

REVIEWS

Wash Wader Ringing Group Report 1979-80

Edited by Branson, N.J.B.A. 1981. 70pp; 30 x 21 cm. Copies available from: Dr N.J.B.A. Branson, Trinity College, Cambridge, England. Price (including postage): £2.50 in United Kingdom, £3.00 to Europe, £4.00 elsewhere. (Payment in sterling should accompany order.)

The latest WWRG report describes the groups activities during 1979 and 1980. The format adopted is similar to that used in previous reports in that chapter 2 (which constitutes the bulk of the report) consists of a list of recoveries, followed by maps showing the distribution of recoveries and controls of selected species and a summary of all known controls and recoveries of Wash waders. Chapter 1 comprises an introduction and a description of the fieldwork carried out during the period; this includes tables of catches and a list of publications based on Wash data. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 include short articles on colour marking within the Wash and its contribution to the study on Movements of Wader Populations of Western Europe, primary moult sequences and weights, respectively.

As always the scale of the WWRG operation is impressive with over 12000 birds ringed during the two year period. This brings the total for 1959-80 to 143,203 newly ringed birds and has resulted in 3469 recoveries and controls (including birds ringed elsewhere and recaptured on the Wash). The size of their commitment is reflected in the membership list and accounts: how many other groups have a membership list of 150 and a bank balance of £2,500?

When reading ringing group reports one inevitably makes comparisons, and, when reading this one, I had to admit to a degree of disappointment. The sort of reports to which I am accustomed normally consist of perhaps a dozen short papers or interim analyses of group data with a page or two of selected recoveries. These papers can be of a quality which is high enough to merit publication in journals with a wider circulation (I suspect that nowadays Ringing and Migration receives many of these papers). Although the WWRG report does contain a couple of 'meaty' articles, especially the moults and weight analyses (though even these are rather heavy on data and light on discussion), no less than 25 of the 70 pages are filled with lists of recoveries. These lists are preceded by short summaries of the recoveries of each species (3 pages), and followed by maps showing the distribution of recoveries/controls of selected species (11 pages). Thus over half the report is allocated to recovery data. The maps and species summaries are of undoubted interest; however, I found the 25 pages of recoveries uninteresting and arid reading. If some of these pages had been used to expand the species summaries or had been filled with a few more short papers the value and 'readability' of the report would have been increased.

Hector Galbraith.

Shorebird Studies in North West Morocco. (Report of Durham University 1980 Sidi Moussa Expedition)

Edited by M.E. Moser. 1981. 100 pp.
Available from M.E. Moser, Dept. of Zoology, University of Durham, South Road, Durham, UK. Price £1-50.

The Sidi Moussa salt pans, on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, have been the study areas for two recent expeditions, the above in autumn 1980 and Netherlands Expedition in spring 1981. The earlier and larger studies by University of East Anglia Expeditions and others were responsible for establishing the basic data on population origins and migration on the Moroccan coast, and the recent expeditions have concentrated on aspects of use of the site as a migration halt.

The Report is divided into sections on wader and non-wader studies. Within the wader section, the majority of the presentation of biometric data does not add, not surprisingly, a great deal to the studies of the early 1970's. The most interesting aspects of the Report concern the analysis of turnover of migrating waders at the site, using both dye-marking and count data. By selecting a discreet migration site not subject to great local movements of waders, daily immigration and emigration can be estimated, and activities linked to weight changes. These suggest a rapid turnover of birds, with little weight added for onward migration south. It is suggested that birds in poorer conditions when caught did not tend to stay longer than those in better condition. A decrease in mean weights through the period is attributed to an immigration of lighter birds and emigration of heavier ones, as opposed to loss of body condition of individuals.

The advantage of any expedition report is that it enables data to be presented which might be insufficient to justify publication in a scientific paper, but which is recorded for future workers. It also allows an element of speculation which might not be permitted with more rigorous editing. This Report is no exception, at times giving way to temptations to draw inferences on rather limited data from the 894 waders caught. For example, the controlling of one Little Stint Calidris minuta from an earlier expedition cannot support statistically any statement about constancy of individual migration routes and, even if this speculation is qualified, such a statement is probably best omitted.

The Report is 100 pages long, and is printed only on one side of the paper, considerably increasing the bulk and, therefore, postage costs, not to mention storage space required.

Finally, it is interesting to note the depths of ingenuity required to raise finance in the interests of scientific research in present economic circumstances. A sponsored Beard Shave raised £73-00 of the expedition's expenses!

W.J.A. Dick