

## EDITORIAL

### BIRD-RINGING AND CONSERVATION

Although most ringing activity, particularly that carried out by amateurs, is concerned with finding out minutiae of knowledge about the daily lives of birds, ringers should also keep in mind the contribution that they can make to conservation. Apart from the fact that many of our professional ringers are from the Conservation Departments and that NUBRA is funded from the same source, as bird-enthusiasts, we owe some thought to the preservation of the objects of our enthusiasm. I am glad to say that there are already a number of groups making a contribution in this direction. Ringers in the Transvaal are carrying out studies on the diminishing numbers of the Cape Vulture and birds of prey are being studied in the Kruger National Park. In the Cape, another group is making a study of waders particularly of the Saldanha Bay area, which is seriously threatened by the mammoth developments proposed by Iscor. Ringing studies of terns at Cape Recife near Port Elizabeth have shown how important this area is as a passage point for these birds which in turn will reinforce proposals for the area to be declared a Nature Reserve. I think that the important point about the best of these studies is that they involve more than just ringing. Thus counts are kept of all birds of prey seen in the K.N.P., while ringing is being carried out. Similarly the W.Cape Wader Group has organized once-a-month counts of selected spots at Langebaan and thrice yearly an attempt is made to record all the birds in the area by simultaneous counts by ten or more observers. These population figures can then be compared with indirect population estimates from retrap rates and a good estimate of total population can be made. The recent mid-winter count revealed more than 8 000 overwintering waders which suggests that Langebaan may be proportionately even more important as an overwintering area than as a summering spot.

It follows that ringers should consider carrying out similar supporting studies where these are not already on the go. Should not the Vulture Study Group contemplate making a study of fledging success and accurate counts of numbers of birds present etc., while carrying out their ringing? Such additional work will give further direction and impetus to any ringing studies on uncommon species and to population studies of threatened habitats.