

Woodcock Research Group (IWRB)

The exasperating Woodcock is a 'fringe' species amongst waders and waterfowl and woodland game, and tends to be neglected in any group study. Woodcock enthusiasts are perhaps as odd and solitary as the bird they have chosen, and the new Woodcock Research Group of IWRB is striving to flush some and induce flocking behaviour. Any members of the WSG with an active interest in woodcock are asked to write to Monica Shorten at East Gate, Old Castle Road, Salisbury, Wilts SP1 3SF, and to tell her what they are doing or would like to do.

It seems that the occasional woodcock does get ringed by the WSG - a total of 5 was recorded for 1974 - thank you, TRG and Humber! The capture and ringing of this bird during its breeding season really separates the men from the boys, yet there is a great need for 600-700, mainly pulli or juveniles, to be ringed in the British Isles each year. It has not been met since 1935 (763 pulli) and the average yearly total, including FGs on migration, has been about 30 in recent years with pulli averaging about 8. So every young woodcock ringed will be a help. The recovery rate is 7.9%.

Two years ago Ib Clausager (Kalo, Denmark) published a good guide to methods of determining the age-class and sex of woodcock from external features. Even very precise measurements of bill length and central tail feathers, expressed as a ratio, allow adult males and females to be confused: the best that can be done without dissection is to use the formula of Stronach, Harrington & Wilkins which reduces the probability of error to 28%:

- 0.2952 bill length plus 0.1566 central tail feather length
which gives
greater than - 8.3640 male (72% correct)
less than - 8.3640 female (75% correct)

Birds in their first twelve months after hatching must be excluded, and this can be done by examining the tips and proximal edges of the outer primaries (ragged outline on first years; smooth on older birds, at least until April) and the terminal lighter bar on primary coverts (broader and browner on young birds). This quick, simple method correctly classifies 95-98%. Any woodcock ringed during migration periods or in the winter is worth such extra records in the notebook. But can anyone sex woodcock pulli?

Monica Shorten
Co-ordinator, WRG

Look to Colour - ringed and Dye-marked Waders!

Since 1972 Common Sandpiper Tringa hypoleucos and Little Ringed Plovers Charadrius dubius have been marked individually with colour - rings and an aluminium - ring of the Ornithological Station Helgoland below the intertarsal joint. They were ringed on the mud ponds of the sugar factory of Norten - Hardenberg, Lower Saxony, Federal Republic of Germany.

From spring 1975 a larger number of several species of waders, especially Common Sandpipers T. hypoleucos, Wood Sandpipers

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T. Glareola, Green Sandpipers T. ochropus, Greenshanks T. nebularia, Little Ringed Plovers Ch. Dubius, etc., will be dye-marked on the under parts of the body by red, green, blue, yellow and possibly black colours. The under part of the body is divided into three sections: 1) breast, 2) belly to the beginning of thigh, and 3) beginning of thigh to under tail coverts. The combinations can easily be recognised with a standard binocular at considerable distances.

Details of rings and dye-marks seen, place of observation, date and time, length of stay etc. should kindly be sent as promptly as possible to:

Beringungsgemeinschaft Bernd Riedel, 3410 Northeim 1, Wilhelmstrasse 44
BRD.

Sanderling, Greenland and colour rings

by G.H. Green

The following should be regarded as a piece of personal reportage rather than a definitive scientific publication. I was at a brass band concert the other evening and while the band was playing my mind wandered off into random thoughts about Sanderling, partly because this time (28 June) last year I was in Greenland listening to their strange croaking song and partly because on 16 June this year I received a cable from Danmarkshavn in NE Greenland which read "SANDERLING METAL RING RIGHT LEG PALL RED PLASTIC RING LEFT LEG OBSERVED DANMARKSHAVN 16 JUNE YOURS MELTOFTE". It was an exciting cable to receive as it tells of a bird ringed at Mestersvig (NE Greenland) in 1974 by the Joint Biological Expedition and found in the next breeding season 550 km further north. So far I don't know if the bird has been caught and can only speculate whether it was ringed as a passage migrant at Mestersvig or whether it was an adult which has forsaken its former breeding site. If the first it lends support to the theory that waders migrate along the NE Greenland coast. It is unlikely to be a 1974 pullus as young birds appear to remain south for their first summer.

The observation is yet another 'first' and another valuable piece of information from the colour ringing and dye marking scheme we used in Greenland in a small way in 1972, Meltofte used in Pearyland in 1973 and the Joint Biological Expedition used more extensively in 1974. To date, in addition to the Danmarkshavn bird, 9 Sanderling, 15 Ringed Plover, 1 Turnstone and 1 Dunlin have been reported in Britain solely by observation of dye marks and colour rings (see BTO News 73 June). The scheme can claim the first definite records of Greenland Ringed Plover and Sanderling in Britain. All the Sanderling (except one in the west of Ireland, March 1975) were seen during the August-September passage period and confirm the view, first put forward by A.E. Williams at a Ringers Conference 5 years ago, that Greenland Sanderling occur in Britain as passage migrants and do not stay for the winter. We were therefore rather put out and puzzled by several reports which reached us last winter from Holland, Belgium, and Essex of Sanderling with red colour rings only and no metal rings. Later we found that Dr Gerard Boere had