University of Dundee N.E. Greenland Expedition 1972

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On the 10th July 1972 two rather excited members of the Wash Wader Ringing Group set off to Scotland to join this expedition. That night we flew to Iceland and on the 12th left Reykjavik by charter flight to NE Greenland arriving at Mestersvig (76°16'N, 23°55'W) at 21.00 hours in brilliant sunshine. As soon as our temporary camp had been pitched were were off on our first walk over the tundra, not returning until 04.00 - but still in brilliant sunshine! Long-tailed Duck, Red-throated Divers, Glaucous Gulls, Arctic Terns, two pairs of Dunlin, one pair of Ringed Plover and Snow Buntings were our introduction to Arctic Ornithology, and all set amongst the most fantastically beautiful scenery and under blue sky with brilliant sunshine and complete calm. Next day we moved camp and settled on a site overlooking Kong Oscar's Fjord which was our base until September.

Our aim was to catch, ring, weigh and measure some breeding waders. It turned out to be rather difficult. The breeding population was thinly spread over many miles of country and the season was poor, probably because of bad weather in June and July. Non-breeding years, or years of poor breeding are well known occurances in the Arctic and unfortunately cannot be forecast. The most commonly occurring wader was the Ringed Plover which was found wherever there were areas of small broken stones, pebbles or shingle but although we found many birds holding territory we found very few nests (only 4) and saw very few juveniles later in the season. Dunlin were less common and restricted to boggy places or rather wet tundra. Sanderling were even less frequent. We only saw Turnstone occasionally and Knot rarely. We did not record Purple Sandpiper or Phalaropes. We spent a great deal of time fruitlessly watching waders on territory hoping for clues to nest or young and wexwalked many miles in search of waders.

It was impossible to catch waders on territory in a wide open landscape when there was daylight for weeks on end and when there was no nest - or we could not find one. When we found nests of Ringed Plover and Dunlin we caught the adults quite easily with drop trap or single shelf mist net. AEW had the remarkable experience of lifting a brooding Sanderling (3 pulli) from its nest by hand - and it was back on its young within 30 seconds of being released while we stood a few yards away.

The large areas of sandy beach and estuarine silt near Mestersvig were quite unsuitable for waders, probably because they were poor in invertebrates. Breeding waders feed on insects and other arthropods living on the tundra. We rarely saw gatherings of waders and our largest flock, which we saw only once, was of 19 young Sanderling feeding along several hundred yards of beach where seaweed had been exposed by a low spring tide. We might have caught these with 'walk-in' traps but this was the one catching method we did not take and could not make. Improvisations with single shelf mist nets caught one Sanderling and one Ringed Plover. Later experiments with a clap net failed. On several occasions we might have successfully used 'walk-in' traps is we had carried them on our backs ready for instant use. Although we set our cannon net we never had a chance to use it. Wader movements were unpredictable and birds were rarely seen in the same place twice. A cannon net is too unwieldy and heavy for two men to carry about the tundra on the offchance that it might be useful!

Species	Totals			Shot	Total Measured
	Pulli	Ringed AD/Juv	Total		
Ringed Plover	5	5	10	7	12
Dunlin	4	2	6	1	3
Sanderling	3	2	5	0	2

We measured too few birds to fulfill our hope of characterising the NE Greenlar breeding waders. However, the sample from Ringed Plover is useful, and these measur ments and those from the Dunlin may be directly compared with data collected in Britain. The birds were measured by GHG who has measured many waders in Britain an who is known to obtain measurements matching those collected by other Wash measurers Several birds were shot (we had a permit) to increase the sample size of the common Ringed Plover and to collect samples of food from oesophagus and gizzard.

It seems worthwhile reporting our measurements in full, and for the present without comment.

Species	Date	Age	Wing	Bill	Weight	
Ringed Plover	14.7	Ad	131	14	53	
	15.7	Ad	130	13	62	
	19.7	Ad	135	14	61	
	19.7	Ad	132	13	57	
	28.7	Ad	131	14	55	shot - male
	28.7	Ad	125	13	54	shot - male
	10.8	Ad	131	13	50	shot - male
	10.8	Ad	133	14	54	shot - male
	12.8	Ad	131	13	61	
	17.8	Ad	134	13	75	shot - female
	21.8	Ad	134	13	70	shot - male
	21.8	Ad	129	13	58	shot - male
Dunlin	25.7	Ad	109	26	47)	pair from same nest
	29.7	Ad	109	27	42)	
	30.7	Ad	115	30	40	shot - female
Sanderling	4.8	Ad	127	26	60	
	[illegible].8	Juv	126	24	50	

Nearly all the adults and the juvenile were dye marked yellow on their under-parts and a tall white colour ring was placed on their left legs (Danish metal ring on the right. We hoped for later sightings (Wader Study Group Bulletin No. 6) and we have been rewarded by two incredible records. Of the 5 ringed plover so marked two have been seen in England! In both cases the marks and colour rings were accurately described by the observer. One bird was seen at the mouth of the Witham near Boston, Lincs. on the 20th August and again on the 23rd. The second was seen at Draycote Reservoir, Warwicks. on the same date - 20th August! As far as we are aware these are the first proven records of NE Greenland Ringed Plover in Britain. Salomonsen (1971) Med. om Grønland 191, 2, 1-52, mentions the recovery of one bird which was ringed near Perry Oaks, Middlesex on 22.8.62. and found in NW Greenland during June 1964 but apart from this the only other recoveries of Greenland Ringed Plover are in Iceland, and one shot at Mestersvig, 21.7.64 which had been ringed in Senegal 22.10.58.

Although we did not catch many waders and therefore largely failed in our aim to characterise NE Greenland birds by measurement we have gained a great deal of practical experience and feel that a future expedition could be more successful, gi a good breeding season, a lot of energy and enough money! We doubt whether large scale wader ringing will ever be possible in this part of Greenland but a highly energetic expedition reaching Greenland in June could catch a good number of birds at the nest. It is a long way from pair to pair and valuable days would be spent foot-slogging. If sufficient people went to Mestersvig and then had the use of a helicopter to scatter them over a wide area much more ground could be covered quite quickly. Inflatable boats with powerful outboard motors would be useful after the pack-ice had broken up - but this is not until after about 20th July.

We would like to thank the other members of the expedition for their interest and help, particularly those of the biology party, and especially R.W. Summers who helped in many ways.