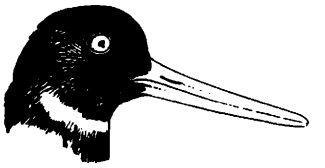
RUFFNET: THE 1989 PROGRESS REPORT

David Lank & Theunis Piersma



RUFFNET (Lank & Piersma 1988) is a ringing programme designed to investigate the longevity, morphometrics, and distribution of male Ruffs *Philomachus pugnax* of different plumage colours and behavioural morphs. Basically it provides a simplified system for recording feather colours and patterns when ringing males in breeding plumage. Survivorship and morphometrics may then be analyzed as a function of morph-type. Here we summarise the progress made during the first year of the project.

RINGING PROGRESS TO DATE

J. van Rhijn made available his ringing data on 98 males trapped at leks, including 8 recoveries.

J. Jukema was the first person to try the RUFFNET system in the spring of 1988, capturing 7 males in Workumerwaard, Friesland. Thank you Joop!

RUFFNET obtained data on 88 male Ruffs during a 2-day mist-netting effort in the Alde Faenen, near Earnewald, Friesland. Eddy Wymenga organized appropriate water levels, through "Jt Fryske Gea" (who gave permission and provided logistic support), and assembled a crew including K. Koopman, W. Altenburg, J. Roosma, B. Klazenga, T. Piersma and D. Lank. We also netted Common Gulls, terns, Oystercatchers, Black-tailed Godwits, Whimbrels, Redshanks, a Spotted Redshank, a Coot and a Shelduck.

D. Lank and C. M. Smith codified their data on 74 males caught in Finland into RUFFNET format. There is 1 recovery and numerous local resightings of these males in subsequent years.

M. Harengerd, J. Meltner, and D. Lank considered ways to abstract information on male plumages from the ringing cards collected by OAG Munster at the Rieselfelder Munster where records go back to 1972. This information may be coordinated with an existing databank of morphometric and recovery information managed by T. Kepp.

All of this adds up to a good start for the ringing and survival project.

ARE SATELLITES SMALLER THAN RESIDENTS?

Hoglund & Lundberg (1989) report from a study of museum skins that the whitest birds in the population are slightly smaller in a number of body measurements than the darkest birds, including tarsus length, a morphological variable which is likely to be determined during a chick's growth phase. They suggested that plumage colour and male behaviour may be determined at least in part by a condition-dependent developmental switch. It is now of greater interest than ever to capture and measure birds of known plumage type at known locations.

DO SATELLITES REMAIN WHITE AND BEHAVE DIFFERENTLY IN WINTER?

Some male Ruffs grow white neck feathers when they moult into their winter plumages. It appears that these may be related to an individual's breeding plumage colour and behaviour. Captive satellites with white ruffs often grow white winter neck feathers, while white-necked residents do not (personal observations). It would be most helpful to have more information from captive birds whose moult cycles appear normal. We are particularly interested in identifying satellites in winter because in captivity satellites become unusually aggressive and territorial around food dishes at this season (Lank *et al.* 1989, plus observations by J. van Rhijn). We do not yet know whether this also occurs in the wild. If it does, it would appear to be just the opposite pattern from that seen during the summer, when satellites are non-territorial at breeding leks!

About 10% of pre-nuptial moulting males were scored with white on their neck in visual scans in Turkey (van Winden *et al.* 1989). About 16% of birds caught and inspected in the hand on early spring migration in Italy had white necks (N. Baccetti and L. Serra pers. comm.). We would expect to find a higher percentage among birds inspected in the hand. Since 10-15% of ruff breeding populations are thought to be satellites, it is tempting to believe that nearly all white-necked winter birds may be satellites in the summer, although the reverse will not be true.

PROCEDURAL MODIFICATIONS FOR RUFFNET

RUFFNET methodology remains similar to that outlined by Lank & Piersma (1988). At the Alde Faenen we sometimes found it useful to code up to three colours for the "main" pattern of the Ruff. In addition to the variables on the RUFFNET data sheets we also recorded bill colours and wattle colours (when present), and found that *c.* 10% of the males had full sets of much newer-looking primaries than the rest. Perhaps the latter had migrated less far to our encounter with them in Friesland.

We encourage persons ringing males in the autumn or winter to code the presence of white neck feathers in some fashion. However, RUFFNET is not at the moment suggesting how this might best be done.

We encourage more strongly than before persons to take full sets of morphometric data on captured birds. Measurements could include tarsus length, total tarsus and toe, total head length, wing length, bill length and weight. It is clear that body size will become more and more interesting as information accumulates.

So: catch ruffs this spring! Walk-in traps, nocturnal mist-netting, Wilster-netting or cannon-netting may be possible! Ruffnet materials and coding sheets are available from David Lank or Theunis Piersma at the addresses below.

REFERENCES

Hoglund,J. & Lundberg,A. 1989. Plumage color correlates with body size in the Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*). *Auk* 106: 336-338.

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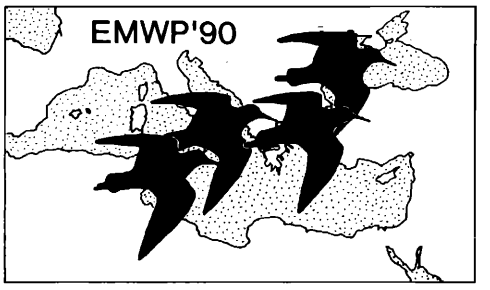
THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN WADER PROJECT 1990



A CALL FOR WADER WATCHERS AND COLOUR MARK OBSERVATIONS

The WIWO (Foundation Working Group International Wader and Wildfowl Research) will co-ordinate an international wader project in Greece, southern Turkey and Tunisia in spring 1990. Simultaneously, a joint project with the Foundation for Ornithological Research in Eygpt will start in the Nile Delta in Eygpt. These projects will be carried out from 1 March to 31 May 1990 and will involve the counting, trapping and colour marking of waders.

The main objective is to gain insight into the migration routes and strategies of waders during spring migration through the eastern Mediterranean region. Much information is still needed to delimit the Eastern Mediterranean Flyway in the west (are there connections with the well studied East Atlantic Flyway?) as well as the east (the Central Asian-East African Flyway). The main stop-over sites during spring migration are still largely unknown.

SITES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

The project in Eygpt will be carried out in the Nile Delta (mainly Lake Manzala) in close co-operation with the IWRB and the Eygptian Wildlife Service. In Turkey, the study area is situated in the Cukurova Deltas (Akyatan Golu) in Southern Turkey and the project is jointly organised with the Society for Protection of Wildlife in Turkey and the Cukurova University. In Tunisia, the main study area will be the Gulf of Gabes and the organisations involved are the Association le Amis des Oiseaux and the Institut National des Recherches Scientifique et Techniques. In Greece, the Gulf of Messolongion has been chosen as a study area and the project will be carried out in collaboration with the Hellenic Ornithological Society and the ringing group in Messolongion. Local participants are involved in all projects.

COLOUR-MARKED WADERS AND COUNTS

Simultaneous counts every week in all study sites will give information on the timing of migration in the different study areas and potential exchange between them. In addition, waders will be trapped and colour marked (with plumage dyes and leg flags) in Tunisia and Eygpt to provide direct observations of migrational links between the areas. Biometrics, plumages, moult status and weight changes might give additional data on the populations involved and their migration strategies.

BIRD WATCHERS NEEDED

Because of the low density of observers in the eastern Mediterranean and eastern Europe, there is a need for wader watchers to concentrate their search for colour marked waders and counting on other important wetlands in this region. This extension of the EMWP '90 is now under the umbrella of the Wader Study Group and regular progress reports will appear in the *Wader Study Group Bulletin*. Contacts are already established with ornithological groups in Israel, Malta, Italy, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Austria and the Soviet Union (the Black Sea region). Areas which especially deserve more attention are: southern Italy, north-east Greece, western Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania. Any information on departures of waders in western, central and eastern Africa will also be very valuable.

SLENDER-BILLED CURLEW AND OTHER TARGET WADER SPECIES

One of the most important, but rarest wader species whose migration is almost completely limited to this region is the Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*. With respect to this species, all work will be undertaken in close co-operation with Adam Gretton of the ICBP, who for the last two years has been the co-ordinator of a special ICBP project on this highly endangered species. Therefore, the Slender-billed Curlew will be one of the special target species of the EMWP. The other target species will be: Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea*, Dunlin (the central Siberian population) *C. alpina*, Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Spotted Redshank *T. erythropus*, Greenshank *T. nebularia*, Wood Sandpiper *T. glareola*, Marsh Sandpiper *T. stagnatilis* and Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*. In addition, information on all other species will be gathered.