

PATAGIAL TAGGING OF WAHLBERG'S EAGLES

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The Wahlberg's Eagle Aquila wahlbergi is a common sight in the savanna woodlands of Southern Africa during its breeding season, August through to April. However, it is conspicuous by its absence during the rest of the year. Steyn (1962) was the first person to draw attention to the Wahlberg's disappearance during its non-breeding season in Southern Africa, while Brown (1970) confirmed that in East Africa this eagle also leaves its breeding grounds after nesting. More recently Smeenk (1974) noted concentrations of Wahlberg's Eagles moving north in December 1970 and from January to early March 1971. A corresponding concentration of south bound migrants in August or September was not observed. However, large numbers of Wahlbergs were recorded passing down the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika from mid-July to early September (Gifstrand 1969). Brown and Amador (1965) also report Wahlberg's moving around the northern shore of Lake Victoria in August and a south-easterly movement in Tanzania during August and September. These latter observations could well involve the migration of Wahlberg's to Southern Africa. What is confusing, is the northward movement of these eagles in December to March (Smeenk 1974), when the majority of the adult birds in East and Southern Africa are in the middle of a breeding cycle. Could it be that those eagles seen moving north by Smeenk were sub-adults moving out of adult breeding territories? Or is there a "crossroad" area from which the eagles migrate north and south? These are some of the questions that we hope in the long run will be answered by patagial tagging Wahlberg's Eagles in Southern Africa. Detailed observations at the nest site during tagging should assist in answering questions on the size of breeding territories and male/female share of nesting activities; while the return or otherwise of marked birds

to their breeding sites in future breeding seasons would give us answers to the strength of pair bond (do the same male and female return to the same nest each year?), and the length of the pair bond. At present there are no answers to these questions. The basic knowledge of the average life span of any animal in its natural environment is vital to its conservation, should it be in the need of conserving. By tagging chicks we would be able to collect data on age at nesting, where they set up their nest territories and whether they migrate south while they are immatures. Some of these data would be difficult to collect, especially those pertaining to birds away from their nesting areas. To help increase the returns from these tagged eagles we have notified all the bird journals in Africa both East and West, as well as writing to all British Ornithological Union members in Africa. So we feel maximum benefit can be derived from the tagging of Wahlberg's Eagles.

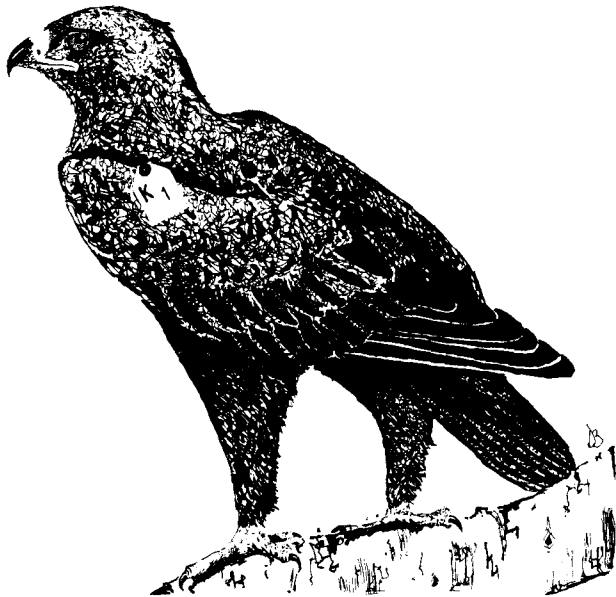
The tag we are using is similar in design to that described by Kemp (1977) but due to colour availability and cost, has been made from Sterkolite; this is a tough plastic with a nylon impregnated weave, which is more flexible than the original Darvic plastic. Numbers and letters are easily cut out of Sterkolite and one colour can simply be glued on to another to give contrast to the cut out section. The effect of this kind of tag on eagles has been shown by Kemp (1977) and other workers to be legible and possible even preferable to leg rings.

Anyone wishing to assist in tagging Wahlberg's Eagles is asked to please contact us at the given address, so that tag colour codes are not duplicated.

References

- Brown, L. 1970. African Birds of Prey. Collins, London
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- Kemp, A. 1977. Some Marking Methods used on a Variety of Southern African Raptors. Safring News 6 : 38 - 43.
- Smeenk, C. 1974. Comparative Ecological Studies of some East African Birds of Prey. Ardea 62 : 1 - 97.
- Steyn, P. 1962. Observations on Wahlberg's Eagle. Bokmakerie 14 : 7 - 14.
- Ulfstrand, S. 1960. Migration of African Kites and Wahlberg's Eagles at Lake Tanganyika. Kong. fysiogr. Sällsk. Lund. Fork. 30 : 31 - 39.



Wing-tagged Wahlberg's Eagle, sketched by Duncan Butchart.