have, at the very least, one fairly low-cost option in

which to participate every three or four years.

Finally, the input and feedback from the international visitors was very reassuring. One first-world visitor was envious of the administration of and approach to ringing in southern Africa. The affirmation of an international review is necessary to prevent parochiality.

All of this was achieved with a great deal of consensus and a minimum of passion, which belied the fact that the workshop will, I believe, have a lasting impact on ringing in southern Africa. Lastly, I would like to repeat the statement by Pertti Saurola, and later emphasized by Ian Rowley. Long-term life-history studies are very important and only the amateur has the time to pursue such studies. Without dedicated amateur involvement in ringing, the rate of gain in understanding of avian demography is severely curtailed.

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## REVIEWING THE TAXONOMY OF *PYCNONOTUS* BULBULS: A PROPOSED RINGING PROJECT

Rael Loon

38 Lancaster Avenue, Craighall Park,  
Johannesburg 2196

On the 10th October 1992, I was ringing birds in my garden in Craighall Park. After catching and ringing 16 Blackeyed Bulbuls *Pycnonotus barbatus* within the space of about an hour, I checked the single mistnet again to find another two Blackeyed Bulbuls caught in the net as well as what appeared to be a single Redeyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus nigricans*!

Obviously I was very reluctant to ring the bird as a Redeyed Bulbul and immediately release it, knowing how suspicious my fellow ringers would be had I told them I caught a Redeyed Bulbul in my garden. I tried in vain to get hold of someone to confirm this sighting. Unfortunately, being Saturday, everyone had gone off to do their own ringing, while I was holding a bulbul in my hand with a definite orange wattle around its eye.

Even I was not convinced, however. I carefully took various measurements of the bird, checking through *Roberts'* in order to find some other anatomical confirmation to distinguish it from its

blackeyed compatriots, but unfortunately no such luck, since all the measurements correlated. Comparing the bird with the two Blackeyed Bulbuls I had caught with it, I could see no marked differences between them, other than the colour of the wattle. The culmen seemed somewhat sharper. Even their iris colour was the same which made matters difficult since the Redeyed is meant to have an orange or red-brown iris as opposed to the dark brown iris of the Blackeyed.

Very confused, I let the bird go, not knowing whether to have ringed it as a Redeyed Bulbul, a Redeyed blackeyed Bulbul, a Blackeyed reeyed Bulbul or simply an LBJ with a red eye.

I had personally never heard of anyone who had a confirmed sighting of Redeyed Bulbul in Johannesburg. I subsequently spoke to Guy Bradley who had caught several similar birds when he was ringing at John Bunning's station at Melville Koppies and he was as confused as I am. John McAllister, the editor of *WBC News*, noted that Redeyed Bulbuls are common at Abe Bailey Nature Reserve, near Carletonville and Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve near Heidelberg (December 1992, No.159). I wrote to Dr S. Keith of America who has done quite a lot of work on *Pycnonotus* bulbuls (Keith, 1992) and enclosed a photograph of the bird. I asked him whether he thinks that the bird was a hybrid or a true Redeyed Bulbul. Dr Keith said that it was possibly a pure *P. nigricans*.

Now I would like to set up an experiment to investigate whether this is

true. More generally I would like to review the taxonomy of birds using Bulbuls as a type of 'bird guinea-pig'. In order to do so I am thinking about collecting several pairs of each Bulbul on the hybrid zone, colour-ringing them so that one could identify them individually, and placing them in a large aviary. This would be quite a long-term project since one would have to observe them over several generations to get any meaningful data. The variables that could be played with could include habitat, temperature, humidity, diet, etc. Much recent theoretical work in Evolutionary Biology has placed an emphasis on specific mate recognition systems (Patterson, 1978). Interesting results could be obtained comparing the calls of the birds and particularly of the hybrids (if they do hybridise of course). DNA-DNA hybridisation experiments (Sibley, 1986) could also help solve the Bulbul puzzle.

If anyone could assist me with this project please let me know. I'm wondering also whether or not one of the Cape ringers could conduct a joint project using Cape Bulbuls and Redeyed since this could further elucidate the problem.

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