

DYE-MARKING RUFF ON THE REEF

J.P. Reed,
P.O. Box 67026,
Bryanston,
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and

M.B. Schmitt,
98, The Sentinel,
Hillbrow,
2021.

The Rand Wader Group has ringed some 1 600 Ruff Philomachus pugnax over the past five years. Only two of these birds have been recovered outside the Reef area, namely Cape Town and Persia, and only 21 birds have been recaptured by the Rand Wader Group. The recovery rate is distressingly low and the recapture rate is considerably lower than the recapture rates of other wader ringing groups with whom we are in contact. The information retrieved from actually ringing the Ruff has not clarified the movements of the Ruff on and from the Reef.

The Ruff arrive on the Reef during August and the numbers increase rapidly during September and October. Abruptly at the end of November and early December the majority of Ruff disappear from the Reef and at the end of the season only a small percentage seem to pass through the area.

Do the Ruff use the pans and marshes on the Reef as a 'stop-over' to complete the moult and perhaps gain weight and strength before dispersing? Or are we merely experiencing a continual influx of birds from the North which stay a few days before moving on and are replaced continuously up to the end of November by other Ruff coming from the North? Are our Ruff migrating in a loop using a different route for the forward and return journeys? Why have none of our Ruff been caught in the Rift Valley or is this not their migration route?

Basically we want to know more about the movements of Ruff to, from, and within the Reef area. For this reason the Rand Wader Group is undertaking a trial colour marking programme during the 1975/76 season, during which we hope to colour-dye some 500 Ruff. At each outing a new colour or colour-combination will be used. Ruff roosts will be regularly checked for colour marked birds.

The following dyes will be used on the Ruff: Fuchsin, Brilliant Green and Crystal Violet obtained from Switzerland, and Orange which is 'Marzan' commercial ink based in Xylol. These dyes have been tested on domestic birds (bantams, chickens, geese) and no adverse effects have been observed. All the above dyes are regarded as non-toxic. The dyes tested were taken orally by the birds when preening before the dyes were dry and appear to have had no adverse effects. When exposed to light only, the dyes have a minimum effective life of three months if the bird does not moult. Exposed to light and water the dyes have a minimum life of two months. Experiments are still continuing and a full report will be submitted to the editor of SAFRING in due course.

The dyes will be prepared before ringing commences. As each

bird is processed the dye will be applied by brush on the lower surface (chest, abdomen). The bird will be kept until the dye has dried - approximately 10 minutes.

Our results may help us in determining the importance of various pans and marshes to migrating Ruff and ultimately we may be able to suggest the conservation measures necessary to ensure their continued safety on the Reef.

We herewith earnestly request other ringers to look more closely at Ruff in the field and please report every marked bird to the authors or to NUBRA, stating locality, time, date and colour or colour combination. Anyone submitting this information will be notified of when the bird was ringed.

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF NUBRA

The following letter was received at NUBRA and had us puzzled as it contained no clue why it should have been sent.

Sirs,

I just received your letter of March, 1975, with great enjoyment. The delay of your reply makes me think you take no notice of my letter.

So I write this letter and wate for its sooner reply carrying in it your agreeial that you me help to me to visit U/K.

I have the pleasure to hold UK with your help.

Yours,
Mohamed Ali Elghali, State Bank
Nyala, Sudan.

The only possible clue was the Sudan. As we had no record of a correspondence with the Sudan it was possible that there had been a recovery from there. If so, which species? Rhodesians interested in duck would have no difficulty supplying an answer: Knob-billed Duck. It proved that Mohamed Elghali had advised us of a bird which he "had the pleasure to hold". As we did not know whether the bird was dead or alive, we marked his wording plus U/K (unknown) on the recovery advice.