

## BIRD RINGING IN EAST AFRICA

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About a year ago a special committee was set up to consider how to encourage bird ringing in East Africa. For those of our members who are not familiar with this popular form of research, the following is a short account of the decisions already taken, together with an indication of what has been accomplished outside these territories.

Bird ringing, or banding as it is called in the United States, is a comparatively new method of marking birds, although its development can be traced back for many hundreds of years. Before any work on bird behaviour can be accurate enough to satisfy the scientist, it is necessary positively to identify individual birds on each occasion. This can be done in a variety of ways, but the most satisfactory and the longest lasting is to fix a tag, or ring, to the bird's legs: occasionally clips in the wings have also been used.

The capture of the birds without harming them, the fixing and recording of the numbered rings, the recovery of the rings, and exchange of information regarding the recoveries through report centres back to those interested is all part of the technique of bird ringing. Throughout the world there are a considerable number of organisations and individuals engaged in the practice and the exchange of information about recoveries. Most European countries, the United States and South Africa participate, and even Russia has for some years been in the habit of reporting recoveries of birds ringed in other countries. There are 593 holders of ringing permits in Britain, and 1,750,000 birds have been ringed there since work started in 1909.

There are three types of problems connected with birds which can be investigated by the use of rings. First, there are questions of bird behaviour. For those interested in working out details of all such actions as nest-building, feeding at the nest, territorial and courtship behaviour, it is essential to be sure that any individual bird can be identified. This can be done by colour rings, which allow identification without interfering with the bird's liberty. Then there are questions of local movement. Much has been learned of the movements of young birds soon after they have left the nest, and there is much of interest we should like to know about the movements of species at different seasons within East Africa; this can be done by ringing and recovery within the territory. Thirdly, and this is really only an extension of the last, there is the tracing of the great stream of migrants which move from one continent to another. A great deal has already been discovered about such movements, but there still remains much to be learned regarding these seasonal movements of birds, especially in and through East Africa, on migration. For this study ringing is the most valuable tool in the hands of the research worker and moreover it is a field in which the serious amateur can do a very great deal to assist the professional investigator.

To further such researches in its area, the East Africa Natural History Society has set up a special ringing sub-committee, and the Coryndon Museum has agreed to act as a report centre: this it has already been doing for Dr. Disney who has been working on *Quelea* control. Although it is not at present proposed that the Committee will carry out any ringing programme itself, it will assist would-be ringers by providing them with rings, record forms, advice on ringing and instruction on trapping and actual ringing technique. In addition, this Committee will act as recorders and as a clearing house for information regarding recoveries. It will

co-ordinate schemes to avoid overlapping, and in due course it is hoped to publicise actual schemes in order to ensure that reports of ringed birds are received from African sources. The co-operation of the Game Department has been promised, and this is most necessary since their permission is needed in each case where the trapping of birds is undertaken.

The Committee has also prepared a ringing code which all would-be ringers must agree to observe before their applications to take part in any ringing scheme are accepted.

The salient points of this code are:-

1. The object of ringing is serious scientific study.
2. Ringing must in no way endanger the health or impair the chances of survival of the bird.
3. Ringed birds must be accurately identified.
4. Accurate records must be kept and forwarded punctually to the recorders.
5. Ringers are responsible for obtaining their own trapping permits from the Game Departments concerned, after obtaining approval from the Society.
6. No transfer of rings or delegation of ringing to other individuals is permitted.
7. Ringers must not publish their records without approval of the Society.

Readers of Dr. V. van Someren's *A Bird Watcher in Kenya* will remember the interesting account of the behaviour of the Fiscal Shrike. Much of this was made possible by the use of colour rings, and there is no need to start with an ambitious ringing scheme; simple observations of birds in one's own garden can be an introduction to a more serious study.

The East Africa Natural History Society is aware that there are a number of members who wish to take on some active work, and feels that this is a real opportunity for such members to undertake studies which will be a worthwhile contribution to the ornithology of Kenya. Will those who are interested and would like further details, please write to the Secretary, who will pass such requests to the ringing sub-committee. They will gladly help and discuss any project proposed. Expert advice is available, so, after deciding what problem might be studied, and ensuring that the necessary time can be given to serious work, the Committee will tell you in what way they can assist, and provide rings and record forms on payment, after the necessary trapping permits have been obtained. Unless you have previous experience in ringing, you will be expected to work for a short time with an experienced ringer, since birds must be trapped and ringed without damaging them in any way. This alone is worth preliminary investigation before the project is undertaken.

It is hoped that in due course it may be possible to establish stations for ringing migrants similar to those run by local committees under the auspices of the British Trust for Ornithology in Britain. Here it will be possible for those who have not the time to run a scheme of their own, to assist in more ambitious projects which may well need the assistance of Society members.