

REVIEWS

Kevin Baker. 1993. Identification guide to European non-passerines. *BTO Guide* 24. Theford: British Trust for Ornithology. 332 pp.

Kevin Baker, of the British Trust for Ornithology, has just written a long-awaited ageing and sexing guide for European non-passerines. The companion guide for passerines by Lars Svensson first appeared in 1970 and reached its fourth edition in 1992. 'Svensson' was reviewed in *Safring News* 22.82-83 (1993).

BTO Guide 24 covers 119 non-passerine and non-wader species. The waders were excluded because there was already a similar guide for this well-studied Order in this series: (*BTO Guide* 17 'Guide to the identification and ageing of Holarctic waders' by A.J. Prater, J. Marchant and J. Vuorinen, published in 1977, and reviewed in *Safring News* 7.14-15 (1978)).

Excluding waders, there are roughly 250 non-passerine species that occur fairly regularly in Europe, so the first thing to say about this Guide is that it is not comprehensive, covering less than half the species that occur in Europe.

On the other hand, at least one species is included from each of the Families which a European ringer is likely to encounter. A high proportion of species in Families at the starting end of 'Voous order' are dealt with (Divers as far as Auks), but thereafter (Doves to Woodpeckers) the coverage is less consistent.

The book is based both on Kevin Baker's own know-how as a ringer and ornithologist and on papers in journals, in his case particularly *Ringers' Bulletin* and *Ringling & Migration*, the journals in which British ringers publish their methods of ageing and sexing birds.

As is the case with Svensson's passerine guide, the most useful chapter for SAFRING ringers is the one on general principles for ageing and sexing. Kevin Baker has sections on 'moult and wear', 'growth bars', 'cloacal examination' and 'incubation patch'. Of these, he considers that "A full understanding of the principles of moult and wear of feathers is **essential** for the purposes of ageing and sexing birds" (his emphasis). Looking through the guides published in *Safring News* to date, this has certainly been the experience in southern Africa as well (at least as far as ageing is concerned).

Looking at a sample of Kevin Baker's accounts, they are written (understandably!) from a Britcentric viewpoint. The Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* guide applies only to the population breeding in Britain and the adjoining North Sea coasts of Europe, and not to the Baltic Sea (and Black Sea) populations migrating to southern African waters – the timing of moult in these populations differ from each other.

No doubt many ringers across Europe will be provoked to submit additions, improvements and additions based their experience.

Kevin Baker's Foreword welcomes this: "The scope for learning much, much more about ageing and sexing methods in non-passerines is enormous. Periodic revision is essential ... Users are urged to pass on information about ageing and sexing methods not covered in this guide, or those techniques which need modifying, or those which do not appear to work!" It was largely this kind of feedback that enabled Svensson's passerine guide to progress from edition to edition!

Perhaps the most important thing about this Guide is the encouragement it (again) provides to ringers in southern Africa to imi-

tate it. Firstly, we do not need information on all our species before we start to produce our own ageing and sexing guide; secondly, we do not need criteria tried and tested throughout southern Africa before we start; thirdly, there is already enough material in *Safring News* (see Vol 23(1):49-52) which could be collated together to make the pro-

vocative start that seems to be needed to get ringers to add their know-how; fourthly, we need a willing coordinator who will start the ball rolling and, hopefully, see the *Guide to ageing and sexing birds in southern Africa* through its first few editions.

Les Underhill

Bird ringing in science and environmental management. Edited by Jenni, L., Berthold, P., Peach, W. & Spina, F. European Union for Bird Ringing, Heteren, The Netherlands. 24pp.

What can be achieved through bird ringing? What contribution can this knowledge make to science and conservation? This booklet, produced by EURING, the European Union for Bird Ringing, provides answers to these questions.

The booklet traces the history of scientific bird ringing; the beginnings in Denmark in 1889, the development of national ringing schemes, the introduction of mistnets and the unravelling of the mysteries of bird migration.

EURING has recently identified three major areas in which ringing in Europe is capable of playing major roles in science and conservation.

1. Little can be done about the declines in many species migrating from (and within) Europe until there is a better understanding of migration routes for each population, their staging, refuelling and non-breeding areas. This information can be used to plan a strategy to conserve these bird species through an integrated system of protected areas.

2. With habitat fragmentation, the dispersal processes that enabled gene flow to take place have been disrupted to an unknown extent. Our ignorance about how organisms move between birth site and breeding site is one of the major shortcomings in applying the theory of population ecology to conservation problems. Clearly, bird ringing can help to provide these data. Bird ringing can also help to identify 'source' and 'sink' populations, crucial information for conservation biology.

3. The mechanisms underpinning changes in the sizes of bird populations can be uncovered using bird ringing. The priority ringing projects in Europe are to measure the variations in time and space of breeding productivity, dispersal, survival, impact of hunting, etc.

The booklet is timely. All institutions need to justify their continued existence on an on going basis – otherwise they just become institutions. The point is repeatedly made that ringing schemes in Europe (and elsewhere in the world) have "a crucial role to play in solving the challenges and responsibilities facing environmental managers and politicians in the 21st century."

Les Underhill