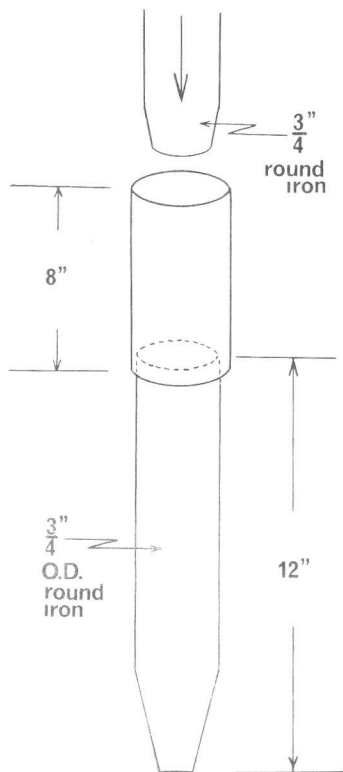


## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

Thank you for the Vol. 2, No.1 received today. There is a lot of food for thought here and much to learn. Congratulations.

Your remarks about making nets and about nylon v terylene nets bring to mind some of my experiences. First of all I have for a number of years bought bulk netting from the BTO for making up into nets. This is a cheaper way of getting netting, but I would add that making the nets is hard work. The bulk netting comes in 3ft widths and so each shelf means "sewing" on another length. We have made 6ft nets normally, which are ideal for the grassland ringing carried out at Peterhouse. I am sure 9 or 12ft nets could be made equally well if required. I have even used some as 3ft single-shelf nets with success at open water-holes. I do not consider the work particularly difficult, but it is a strain on the eyes and unless one has plenty of space the net seems to get caught up in one's legs all the time. We have used old steel knitting needles (the long sort) with a hole drilled in the end for threading the tie-strings. This is bent slightly and is easier to use than a netting needle. The loops are made with the white nylon guy cord supplied by the BTO.



When I started ringing up in Rhodesia, the Japanese nylon nets were all we could get so we used them. I found that many of the birds were damaged by the nylon which was "coarse" to the touch. I found that shoulders in particular seemed to be rubbed raw. Another disadvantage I found was that the nylon soon became brittle and any fast-flying bird went straight through. Once the terylene nets became available I dumped the nylon as soon as I could afford replacements. The terylene is much softer and does not damage the birds nearly as easily (although I still get the odd bird with damage - usually when the bird is the wrong size for the net) and the nets never have the harsh feel that the nylon had. The terylene also lasts much longer than the nylon.

While on the subject of nets and netting, I think it might be useful to mention that we bought a length of the superfine bulk netting to try. I have found this to be too weak for the sort of

conditions under which we work. The net tears too easily if hooked up - even the wind is often sufficient to tear the nets off a hook. I did not find that the finer netting gave me any advantages in trapping birds and it certainly became brittle much more quickly than the conventional netting. This again shows that the nylon is not as good as the terylene nets in my opinion (the superfine being nylon).

I think that probably the simplest way to repair mist nets is to use a piece of bulk netting or else use an old net. I find that tying new netting in either terylene or nylon is difficult as the knots seem to slip, but this may be because I lack experience in net-making.

With reference to the mist net poles described on P 18; John Harwood does not describe what he uses to anchor the pole in the ground. The system we use is to weld a piece of  $\frac{3}{4}$ " I.D. galvanised iron pipe onto a sharpened piece of  $\frac{3}{4}$ " O.D. round steel reinforcing. This is hammered into the ground using another piece of  $\frac{3}{4}$ " round iron tapered at the bottom so that the slight expansion does not cause the iron to stick in the socket. This method eliminates the burring of the top of the socket which occurs if the socket is struck directly with the hammer. Into the socket I slip a piece of  $\frac{3}{4}$ " conduit - the length up to 12ft, depending on the nets being used and the height required. We have also found that 1" rake handles tapered to fit in to the socket are quite suitable. Having read John Harwood's article I think I may well use his system to join my wooden poles and I think his idea of using snap hooks for anchoring poles an excellent one.

Finally the article on trapping plovers at night. I cannot think why I did not think of using this on our Botswana trips. When night hunting I have used the hunting lamp quite successfully to "hold" plovers on dark nights and I am sure that using a net we could catch them. The bright spot-light would have advantages over a torch in that it is much brighter, thus a netter who operates from a vehicle may be able to increase his catch. I shall endeavour to try this out next time I am netting in Botswana where plovers are common.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Ginn,  
Peterhouse,  
Marandellas,  
Rhodesia.

Sir,

I would like to make a suggestion for a regular feature article in Safring News. Most ringers do not become aware of recoveries and recaptures until the end-of-the-season reports are circulated unless they are the original ringer or can visit the NUBRA offices.

A feature article could give particulars of interesting recoveries and recaptures made in the previous quarter, selected to point-up movements, longevity or details of little-ringed birds.

I suggest that the article be modelled after 'Recovery Round-up' in The Australian Bird Bander in that a complete list is not given and that mention not be taken as final publication. This allows ringers to retain their data for their own use, and possible

publication.

John Cooper,  
A 401, Lynwood Gardens,  
Pinetree Road,  
Claremont, C.P.

Sir,

Dr. Tom Choate's article on "Economical Colour Banding" (Safring News 2 (2): 18-20) calls for immediate comment. I and many other ringers consider his method highly dangerous for the bird. The letter from Johnnie Cloete in the same issue dramatically illustrates that even a metal ring with a slight gap can be dangerous to species that gather bits of thread and string for nesting material. Dr. Choate's colour tags, with their long protruding tails, would be a death-trap for sparrows, as well as other Passerines which use similar nesting material, or frequent dense thorn scrub where the tags might get caught. It is also not inconceivable that weavers could tie themselves up with strips of nesting material while building. Interference with brooding of eggs, egg breakage and injury to young chicks by the tags with their metal staples are also highly likely.

Those of us who are concerned with ringing administration have a constant battle to convince members of the public that ringing is a safe technique. It needs only one newspaper article featuring a bird that has died or been maimed by a ringing technique to destroy years of public relations work. Dr. Choate says that no evidence of injury is evident after three months of using his tags. We should remember that a bird may become entangled inside its nest, or in an isolated place, or be rapidly removed by a predator or scavenger after becoming entangled. Three months is hardly enough time to evaluate a technique of this nature.

The prime requisite of ringing is that any technique used should be safe. I am not convinced that Dr. Choate's method is either safe or desirable. The only advantage over standard, proven colour rings is that the polythene tubing is cheap - but can any small saving in cost be offset against public displeasure against all bird-ringing? I would appeal to all ringers to avoid using these colour tags, and to the administrators of the ringing scheme to ban all experimental marking, unless it is done under strict control in order to evaluate a particular technique.

John A. Ledger,  
Branch Ringing Organiser,  
Witwatersrand Bird Club,  
P.O. Box 1038,  
Johannesburg, Tvl.

Sir,

In his article "Economical Colour Banding" Dr. T. S. Choate states that the cost of 600 'bands' is R0,30 and that this amount is approximately 10% of the cost of commercial rings. In other words the same number of commercial rings would cost R3,00 - his saving is therefore R2,70. Dr. Choate considers these costs considerable.

If Dr. Choate is a dedicated ringer, he will readily agree that he spends in the region of 80 to 100 times as much money per annum

on petrol, car wear and tear, traps, bait, nets, etc. in pursuit of his ringing effort, and therefore this saving of R2,70 should be seen in true perspective as having no bearing at all.

I do not think that these so-called colour-bands can be considered harmless for birds which spend a great deal of their lives in under-cover and carry long pieces of straw, grass, wool, etc. for making their nests. Apart from this, it is known that weavers have been recaptured 12 years after ringing, and that the aluminium rings that had been used on them were worn down to half of their original thickness, so how long will these staples last?

My opinion is that Dr.Choate, by saving himself R2,70 definitely does no good by using these contraptions, neither to the birds nor to the Ringing Scheme as such, as we all know how easily many years of good public relations can be destroyed by one thoughtless ringer's actions. We can be glad that Dr.Choate's letter was not subject to any more publicity than that covered by the limited circulation of Safring News.

I wonder whether NUBRA should not only approve a colour-ringing scheme as such, but should also specify or approve the type of colour ring to be used.

M.B.Schmitt,  
98 The Sentinel,  
28 van der Merwe Street,  
Hillbrow, Tvl.

NUBRA Comment - I feel that both these letters perhaps exaggerate the dangers of this type of colour-ring. The only part of the design which presents an additional hazard to the bird other than that of the standard colour-ring is the staple, which if not properly flattened could form an entangling or protruding hook. However NUBRA is currently assembling a register of colour-ringing in southern Africa and is intending to tighten up on its regulations for colour-ringing. No colour-rings other than the standard type supplied by NUBRA, should be used without prior approval and ringers should certainly not adopt the colour-ringing technique advocated by Dr.Choate until it has been tested more thoroughly. Perhaps the most significant point in the above letters is that the actual saving costs are really insignificant relative to the other costs of ringing activities.  
- C.C.H.Elliott.

Sir,

A comment on the editorial note (vol. 2, no. 1, P 25, 1973) that vultures in the S.W.Transvaal may be electrocuted by "flying into wires, e.g. Mute Swans in South east England": This suggestion is probably not consistent with the habits of normally high-flying breeding colonies. It may, however, apply to vultures in other areas and is certainly true of aquatic species in South Africa, e.g. flamingoes; or the occasional Sacred Ibis on its way in to roost, etc. Of course non-aquatic birds are also killed by flying into wires (in daylight as well as at night).

The ultimate entanglement of that number of vultures (148) with the guard steels (which are attached to the steel masts) and high tension conductors is more likely to be the result of perching - which has, in fact, been observed. Hence the statement in the

original paper: "It is not known whether these large birds are killed trying to perch or when flying off, or both".

Miles Markus,  
Dept. of Zoology,  
Imperial College,  
London S.W.7, U.K.

Sir,

The report of Mr. Manfred Waltner concerning the palearctic wader ringing results of the W. Cape Wader Study Group, Safring News vol. 2 no. 2 page 4, has stimulated me to do some calculations concerning our results in the Transvaal. In the 72/73 season Bob Fleetwood and myself caught 452 palearctic waders during 24 outings. This is an average of 19 birds per outing. An average number of 10 single-shelf wader nets were used on each outing, which gives an average of 1.9 birds per net per outing.

Mr. Waltner is absolutely correct in talking about a discouraging picture for would-be ringers. Nevertheless even we consider our past season very successful.

Manfred B. Schmitt,  
98 The Sentinel,  
28 van der Merwe Street,  
Hillbrow, Tvl.

Sir,

#### Pirate Ringing Stations

I would like to draw ringers' attention to a potential hazard to their studies.

I find that we have on our boundary a pirate - perhaps even commercial - banding station which operates spasmodically but to an as yet unknown programme. Their activities while perhaps not significant cannot be ignored.

These stations are disguised as poultry yards with the roosters and hens strutting around as bait not to mention fowl food; birds bearing Rondevlei's rings are lured and trapped.

As you note, or as you should note, one becomes well acquainted with old hands at an established station and some of our birds, now completely pauperized, rely on us for a daily hand-out. One recognizes the limp, the twitching eye, the nervous cough and the guilty downcast eyes of some of these and, indeed, it is frequently not necessary to scrutinize their identity cards. These are the old Rondevlei hands who waste our time and fill our records.

Over the past year I have noted on several occasions a rather brazenly out-thrust leg of several Laughing Doves and a look which almost says "I am a newcomer. Please mark that." This note is prompted by a capture today of what I recognize to be an old friend of ours who was notching up surely his 150th to 200 retrapping. In place of what should be a well worn band, he wore a pale blue ribbon neatly tied into a bow around his right leg. Only last week one bird turned up with no less than two bands on one leg.

All this goes to show that some Grassy Parkite is trapping, removing, re-arranging, distorting and making a nuisance of himself. As I have mentioned one will never know to what extent these activities may reach. I do feel that it is worthwhile keeping such an incident in mind.

E.H.J. Middlemiss,  
Chief Warden of Nature Reserves,  
Rondevlei Bird Sanctuary,  
Retreat, C.P.