

TECHNIQUES

IMPROVING CATCHES WITH A TAPE-RECORDER

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Having read the articles on the use of tape recording as an aid to catching birds in mist-nets for ringing purposes, (in Safring Vol.1 no.2 : 18 and Vol.2 no.2 : 26) I would like to add some observations of my own.

I have started a five-year population study of the bush-birds occurring at the Melville Koppies Nature Reserve, an area of approximately 40 ha. of virgin veld in the centre of the built-up suburb of Melville, Johannesburg. Owing to its location it does not accommodate a large variety of bird species. A check-list compiled in 1972/73 (Supplement 'A' of the W.B.C. News Sheet No.82) lists a total of 73 species, to which from my ringing activities I can add a further eight species.

From the start of my ringing visits I realised that I must find some way of improving my catches, so I started taking along a small cassette tape-recorder with a pre-recorded cassette of bird calls with me as part of the ringing equipment. The following notes are some of the observations I made during the time I have been using this technique:-

Turtle Doves (R.316) usually answer their calls but nothing further.

Laughing Doves (R.317) have been called and caught.

Diederik Cuckoos (R.352) usually come to their call, calling themselves and getting quite excited. I have caught five.

Red-faced Mousebirds (R.392) come to their call and some have been caught.

Black-collared- & Crested Barbets (R.431 & 439) have been called up by their calls and caught

Sharp-billed Honeyguide (R.443) I have no recording of its call, but it appears quite an inquisitive little bird and often comes to inspect what is going on - especially when the recording of Black-eyed Bulbuls mobbing an owl is playing. I have caught one.

Black-eyed Bulbuls (R.545) are very easy to call up, especially when playing a recording of them mobbing.

Cape Robin (R.581) usually only takes up a vantage point and sings back to the tape-recorder.

Garden & Willow Warblers (R.595 & 599) both have been called up and caught by playing their songs.

Fiscal (R.707) this bird takes no interest whatsoever when its call is played.

Crimson-breasted Shrike & Bokmakierie (R.711 & 722) these two species usually answer from wherever they happen to be but otherwise take no interest.

White-bellied Sunbird (R.763) on one occasion a male bird got quite excited, flying back and forth between two bushes over the tape-

recorder singing loudly from each bush between flights, which took him over the net - this he expertly avoided on each flight!

Cape White-eyes (R.775) have been called up and caught by playing their song.

Cape & Masked Weavers (R.799 & 803) are very easily called up and caught by playing recordings made at weaver colonies. They also come to the Black-eyed Bulbuls mobbing recording.

I have tried playing the call of the Pearl-spotted Owl (R.365) (which I have used to call up birds in other areas when bird-watching, with excellent results) but I have found that this call has no effect whatsoever on the Melville Koppies birds. The only explanation I can think of to account for this, is that this species does not (as far as I am aware) occur at Melville. I have also tried the call of the Spotted Eagle Owl (R.368) (which does occur at Melville Koppies) but to no avail.

The cassette recorder takes 4 x U2 batteries. The normal 'Eveready' ones which cost about 18c for 2 I find only last for \pm 3 hours continuous playing time, I usually use the 'Eveready' "Powermax" batteries which cost about 22c for 2 and they last \pm 7 hours continuous playing time, the 'Eveready' "High Power" batteries which cost about 27c for 2 appear to have no advantage over the "Powermax" for the extra cost. I once found and bought some Japanese make of batteries which cost 99c each but I found these only lasted about 4 hours longer than the "Powermax" batteries. If someone could find or design a re-chargable battery power-pack I think this would be more convenient and less expensive in the long run.

I usually place the recorder under a bush about 1 - 2m from the net, making sure that it is not directly in the sun nor will be during the time it is to be left unattended, which will usually be the amount of time that it takes for one side of the cassette to play. I have found that the most suitable cassettes are those that play for 45 minutes a side.

TRAPPING THE BLACK DUCK *Anas sparsa*

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At the beginning of 1972 a study of the ecology and social behaviour of the Black Duck *Anas sparsa* was started by the Percy FitzPatrick Institute. The Black Duck inhabits rivers and streams, and like some other riverine duck in New Zealand and South America, appears to be territorial the whole year round. In the more typical dabbling duck (*Anas* spp.), inhabiting perennial or seasonal pans the tendency is to be territorial only during the breeding season. At other times of the year these birds tolerate the close proximity of one another and often aggregate in large flocks. The question therefore is posed: What ecological factors select for year round territoriality in the Black Duck? In order to answer this question we have been collecting data on the fidelity to, and seasonal variation in, home range, the degree of territorial behav-