

Rings above the 'knee'

Barry Spence has reminded us of a problem that may occur if waders ringed by some European schemes are retrapped. Several of these schemes commonly place rings above the 'knee', a position where it is easy to overlook them, especially if many birds are being handled. They may also be missed if small waders are held upside down for ringing (a position more frequently used for passerines), when, the ring may slide out of sight into the feathers.

We do not, of course, know how often such rings go unnoticed but several people know of cases where birds have been accidentally double-ringed because of this or where, when two people examined a bird perhaps for ringing followed by measuring, one has noticed the ring and the other has not.

The message is that we should take care that these valuable data are not lost in this way.

WESTERN CAPE WADER STUDY GROUP : SOUTH WEST AFRICAN EXPEDITION 1976-77.

A team composed of W.C.W.S.G. members visited South Africa from 30 December 1976 to 14 January 1977. The main aim of the expedition was to census the wader populations on South West Africa's two largest coastal lagoons, Sandwich Harbour and Walvis Bay Lagoon. Other sites were to be censused including 200 km of shoreline. The second aim of the trip was to trap waders for migration studies and attempt to concentrate on those species which were not readily trapped in the western Cape.

Walvis Bay Lagoon was adequately covered on 5 January and a total of 29,000 waders counted. The most abundant species were Curlew Sandpipers (9,000) and Sanderlings (8,000). The large number of Chestnut-banded Plovers (2,000) was of interest for such numbers of this endemic plover have not been recorded before. Other water birds included 17,000 Flamingo's and 600 Pelicans making this lagoon a rather spectacular wetland.

The logistics involved in censusing Sandwich Harbour were much more complicated such that a complete census was not achieved. Further, we underestimated the vastness of the southern salt pan and this coupled with shimmering mirages made the counting difficult. However, 10,000 waders were counted though a total figure may be double this number. Again Curlew Sandpiper and Sanderling were the most abundant species (2,000 each) and 1,000 Bar-tailed Godwits were also counted. There were fewer Flamingo's (5,000) but more terns (15,000).

The rocky shore between Walvis Bay and Swakopmund supported a surprisingly dense concentration of waders and 12,000 were counted on 22 km of shore. This population was composed primarily of 4,000 Turnstones, 3,000 Curlew Sandpipers and 2,000 Sanderlings. The shore was rich in mussel beds though the washed up kelp and shingle were also favoured feeding areas. Most of the other 190 km of shoreline censused was sandy and only supported a thin scattering of Sanderlings (4,000), Turnstones (1,000) and Grey Plovers (500).

Cape Cross Seal Colony was visited and all senses were suitably stimulated! As well as the thousands of seals there was a high tide roost of 600 Turnstones and 1,000 Sanderlings. We also saw 8 Black Oystercatchers which makes this sighting the most northerly recent record for this species. The Black Oystercatcher is endemic to the west coast of Southern Africa.

We trapped 1,084 waders, mostly by cannon net on the rocky shores of north of Walvis Bay (see Table 1). The catch included two long distance controls of Sanderlings, one from Port Elizabeth (E. Cape) and the other from the Olifants estuary (W. Cape). The