

Woodcock Research Group (IWRB)

The exasperating Woodcock is a 'fringe' species amongst waders and waterfowl and woodland game, and tends to be neglected in any group study. Woodcock enthusiasts are perhaps as odd and solitary as the bird they have chosen, and the new Woodcock Research Group of IWRB is striving to flush some and induce flocking behaviour. Any members of the WSG with an active interest in woodcock are asked to write to Monica Shorten at East Gate, Old Castle Road, Salisbury, Wilts SP1 3SF, and to tell her what they are doing or would like to do.

It seems that the occasional woodcock does get ringed by the WSG - a total of 5 was recorded for 1974 - thank you, TRG and Humber! The capture and ringing of this bird during its breeding season really separates the men from the boys, yet there is a great need for 600-700, mainly pulli or juveniles, to be ringed in the British Isles each year. It has not been met since 1935 (763 pulli) and the average yearly total, including FGs on migration, has been about 30 in recent years with pulli averaging about 8. So every young woodcock ringed will be a help. The recovery rate is 7.9%.

Two years ago Ib Clausager (Kalo, Denmark) published a good guide to methods of determining the age-class and sex of woodcock from external features. Even very precise measurements of bill length and central tail feathers, expressed as a ratio, allow adult males and females to be confused: the best that can be done without dissection is to use the formula of Stronach, Harrington & Wilkins which reduces the probability of error to 28%:

- 0.2952 bill length plus 0.1566 central tail feather length
which gives
greater than - 8.3640 male (72% correct)
less than - 8.3640 female (75% correct)

Birds in their first twelve months after hatching must be excluded, and this can be done by examining the tips and proximal edges of the outer primaries (ragged outline on first years; smooth on older birds, at least until April) and the terminal lighter bar on primary coverts (broader and browner on young birds). This quick, simple method correctly classifies 95-98%. Any woodcock ringed during migration periods or in the winter is worth such extra records in the notebook. But can anyone sex woodcock pulli?

Monica Shorten
Co-ordinator, WRG

Look to Colour - ringed and Dye-marked Waders!

Since 1972 Common Sandpiper Tringa hypoleucos and Little Ringed Plovers Charadrius dubius have been marked individually with colour - rings and an aluminium - ring of the Ornithological Station Helgoland below the intertarsal joint. They were ringed on the mud ponds of the sugar factory of Norten - Hardenberg, Lower Saxony, Federal Republic of Germany.

From spring 1975 a larger number of several species of waders, especially Common Sandpipers T. hypoleucos, Wood Sandpipers

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