LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

The article in the first issue of Safring News on the use of the Bal Chatri raptor trap was very interesting. Having helped Professors Broekhuysen and Siegfried in their work on the Steppe Buzzard I would like to make a few suggestions.

Firstly the problem of wind flattening nooses. We found that this problem could be overcome by strengthening the bases of the nooses with fuse wire. A piece of wire is wound around one cm. of the wire of the cage next to the base of the noose, then wound spirally up and down about one cm. of the noose and finally wound around the cage wire again. The result is an inverted T of fuse wire which adds considerable support to the noose.

Secondly the type of mouse used in the trap. White mice have poor resistance to high ambient temperatures and solar radiation. We used agouti (brown), black or piebald mice which are more active and have a better resistance. The traps were not left out for more than five minutes after the raptor showed signs of disinterest (such as preening). A dropper water-bottle was put in the cage when it was not in use. If the mice were listless a few drops of water were sprinkled onto their fur. They usually preened and so inadvertently drank water.

A double-walled trap with two mesh walls one cm. apart stops the mice from chewing the nooses and also prevents the raptors from getting at the mice.

Other brief points:-

- 36lb. breaking strain nylon (23 -26 s.w.g.) worked best for small and medium sized raptors.
- Do not put too many nooses on a trap.
- The ideal trap weight to raptor weight ratio is about 3,5 : 1.

I hope that these points might lead to improvements and better trap success.

Yours sincerely,

P.G.H.Frost,
c/o FitzPatrick Institute,
University of Cape Town,
Rondebosch 7700,
Cape.

Sir,

I am not convinced that nylon Japanese nets should be abandoned in favour of the British terylene nets.

The nylon nets have two advantages as I see it. Firstly they cost less, although admittedly, the nylon nets deteriorate sooner than terylene nets. I would like to see a comparison of prices and effective life times of the two net types. Even if terylene nets may be economically far cheaper.. This cannot be disregarded.

The second and biggest advantage of nylon nets is that under sunny conditions, the finer nylon nets catch more birds. This statement is based on personal experience of many types of netting, from swallow and night netting, to netting in forest, scrub, grass and backyard habitat where both terylene and nylon nets were used.

The question to ask at this point is "Are there any disadvantages which militate against the use of nylon nets?".

The important point which has been raised concerns injury to the bird. Large fast-flying birds such as doves and waders, probably will cut themselves more frequently on nylon. Nevertheless, I have seen waders trapped in terylene nets with cuts, and bent flight feathers. Other contributory factors towards the injury of birds are bad handling, incorrect net size and time spent in the net - and not only net type. Cuts always bleed profusely and look far worse than they are. In my experience, very few smaller birds trapped in nylon nets show any external injuries, and I feel the importance of this consideration is overplayed - without evidence.

Internal injuries are another matter. These can only be investigated thoroughly by examining the bird when dead. (Who cares what injuries are inflicted, if the bird is to die anyway?). I am open to correction, but I understand that many such specimens are killed by squeezing the body. One cannot draw conclusions from such evidence.

It is my contention that under some conditions, the nylon net is superior to the terylene net. Some ringers will disagree with me, but I further contend that it would be very difficult to prove this scientifically - because so many variables are involved. Finally, I request NUBRA to carry a stock of nylon nets. Ringers can then choose according to their personal preference, for solid evidence is not available it seems.

In conclusion, that old cliché "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush".

Yours sincerely,

Aldo Berruti,
95 St.Andrews Drive,
Durban North 4016,
Natal.

The following letter was received from Escom in response to representations from NUBRA asking that Escom personnel be informed of the possibility that dead birds beneath overhead wires might be ringed. The letter seems of sufficient general interest to warrant publishing in Safring.

Sir,

Escom is willing to co-operate with the University of Cape Town in its reasearch programmes. A directive will be issued to all employees concerned to report to you or to the Pretoria Zoo on any dead ringed birds found during power line inspections throughout the Republic, and to remove, flatten and return the rings.

Escom engineers have commented that generally birds will not perch on live conductors of over 50 000 volts. Birds have been seen to approach a conductor and to fly off again immediately they became aware of the intense electric field near the conductors. If

Dear Sir,

On 22.1.72 I ringed a Greater Kestrel Ad.♀. I retrapped the bird on 23.5.74 and found the aluminium ring was so worn as to be almost undecipherable. The wear on the ring was mainly on its outside surface and appeared to have been made by the bird's beak. I removed the ring and replaced it with a stainless steel one.

In view of the above experience I would suggest that no bird of prey should be ringed with an aluminium or even aluminium alloy ring. Only stainless steel or incoloy rings should be used.

Yours sincerely,

H.P.Mendelsohn,
1228 Burnett Street,
Hatfield. 0002, Tvl.

E R R A T A

re: Harwood,J. and Piper,S.E.
'How to analyse bimodal ringing data' Safring 3(1):10-16.

In expanding on Mr.Harwood's note, I introduced three errors into the paper. I wish to absolve Mr.Harwood of any responsibility for the mistakes.

1. The last sentence in note 3.3. should read:- place the $\bar{z}$ value on the horizontal axis of Fig.2, draw a vertical line upwards until it meets the diagonal line. Then read off the corresponding probability.

2. The following table should be substituted for Table 6:-

Degrees of Freedom	Percentage Points		
	10%	5%	1%
1	2.71	3.84	6.63
2	4.61	5.99	9.21
3	6.25	7.81	11.35
4	7.78	9.49	13.28
5	9.24	11.07	15.09
6	10.64	12.59	16.81
7	12.02	14.07	18.48
8	13.36	15.51	20.09
9	14.68	16.92	21.61
10	15.98	18.31	23.21
15	22.31	25.00	30.58

3. The second sentence in 4.7. should read:- In this case 3.48 is very much less than 10.64 (chi-squared value for six degrees of freedom at the 10% level = 10.64). Thus we would accept the theoretical distribution. The conclusion is that in this case THERE IS A STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE between the wing lengths of male and female Cape Bulbuls.

S.E.Piper, Dept. of Applied Maths., U.C.T.