

Giving details of age for Oystercatchers on BTO ringing schedules

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The Euring age codes seem ambiguous for some waders, like Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus*, with distinguishable first-year and adult birds, and an amorphous group of birds probably two or three years old. The solution is the use of 'I' (meaning Immature) as a plumage indicator, in the way that 'J' (meaning Juvenile) is used. The proper codes, which should be used on British Trust for Ornithology ringing schedules, for Oystercatchers are given below.

Soft part characters *may* eventually allow the certain separation of all second and third-year birds, so that fully adult birds would be coded 8 or 10, but, as far as I know, this degree of certainty has not even been claimed by anyone.

What is needed to make such determinations stick is good colour photographs of known-age birds caught through their second and third winters – pack your camera with the cannon-nets.

	To end of Dec.	From 1 Jan.
First-year (i.e. up to 1 year old)	3	5
Second year (if certain)	5	7
Fully adult	6	8
Immature	4 I	6 I

Problems with the ageing of Dunlins in autumn

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Amongst features that are used widely to differentiate juvenile and adult Dunlins *Calidris alpina* is the colour of the wing coverts. In juveniles these are fringed buff, whilst the new wing coverts of adults (after moulting) should be fringed whitish (Prater *et al.* 1977, Ferns 1981). At least some second-year birds can be identified by the presence of juvenile feathers (with buff fringes) in the inner median coverts (Holmes 1966, Prater *et al.* 1977). As a result of our work on waders at the mouth of the Vistula in Gdansk Bay (Poland), we now believe that this method of distinguishing age classes of Dunlins may be more complicated than is generally supposed, and that consequently some Dunlins may be aged wrongly on the bias of wing covert colour. We outline the reasons below.

At the mouth of Vistula, waders (mainly Dunlins) have been ringed throughout July to September in most recent years. Birds are caught in traps checked every two hours from sunrise to sunset (Gromadzka 1981). In the first half of July mainly adult Dunlins of the nominate race are caught. The few juveniles that we catch belong to the local breeding population of *schinzii* race (Gromadzka 1983). At that time adults have worn feathers. Amongst them, second-year birds (identified by buff fringes of some inner medians) have especially worn primaries, tertials, median coverts and

rectrices.

In the first half of July we catch the first adult Dunlins starting to change their primaries, the earliest recorded date being 7 July. In about mid-August, we start to catch juveniles, and adults are more and more advanced in primary moult. By the end of August/September most adults have renewed all their primaries. Beginning in the second half of July, during primary moult (at a primary moult score about 15), the median wing coverts are replaced also. It is easy to see these new median covert feathers, since they look very fresh. However, not all new coverts look like typical adult winter ones (i.e. with white fringes). Most adults have a mixture of new median coverts fringed buff-brownish (similar to juveniles) and whitish. Occasionally we even catch adults with all new medians fringed buff-brownish. These could be distinguished as adults from the remnants of a black belly patch, and growing or new primaries. The buff-brownish colour of adult medians varies in intensity: in some birds it is very pale. In others it is bright rust-brown.

The catching of Dunlins during autumn migration in 1983 at the mouth of the Vistula was exceptionally successful compared with other years so we could follow changes in plumage in more detail than before. Between 20 July and 7 September, 1409 adult Dunlins were caught. 70% were

