

RINGING AT POTBERG, BREDASDORP DISTRICT

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Introduction

Although ringing of vulture chicks has been carried out previously at the Potberg, the Department of Nature and Environmental Conservation started ringing annually in 1972. The object of this project being to obtain data on movement, longevity, mortality, age at first breeding and any other relevant data in respect of this colony, which appears to be completely isolated from other colonies. The nearest neighbouring colony was near the Gamka Mountain Zebra Nature Reserve, in the Oudtshoorn District. This colony has since disappeared, the cause of which remains unsolved.

Methods and Materials

The nests of the vultures are plotted on to black and white photographs of the Potberg cliffs. This is done annually, usually at the end of July or beginning of August, when the vultures are busy incubating their eggs or have newly hatched chicks.

The actual ringing is then carried out towards the end of September, when the tarsi of the chicks are more or less fully developed. The nests are re-checked a day or two before ringing so that only the successful nests are then plotted. This saves time and unnecessary abseiling.

The actual ringing is done by members of the University of Cape Town's Mountain Club. From 1972 to 1976 twelve mountaineers assisted. In 1977 however, only six members assisted plus one of our own officers, who is an experienced mountaineer and abseiler. Ringing is done over a weekend as this is the most suitable time for the students.

The mountaineers abseil to the different nests and each chick is ringed with a numbered metal ring and a blue plastic ring on the right leg and a combination of three coloured plastic rings on the left leg. Our own officer also took wing measurements and weights of a number of chicks.

Results

Numbers ringed from September 1972 to September 1977 are as follows:-

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number ringed</u>
1972	14
1973	15
1974	22
1975	15
1976	11
1977	13
Total	<u>90</u>

2 carcasses with rings were recovered below the Potberg cliffs. 1 ringed dead vulture was recovered 24 km west of Swellendam and 1 ringed vulture was recaptured near Calvinia approximately 547 km from Potberg.

Discussion

The use of the coloured plastic rings was started in 1974 and this is being done in conjunction with the Vulture Study Group, which covers the whole of the Republic and South West Africa. The blue plastic ring on the right leg denotes that the bird was ringed in the Cape Province and the combination of the left leg will give us: year of ringing, nest number, which nests are the most successful, etc. Sighting reports will be appreciated. The number of active nests has shown a decline since 1972. For example active nests in 1974 were 44 and in 1977 only 21.

In 1976 blood-sucking flies of the family Simuliidae were collected and sent for identification. Chicks were badly infested with these, but in 1977 infestation was slight.

By correlating wing measurement and weight of chicks it will be possible to see if the chicks are obtaining sufficient food for normal growth, and by collecting regurgitations of the chicks it should be possible to work out the type and nature of food which is being fed to them.

RECENT LITERATURE

Lessells, C.M. 1976. Little Stint, Calidris minuta, migration at a site near Tehran.
Report on Bird-Ringing in Iran 1975.
Pages 13-24. Tehran.

If requested, copies of this paper will be supplied to readers at cost.
