

REPORTBACK ON THE RINGING WORKSHOP HELD AT BONAMANZI GAME PARK IN ZULULAND IN OCTOBER 1994.

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Introduction

Ringers came from far and wide to attend this first¹ ringing workshop in the New South Africa. The idea was conceived at the conference on **Migration, Dispersal and Nomadism** held at Langebaan in 1993, where the ringers felt a need to get together and share ideas, ring some birds and have a good time. That is exactly what happened. Gordon Holtshausen and his team organised a wonderful weekend in a wonderful setting.

General overview

The programme was well designed with lectures, discussions and demonstrations in the middle of the day, ringing in the early morning and afternoon and very sociable evening braais with venison on the spit on Saturday night. Excellent bottles of wine were pulled out of ringing boxes and the feeling around the fires was very convivial. Many of the names that are so often heard suddenly got faces.

The location was ideal for the workshop since it afforded the ringers the prospect of some very interesting and rare birds to be caught and ringed. The whole game reserve was occupied by ringers and their hangers on and nets were to be seen around every corner. Ringers and novices moved from ringing station to ringing station and studied other ringers' techniques and equipment. Some of the novice ringers got the opportunity to ring with ringers from other places, thus broadening their experience.

¹ Nambian ringers organised a workshop in 1991. See **Squeeze the ringers, Namibian style** by Rob Simmons in *Safring News* 20:37-41.

The birds were something else and sight lifers were often taken out of nets. Birds like African Broadbill, Rudd's and Yellowbreasted Apalis, African Goshawk and Pinkthroated Twinspots were caught, amongst others. More than 250 birds were caught and the species list is something to see. Steve Piper had at one stage more bats than birds in his nets, and if Rick Nuttall had been a bit quicker, he might have prevented a Kudu escaping from and with his net!

It was also a good idea to have the SAFRING officials there, though at stages I felt pity for poor Terry and Les, because no sooner would one ringer finish a discussion with them than the next was there to take his place. Good ideas were exchanged and a lot of discussions centred around possible projects to make ringing more purposeful.

TV1 and 50/50 had a team there and it was at times difficult to get going with lenses stuck between your fingers for close-ups or with a big, furry microphone hanging ominously above your head. Many laughs were had with Steve Piper directing himself, Suzette Eloff, the crew and the director. Care was taken to do a positive projection of the image of ringers and ringing, and I think everything went well, except for a robin that decided to act a serious wingsprain right in front of the camera. Hopefully that will be edited out.

Talks and demonstrations

The talks started on Friday afternoon at 14h00 with Gordon Holtshausen welcoming all. He then proceeded to give a talk and slide show on Bonamanzi and the birds the ringers may encounter.

Terry Oatley followed that by telling us how SAFRING works and he then spoke about taking of measurements of birds. Since there is no standard set of instructions as to how measurements should be taken, the measurements are not worth much, except for own use. He added that SAFRING does not have any use for your mensural data and

that if you collect data that you are not going to use you are wasting your time. However, there are ornithologists who may need your data, for example, Rick Nuttall wants every piece of data on the waxbills and Frank Douwes wants information on woodhoopoes.

Aldo Berruti then discussed the ringer's code of ethics and stressed a couple of important points. Most of the code of ethics has to do with the interaction between the ringer and the birds, the ringer and the environment and the ringer and the public. However, nothing is said in the code of ethics about 'ringing twitchers' stealing other ringers' birds from their nets or removing other ringers' rings and putting their own on a rare or special bird. This sort of opportunist malpractice can probably only take place in a hands-on workshop environment and hopefully will not be repeated at future meetings.

On Saturday, Roy Earlé spoke about his project on endoparasites and stressed the need for more blood smears to be collected by ringers. He will let the ringers know by the end of the year of a list of target species from which he needs smears, with an emphasis on the rarer species. Two Middelburg ringers, both in the veterinary field, offered to help Roy with the microscopic scanning of the smears. Roy collected smears from nearly every bird caught at Lalapanzi, thus enlarging his species variety.

A series of practical demonstrations then followed, starting with Les Underhill's demonstration of his impressive Zap Net.

Rick Nuttall's demonstration on how to do a horizontal net placing generated a lot of interest and I am sure this technique is going to be used with great success in a lot of marshes.

Leanda Lotter baffled a lot of ringers when she showed us how a mesh can be knotted and how to use this technique to repair nets. However, with nets as expensive as they are

now, a lot of people showed interest and required more information after her talk.

Dawie de Swart then demonstrated how his present non-slip guy ropes evolved from a complicated brass and rubber fitting to a simple and effective modified washer.

Sam de Beer demonstrated his equipment designed for simplicity and ease of operation by one person. The Ringer's Waltz for Net Folders was also demonstrated, without the accompaniment of music. Interesting comments were made by the assembly, and many of us will now walk around with everything in bundles of four, because four does not require any counting, according to Steve Piper.

We were treated to an interesting talk and slide show by Les Underhill on his Curlew Sandpiper study. I think many ringers dream about a project like this, with visits to other parts of the world included.

Two short discussions by Steve Piper on moult and by Frank Douwes on the measuring and controversial use of the pelvic gap for sexing birds followed.

Alec and Cecilia Manson from Vumba in Zimbabwe could not attend the workshop, but Steve Piper presented their magnificent study done on the birds of Vumba. It took them more than 17 years to collect the data on 10 000 ringed birds. The results of this study will hopefully be published in *Safring News*.

Sam de Beer then talked about the programme that the Wesvaal ringers follow to train new ringers. He stressed the importance of training new ringers and suggested that every ringer should go out and find at least one trainee. He also spoke on what the Wesvaal ringers plan to do in future and ended off by asking the scientists to help the ringers with projects to make their ringing more purposeful and to help ringers to interpret their data.

Conclusion

Les Underhill spoke on future projects and then Aldo Berruti led the meeting into the feedback session. Steve Piper started off by giving a summary of events during the workshop. Aldo then led the discussions that followed.

A show of hands indicated that most of the ringers were from Natal and the Transvaal, with other ringers coming from as far as Namibia. About 40% of the attendees were novices.

Everybody felt that the workshop was a great success and there was very strong support for another to be held in 1995. Rick Nuttall responded with an offer to organise one in the Sandveld Nature Reserve near Bloemhof.

There was a suggestion for ringers to give short formal presentations on their projects and posters. A vote showed that the attendees were in favour of the current balance of techniques versus formal presentations.

There was also a suggestion to establish a formal programme to allow both ringers and novices to watch other ringers at work at their

ringing stations. It was recommended that novices be allowed the opportunity to do practical ringing with ringers during the workshop.

Techniques used by ringers should be published in *Safring News* and notes on ringing techniques and equipment design should be brought to the next meeting to be handed to interested ringers. The Wesvaal Bird Club's set of ringing instructions is being updated and will soon be available to learner ringers.

At the end of the discussion there was a request to SAFRING to enhance feedback on retraps. This would also include some form of interpretation, although Aldo Berruti felt that time may be a restraint.

Thus ended the first, and definitely not the last, ringing workshop. A couple of ringers had to leave, while many stayed on for another night to enjoy the birds and peace offered by Bonamanzi.

Gordon Holtshausen must again be thanked for a splendid weekend, well organised and full of events and activities to please everyone.

RINGING IN THE POTHEFSTROOM AREA

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Introduction

With about 80 members, the Wesvaal Bird Club does not rate as a very big bird club, but it is a very active bird club. The club is not very old either, but it has a very solid foundation, based on the enjoyment of birds, the conservation of birds and the study of birds. Although a lot of time is spent bird-

watching, members are also encouraged to work on other bird related projects. The club was very active during the South African Bird Atlas Project. Their efforts were mainly centred in the areas west of Potchefstroom and vast tracts of the western Transvaal, northern Cape and Kalahari were atlased by members of the club.

As the Atlas Project went into its final stages, members realised that a new activity will have to be found to take the place of the Atlas. The Wesvaal Bird Club started a ringing programme in 1991 when Sam de Beer started his C-permit training under the Rajmakers brothers in Vanderbijl Park.