

## EDITORIAL

As the new incumbent in the "hot seat" at the Bird Ringing Unit, I would like to make a few comments about ringing in southern Africa. Firstly a statement of appreciation to my predecessors. They, especially Dr. Clive Elliott, are to be congratulated for all the hard work they did. They have created a firm basis for a bright future.

About 800 000 birds have been ringed in southern Africa during the last 25 years. This has been due to the efforts of a diversity of people, and certain persons have been extremely active. However the findings, in terms of published data, have not been so great. A lot of data has been unavoidably lost due to poor planning of projects.

The prime aim of the Bird Ringing Unit has been to improve the standards of ringing. Ringing should not be regarded as an end unto itself, but merely a tool to aid and solve avian problems. These problems centre on the movements and population dynamics of birds. To this end ringers were expected to register projects. A pleasant evolution from this has been the creation of group projects.

Still more concerted efforts are needed, and more time and energy needs to be spent on controlling birds already ringed, rather than mass ringing of more and more birds. To this end colour marking schemes are most valuable.

Problem solving requires clear definition of the problem, correct data collection and precise analysis. Too often data are collected, then examined and using hind sight, the problems postulated. Frequently the ringer has collected too much data and is unable to manage analysis. Obviously the easiest aspect is ringing the bird.

This leads to service which the Bird Ringing Unit hopes to provide. All ringers will be free to consult the Unit with regard to what problems are vital, interesting and how to go about solving them. Then the Unit will also provide the data analysis facilities. In this manner, the ringers can have the best of two worlds - able to enjoy their ringing and also able to see their work published.

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