WADER EXPEDITION TO NORWAY, 1974

Kate Lessells

The expedition spent July and August on the north shore of the Varangerfjord in NE Norway. The fjord opens to the east facing Russia about 80 km away and is at 70°N, 30° E - nearly as far north as the Greenland expedition, but with a much milder climate - the snow had nearly completely melted when we arrived in early July. The fjord is about 100 km long, with reasonably gently sloping sides (it is not a typical fjord) and rocky beaches with occasional sandy bays. There are small trees and birch scrub at the western end, but where we were catching there were only occasional small bushes.

Most of July was spent searching for wader pulli, particularly on headlands between the road and the sea. This area has low dry vegetation (less than 20 cm. high and about 80% cover) plus occasional bushes, together with large pools about 100 m. in diameter, and marshy areas of varying extent. Ringed Plover and Turnstone were breeding in the dry areas and Dunlin, Redshank and Red-necked Phalarope in the wetter areas. An entirely man-made habitat, a scrape about 5m high and 2m deep produced alongside the road during road construction, was particularly important for breeding Ringed Plover. The vegetation had not yet regenerated in these scrapes and there were shallow pools in the bottom of them. There was also one larger area of similar habitat and a gravel pit with breeding Ringed Plovers. Inland there is a plateau with low dry vegetation, occasional small damp areas, and large pools. Turnstone, Dunlin and Golden Plover nest in the dry areas. In addition to the species of which we caught pulli the following species are probable breeders (confirmed breeding underlined) : Oystercatcher, Little Stint, Purple Sandpiper, Ruff, Spotted Redshank, Wood Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew. Wader pulli were all caught by hand, usually by locating a breeding pair and then hiding and waiting for the chicks to emerge - the car proved invaluable as a hide!

August was spent catching adult passage birds on rotting beds of kelp and also on some partially tidal pools. We used single shelf mist nets (50% of the catch) wire mesh walk in traps (40%) and clap nets (10%). Initially we mist netted in daylight, but by mid-August it got dark at night.

Ringing totals were as follows:

Species Ringed:	Full-grown	pull.	retrap	control	total
Dunlin	1850	4	674	18	2546
Little Stint	152		32		184
Temmincks sting	10	5	1	1	17
Ringed Plover	39	37	16	5	97
Ruff	131		4		135
Turnstone	4	28	5		37
Purple Sandpiper	15				15
Bar-tailed Godwit	4				4
Grey Plover	1				1
Golden Plover		1			1
Red-necked Phalarope	26	1	1	1	29
Curlew Sandpiper	1				1
Redshank		4			4
Snipe	1	3			4
Wader total:	2317	83	733	25	3075

We also ringed a further 365 non-waders including 3 Rough-legged Buzzard pulli and an adult Hawk Owl.

Most of the controls were ringed by Norwegian ringers locally earlier in the summer.

The majority of the waders ringed were juveniles-of the 1850 Dunlin ringed only 17 were adults. The main adult passage was very concentrated - 1000 to 2000 adults were on the beach for only 24 hours on the 22-23 July. Compared with this the juvenile passage was leisurely and extended throughout August. A preliminary analysis of the Dunlin biometrics is presented below.

Mean wing length : adults 118.1 mm
juvs 120.6 mm (range 112-130 mm)
mean bill lengths: adults 32.7 mm
juvs 32.1 mm (range 22-40 mm)
(the significance of these has not been tested)
Some of the juvenile birds had probably not completed growth.

Of the 17 adults, 6 were not moulting, 9 were in active moult, and 2 were in arrested moult (one of which had also arrested moult of the inner and outer secondaries).

Passage juveniles were retrapped up to 28 days after ringing, and 7 controls with Russian rings indicated the probable origin of the birds. There were weight gains of up to 2 gm/day and one juvenile weighed 70 gms.

Ringed Plover biometrics:
mean wing length : adults 132.0 mm (range 127-135 mm) sample size 11
juvs 129.0 mm (range 115-133 mm) sample size 33
The juvenile with wing length 115 mm still had down on the neck

The only species of which we caught a greater number of adults than juveniles was Purple Sandpiper. All 15 birds were adults, and 11 of them were in moult. Comparing Dunlin and Purple sandpiper moult, Purple Sandpiper had an average of 4 growing feathers among the birds in active moult (maximum 6), and Dunlin an average of 1.1 growing feathers among the birds in active moult (maximum 2). Purple Sandpiper is the only species which winters in the Varangerfjord area which probably explains the presence of adults (but not the absence of juveniles) and also the more normal rate of moult compared with the slow moult of the Dunlin.

AGEING THE JACK SNIPE, LYMNOCRYPTES MINIMUS

Alv Ottar Folkestad

84 individuals of the Jack Snipe caught at Ornithological Station Vigra, Møre & Romsdal Co., Western Norway, during autumn migration 1969-73 have been examined. Parallel to studying plumage characters, also other ageing characters have been noticed.

Remaining natal down on the oil gland feather-tuft is characteristic for juvenile waders of many species, especially during the first migration period. Of course, this character is lost rather soon and is therefore not useful for ageing throughout late autumn and winter. It has been used as a basis for controlling plumage characters. Likewise primary moult has been used as an ageing criterion for controlling plumage pattern in adults.