

WADERS CAUGHT AT OLIFANTS RIVER-MOUTH, SOUTH AFRICA, 1978

by Manfred Waltner

Olifants river-mouth, 31°40'S, 18°11'E, is a small but fascinating wetland on the Atlantic coast of South Africa. Almost all the regular Palaearctic waders visiting the southern part of Africa may be seen there, although usually in small numbers only. Members of the Cape Wader Group visit the area at least once a year. In 1978 the 5 hour journey took place at the end of October. Besides keeping in touch with the habitat, the aim was to collect Sanderling Calidris alba data to fill in information gaps. Winter rains had removed a sandspit, the very spot of a night-roost during the previous two years. Only one Sanderling was trapped during two nights of mist-netting. However the following observations made the long journey well worth while.

About 200 Knot Calidris canutus were observed flying to roost at the far side of the river (72 counted during the 1975/76 coastal survey). Eleven first-year birds were caught in mistnets during the first night. A further eleven were trapped the second night, together with two second-year and one third-year (retrap) bird. Five of this year's Knots carried a complete juvenile plumage and no trace of any new feather could be detected. The remainder of the young showed a small patch of new feathers on the median coverts nearest to the body and some moult in the scapulars. The average culmen length of the sample was 35.7mm (range 34-37mm) which suggests that these birds could be of Siberian origin (Dick et al 1976). Furthermore, it supports their findings, that the mean bill length of juveniles does not differ significantly from those of adults. We noted that the front part of the upper mandible was not as hard as in adult birds.

While the absence of any moult described above will interest ringers in Europe, it is the following observation which came as a complete surprise to us. Two adult Curlew Sandpipers Calidris ferruginae handled showed arrested moult in the primaries (1-5 new, 6-10 old). Out of several thousand Curlew Sandpipers ringed by the group, this was the first instance where arrested moult was observed in adult birds (cf Elliott et al 1976).

References

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- Elliott, C.C.H., Waltner, M., Underhill, L.G., Pringle, J.S. & Dick, W.J.A. 1976. The migration system of the Curlew Sandpiper Calidris ferruginea in Africa. Ostrich 47: 191-213

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(The following extract from the summary of Elliott et al. (1976) on the moult of Curlew Sandpipers in South Africa may be of use, particularly to readers in the northern hemisphere: "Adults complete a full primary moult in the Cape between September and February, taking about 140 days but there is a lot of individual variation. Data from Mauritania show primary moult starting faster, a month earlier than in the Cape, and arrested moult in a few adults. The difference may be because Mauritania birds move on further south while the Cape is the end point of the migration. Kenyan moult records from the Rift Valley follow the Cape pattern except that some birds arrest moult and finish later. Juvenile moult is shown to be different from that of adult, involving only a moult of the outer primaries and taking place during the overwintering period, April to August. All juveniles in the Cape are thought to overwinter and the modified moult to be an adaptation to this behaviour". - The Editors)

A NEW JOURNAL: "FAUNISTISCHE MITTEILUNGEN AUS SÜD-NIEDERSACHSEN"

The first two issues of this journal concerned mainly with the birds of the southern part of Lower Saxony, West Germany and in particular the Göttingen area, appeared in 1978. Each number comprises about 230 pages, in both cases approximately two-thirds of these being devoted to systematic lists, for 1976 and 1977 respectively, and one-third to other papers.

The well produced systematic lists are likely to be among the more valuable of this type of publication in that they are systematic in all respects. After a chapter on weather, ten separate reports are included in this section, each covering a particular area or, in many cases, a single site. As most of these detailed study sites are wetlands, these are likely to be of particular interest to WSG members. Very full details are given for each species and, where appropriate, records are tabulated in terms of 5- or 10-day periods. A helpful idea, which other reports could usefully copy, is the inclusion with each issue of a card book-mark on which are printed the dates and numbers of each 5- and 10-day period and, on the other side, a list of abbreviations used in the systematic lists.