

## EDITORIAL

The end of 1974 sees the expiry of my three-year contract with NUBRA and of a six-year involvement with bird-ringing in southern Africa. I expect to move on to new, if less verdant pastures, in northern Africa to join the F.A.O. quelea team. So this is not the time to ring out wild exhortations but for looking back to see what have been the good things and what the bad.

My first recollection of the bird-ringing set-up in S.A. is of the operation being conducted from a corner of the FitzPatrick library by a rather elderly female secretary on a shoe-string budget. She seemed confused by coordinates and indeed some of her coordinates were confusing, which reminds me of the Yellowbill Duck recovered in Finland. The SAOS Ringing Scheme was further fraught by its partial conversion to a holerith system, a sort of poor man's computer card. The cards have coded holes and the system was full of them too. In fact a lot of early data were lost as a result of this conversion, which has never since been used.

By the time I arrived, many of the worst problems had been solved by Eduard van Zinderen Bakker Jnr. and a lot of data had been extracted from the backs of Geoff McLachlan's cigarette boxes! Some set procedures had been established by Mrs. Rowan. For the next three years, keeping the scheme afloat was a continual struggle, which I later shared with Mike Jarvis, with part-time work and insufficient funds. I well remember the sweat that was involved in preparing the five-year (14th) report to try to bring the records up to date. Those were the days of doing things manually, or once a year and every time we added up the totals ringed we got a different answer. Even at that stage, I realised that there was no such thing as a ringing Pope - everybody was fallible. In fact the only infallible aid to ringing is the computer which, as we all know, is only as good as the input data.

Once NUBRA was founded, ringing was at last established and had the necessary machinery to come right. In the past three years, the basic structure has been established and there is a potential for a strong surge of research output. This is the last hurdle which has to be overcome to place South African ringing among the world's best. It applies to both professionals and amateur ringers and involves two elements. The first is from the past and is the plucking of the few plums of ripe and valuable information lying in the data of the last 25 years of hard but often misdirected work. The second is ongoing and is an aim for every ringer to be engaged in at least one worthwhile project.

To me, the administration of ringing has often been a personal matter. Dealing with ringers personally from all over the country has usually been a pleasure. Perhaps all have not appreciated it like the ringer who headed his progress report 'More Kicks than Half-pence'. The latter turned out to be an obscure quote from Sir Walter Scott, meaning that the ringer had had a raw deal. Much of the help NUBRA has received has been from people on a personal basis.

If that is the good news, the bad news has revolved round two sources of frustration. The first is the difficulty which some amateur ringers have had in realising that they are quite capable of carrying out useful research on their own. But each must put in

enough graft to see what others have done and to work to some sort of plan if he is to be successful. Appeasing one's hunting instinct is not sufficient justification for ringing birds, especially in view of the administrative costs involved. If one is not prepared to put in the book work, then one can either find another ringer or a group which is carrying out problem-orientated ringing and work with them or take up golf.

The second frustration has been the slowness with which even professionals get round to rationalising their work to give it more direction. The professionals should be setting the amateurs a good example and yet they often fall into the same mistake of going on ringing hundreds of birds without any obvious aim or attempts to assess what has already been done.

But both these frustrations are slowly being beaten. Some ringers have taken up golf but others are well stuck into fascinating projects and I am very optimistic for the future. If I had one regret, it is that ringing as a hobby or a professional technique is not carried out by a wider section of the South African population.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Les Underhill, Hans Pfister, John Ledger and my co-editor, Clive Hunter, for their hard work, helpfulness and support for NUBRA, and to the many other ringers who have made the past three years seem worthwhile. I wish my successor, Carl Vernon, every success.

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S.A.O.S. SYMPOSIUM 1975

The S.A.O.S. Council has decided to hold a Symposium in July or September 1975 in Rhodesia. The Subject will be:-

Migration and movement of birds in southern Africa

Clearly this subject will be of particular interest to ringers. Anyone working on a project related to the Symposium subject should start now preparing a paper for presentation.