

have had no reason to replace monel rings on retrapped birds. However we have had no retraps with a time lapse of more than five years.

Wader ringers will find the introduction of the 5,25 mm monel ring, D-series, a welcome addition to the range. We find this size very useful on Grey Plovers, Squatarola squatarola and Greenshank Tringa nebularia for which the 4-series ring is too tight, and the 5-series too loose a fit. Overlapping a stainless steel ring is a tricky business at the best of times, therefore this intermediate size is certainly welcome when dealing with these two species.

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#### BODY MASS OF RAPTORS

D. Whitelaw

Assessing the mass of raptors is complicated by variability in the amount of food retained in the crop. In an attempt to correct for this, I grade the contents in small raptors (in practical terms Black-shouldered Kites, Elanus caeruleus and Rock Kestrels Falco tinnunculus as follows:

- O : Nothing left in the crop
- + : A small very mobile mass, less than 1 cm diameter
- ++ : A mobile mass between 1 and 2 cm diameter
- +++ : A mass no longer mobile, easily felt
- ++++ : Crop visibly bulging

Recently I was able to form a rough idea as to how this correlated with actual masses: A first year Black-shouldered Kite was stunned by a motor vehicle and brought to me. It had not suffered any obvious damage and it was decided to release it. Before release I force fed it on raw chicken gizzard, cut into strips approximately 1 g in mass, its crop was palpated at intervals, and the bird weighed. This showed the following correlation:

+ : 10-12 g  
++ : 15-18 g  
+++ : approx 25 g

A tame Rock Kestrel weighing 200 g was fed on mice cleaved in half. Before cleaving the mice weighed 30 g. The bird was able to consume 1½ mice and then had a visibly bulging crop. Allowing for some loss in the butchering process it can be estimated that the bird ate between 35-40 g.

Observations on isolated birds are of limited value but other ringers may be able to add their own observations and allow a more valid picture of what crop contents means in terms of mass.

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#### HAND NETTING AT NIGHT

Frank von Maltitz.

The technique of catching birds such as nightjars, coursers, plovers and some waders at night by means of a torch and hand net is not new. However, there would seem to be so many mis-apprehensions about the technique that a description of the method used by us may be of interest to ringers interested in trying this system.

The Marsh Owl Asio capensis has the dangerous habit in the Transvaal of sitting in the road at night, and can be netted quite easily provided there is no moon. The cars are driven at a reasonable speed, so that the owl can be spotted when still so far away that the speed can be reduced to a crawl, and the owl is not frightened away on the final approach. The distance at which it is necessary to stop the car has to be found by experience - it varies from night to night and with different groups of owls, is apparently affected by the amount of wind, and is much closer than one would expect.

It is not necessary to use a powerful torch, as the idea is not to dazzle the bird but to provide a light barrier behind which the trapper is not visible to the bird. Indeed, we have on occasion used a rather weak two-celled torch such as is kept in the cubby-hole by the average motorist.