

EDITORIAL

It is some thirty years since the first recovery of a bird carrying an "INFORM ZOO PRETORIA" ring was made. The bird was a juvenile Yellow-billed Kite Milvus aegyptius ringed by Major Haydock at Luanshya, Zambia on 13th October 1948 and recovered at Bubi about eighty kilometres north of Bulawayo on 20th December of that year. In this issue Dr. Ashton, the first Ringing Organizer, tells us something of the background to the establishment of the then South African Ornithological Society's ringing organization and the early days of bird ringing in Southern Africa.

Since then much water has flowed under the bridge; about 900,000 birds of 603 species have been ringed and some 22,000 recoveries and controls of both South African and foreign-ringed birds have been recorded. Initially the aims were fairly simple: elucidation of migration routes being the main interest. A variety of techniques, some old, some new, were tried and tested: a solid base upon which more detailed and specialized studies could be planned was established. The numbers of birds ringed rose from 148 in the 1948/49 season to a peak of nearly 75,000 in 1972/73 before dropping to the present levels. A major turning point came in 1976 when, at the first Bird Ringing Conference, SAFRING announced that its policy henceforth was to support project-orientated ringing only - no more "ring and fling". With hindsight it is clear that the introduction of this policy was made rather too abruptly and in the process a number of ringers were alienated. However, there is little doubt that project-orientated ringing brings in results in the form of published information which can be shared by all interested in birds. It is hoped that the project-orientated approach will induce ringers to think of birds in relation to the environment, as components of a larger system, rather than objects to be considered and enjoyed in isolation.

Our natural environment is decreasing at an alarming rate under pressure from housing, industry and agriculture. If bird ringers want to continue to enjoy birds, and nature in general, they must publish what they have learned so that the knowledge can be used in establishing conservation priorities.