

REWARDS FOR RECOVERIES

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Recently we have received two notifications of recoveries from Africa north of the Zambezi both of which were accompanied by letters suggesting that the recovery rate would be higher if the finders were rewarded for their trouble.

The first, which took 25 months to get to SAFRING, was from a Mr C Wasamumu of Mongu, W. Province, Zambia. He reminded us that he had reported a recovery in 1971 the details of which were as follows:

R. 61 Cattle Egret Bubulcus ibis 585-0050 (W.B.C.)
20.12.59 Westdene, Benoni, Tvl. 26 12S, 28 19E
02.10.71 Barotseland Ponds, Mongu, Zambia.
15 15S, 23 09E

The bird was shot.

Clive Elliott evidently replied to Mr Wasamumu who, after 3½ years of thought, wrote: "I would like to find out whether there is something done to the finder or not. I mean to reward the finder, if not why should someone waste the time informing you about your Ringed Birds. Your Ringed Birds are very common in our Country and if you were rewarding those finding them, you could have a good number of them each season or year".

The second letter was from Le Maréchal de Logis Yackota, en service à la Gendarmerie Impériale Centrafricaine, Birao, Central African Empire. Maréchal Yackota reported the recovery of two birds:

R. 61 Cattle Egret Bubulcus ibis 6-44157 (Dr Malherbe)
30.12.73 Essenbosch, Vredefort, O.F.S. 27 25S, 27 10E
June '76 Birao, Central African Empire. 10 17N, 22 46E
Cause of death unknown.

R. 251 Curlew Sandpiper Calidris ferruginea 2-32973
(Mr C Clinning)
19.12.75 Walvis Bay, South West Africa. 22 58S, 14 29E
June '76 Birao, Central African Empire. 10 17N, 22 47E
Cause of death unknown.

• Maréchal Yackota ended his letter with: "Espérant avoir de vous un soutien moral et pécuniaire,".

Clearly both these gentlemen would continue to report recoveries if they were suitably rewarded. The recovery rates (and shooting mortalities?) of inter-African migrants would surely rise if a reward scheme were instituted. However, the ultimate result would differ little from the Iranian experience as reported by F.B. Argyle in the Report on Bird-Ringing in Iran 1970 to 1974 published by the Department of the Environment, Tehran:

THE REWARD FOR THE RECOVERY OF BIRD RINGS

Since the late 1960's, the Department of the Environment has offered a reward of 500 Rials (approximately U.S. \$ 6.50) to persons handing in bird rings recovered in Iran. This has proven particularly effective in encouraging commercial duck hunters and sportsmen to hand in the rings which they find, and there can be no doubt that were it not for the reward, only a small proportion of the recoveries listed in this report would have come to the attention of the Department.

Unfortunately, rewards of this nature inevitably lead to a certain amount of dishonest reporting, much of which will go unnoticed. Obviously, hunters killing species during the close seasons, in protected areas, or by illegal methods, will

be tempted to give incorrect data when applying for their rewards. Completely fictitious information may also be given when the finder does not remember or know the relevant details. Occasionally, such errors in reporting are obvious, as in the case of the Ruff Philomachus pugnax which was reported as shot in the Caspian region shortly before it was ringed in South Africa. Presumably the bird was shot in the late spring, i.e. during the close season, and the hunter simply backdated the date of recovery to hide this fact.

An analysis of wildfowl recovery data would suggest that quite large scale misreporting occurs, although it is not possible to pin-point particular errors. Thus, although perhaps as many as two-thirds of the wildfowl killed in the Caspian region are caught by commercial duck netters, all but a tiny fraction of the wildfowl recoveries are reported as having been shot. The reason for this is not clear, but one might suppose that the commercial netters are reluctant to draw attention to the scale of their operation, and either do not hand in the rings at all, or claim that the birds have been shot at some other locality.

In the great majority of cases of misreporting, however, it is very unlikely that any error would be noticed, either by the Department personnel handing out the rewards or by persons subsequently analysing the recovery data. To a certain extent therefore, the misreporting must render virtually every Iranian recovery open to some doubt, with respect to precise date, locality and manner of recovery. However the fact remains that the knowledge that birds ringed in a particular area of, for example, Western Siberia in one season have been found in a particular area of Iran in another season, can constitute very valuable information. It is for this reason that the reward system, despite its disadvantages, has been retained.

However, as the extent of bird ringing in Iran increases, and the number of birds bearing rings become significant, there is the danger that unscrupulous hunters may hunt non-game species

expressly for the purpose of finding rings. Recently, a hunter shot four ringed Herring Gulls Larus argentatus in one day for a total of 2,000 RIs. reward. As such occurrences become more frequent, the temptation to shoot any bird on the off chance that it is carrying a ring will increase, and a heavy hunting pressure on non-game species may be precipitated. This of course must be avoided.

For the time being, the ring reward will be retained, but the situation will be kept under constant review. It is envisaged that with significant expansion in the Iranian Ringing Scheme, the reward will gradually be reduced and eventually phased out completely. At the same time, a publicity campaign will be launched to encourage the general public to take a greater interest in the objectives and results of bird ringing, and to send in bird rings in exchange merely for details of when and where the bird was ringed.

Besides wreaking havoc to the bird population such a reward scheme could also do great damage to SAFRING finances! Alas we just have to hope that as more people are educated in Africa the more reports we will receive about exclusively African bird species.

AN INTERESTING RECOVERY

R. 413 Lilac-breasted Roller Coracias caudata

Ring Number: 643-09918

This bird was picked up injured near Selous (18 10S, 30 15E) on 11 October 1973 by A.J. Manson. The following day it had apparently recovered so he ringed and released it at his home in Belvedere, Salisbury (17 49S, 31 01E). It was killed 3 years later on 12 October 1976 near where it was originally found injured.