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 cannot 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

lack of controls of Curlew Sandpipers from the W.Cape, where many thousands have been ringed, suggests fidelity to the different non-breeding quarters. The large number of Turnstones caught was gratifying since the total ringed in South Africa to date is only 79. The high proportion of first year Turnstone, 58%, and Sanderlings, 37%, was of interest and contrasts with the situation in the W. Cape where ratio of first year birds is lower. There were fewer first year Curlew Sandpipers, 13%, but a high proportion of second year birds (a minimum of 40%.

A full report is in preparation and will be advised later.

Table 1 Ringing Totals

White-fronted Plover	18
Chestnut-banded Plover	2
Avocet	4
Stilt	2
Turnstone	323
Ringed Plover	3
Grey Plover	8
Curlew Sandpiper	557
Little Stint	7
Knot	12
Sanderling	141
Bar-tailed Godwit	7
TOTAL	1084

Ron Summers

WADER RINGING IN CO. CORK

A little wader ringing has been carried out at Ballycotton each autumn for about five years but in 1976 Kieran O'Brien and Patrick Smiddy began a programme of regular netting at Ballycotton and at a site in Cork Harbour. Ballycotton affords an excellent opportunity to catch Curlew as they fly to roost in a small saltmarsh adjacent to the seashore. Some 300 were ringed in the autumn of 1976, virtually all of which were in primary moult. Lack of manpower prevented us from processing these birds as fully as we would have liked but this situation should be remedied in 1977.

Some 250 Dunlin were ringed this year, the measurements of which confirm the pattern noted at other British and Irish estuaries i.e. schinzii passage in early autumn (Ballycotton bird recovered in Morocco), the wintering population consisting mainly of alpina birds. Reasonable samples of Oystercatcher and Redshank have also been caught.

Plans for next autumn include intensified efforts at Ballycotton and trial sessions at some new sites in Cork Harbour.

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THE INLAND MIGRATION OF RINGED PLOVER (Charadrius hiaticula) IN AUTUMN

A paper summarising the data obtained from the Inland Wader Enquiry during 1971-1974 is in preparation. This analysis, intended as an interim report, summaries Ringed Plover data obtained from 21 selected inland sites in England and Wales. Ringed Plover was the fifth most abundant species recorded, being scarcer than Lapwing, Snipe, Dunlin and perhaps surprisingly, Ruff.