SEXING BY PELVIC SEPARATION

F. von Maltitz,
P.O. Box 313,
Johannesburg,
2000.

Although the technique of sexing birds by measuring the distance between the distal tips of the pelvis is well known among breeders, it does not seem to be used much by the ringing fraternity, at least in this country. Perhaps this is due to the fact that it is not easy to judge accurately a measurement which can only be felt and not seen. However, it is felt that the system has considerable potential, especially with birds with a sexual dimorphism which is not invariable, such as the weight difference in Chanting Goshawks, Melierax musicus. Comparison of measurements from birds of known sex would soon establish figures which could thereafter be used on birds in the overlapping zone.

Almost certainly, there will be species with measurements which are not sufficiently different to be useful, but it seems likely that these will be in the minority. The main requirement would be the utilisation of a system which gives a sufficiently high degree of accuracy, preferably with a minimum amount of prior knowledge or practice.

The gauge used on the Black-shouldered Kite (On the potential sexing of Black-shouldered Kites, SAFRING 3(3):20) has been found to be suitable for many other species, and consists of a thin strip of fibre glass tape on which a number of pairs of protruberances, at suitable spacing, have been arranged. The method of manufacture, while rather laborious if only one is required, is extremely easy and needs no special tools or equipment.

A piece of plasticine is pressed to give a perfectly flat surface of the required size, say 30 x 140 mm. This is most easily done by rolling to a reasonably flat surface, sprinkling with talcum powder, and then pressing onto a smooth surface such as a piece of glass. We used machined dies for our gauges, but anything which will make dents of the size required and at the correct spacing will do. Two washers about 8 mm diameter, with the edges rounded, and separated by smaller washers to give the right spacing will do, or a loop of thin wire, but it is best to use a system which allows one to set the spacing accurately before making the impression. The pairs of impressions, at spacings of, say, 3, 6, 9, 12, 15 and 18 mm should not be too close to each other, so that only one pair can be felt at a time.

When all the impressions have been made, a spot of Araldite or other epoxy resin is put in each depression, care being taken to eliminate air bubbles, after which a thin layer of fibre-glass tape is laid on the surface and another layer of resin rubbed in. A spatula of some sort is used to smooth the epoxy, which should be just enough to thoroughly wet the tape.

When thoroughly set, the tape may be peeled off, any plasticine

adhering being cleaned off with benzine. It is suggested that the front be painted matt black and the back white or light grey, with the spacing of each pair of protrusions being written or put on with transfers on the back. This helps to ensure that guessed dimensions do not affect the reading.

In use, the tips of the bones are located with the bird held on its back, care being taken that pressure is not exerted on the sides of the abdomen. The pair on the gauge(or comparator) which have the same "feel" is then found, intermediates at the larger spacings being estimated. One finger is used for the closer spacings and two for the wider ones.

The dimensions given above have been found to suit the Black-shouldered Kite and other birds from the Pygmy Falcon to the Brown Snake-eagle. If a gauge is to be used for a particular species, it is suggested that a bird be checked first and dimensions chosen to simulate the feel of the bones as much as possible. Obviously, the pressure on the bird must be so light as to ensure that the spacing of the tips is not altered by the pressure of the finger, and that there is no damage to the egg which is likely to be felt occasionally.

Specific gauges for the Black-shouldered Kite may be obtained, free, from the author.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION.

As part of a broader study on the Spotted-back Weaver, Ploceus cucullatus I am collecting as much moult data together as possible.

If any ringer has any moult data available for this species, I should be most grateful to receive it.

Philippe la Hausse de Lalouviere,
25 Lynford Place,
DURBAN NORTH,
Natal,
4016.