

REQUEST FOR WHOLE BODIES OF FRESHLY DEAD WADERS

Many WSG members know of the difficulties in interpreting the weight data gathered during ringing activities, and may have seen a recent paper which provided information on changes in body composition, thereby helping in such interpretations (P.R. Evans and P.C. Smith, 1975. Studies of shorebirds at Lindisfarne, Northumberland. 2. Fat and pectoral muscle as indicators of body composition in the Bar-tailed Godwit. Wildfowl 26: 64-76). It would be valuable if such studies could be extended, particularly to other species, and maximum use should be made of any casualties of catching operations.

Peter Evans requests that whole bodies of any casualties or birds found recently dead be wrapped in a polythene bag and sent to:

Dr P.R. Evans, Dept. of Zoology, University of Durham, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE.

Mark the package: "Pathological specimen(s) - URGENT". Please include a note of details of how obtained and of weight at the time of capture/death. Postage can be refunded if desired; please indicate on the note.

RINGING TOTALS

Once again a disappointing response, the four totals sent in were:

S.W. Lancs R.G. (606), including 161 Sanderling, 160 pull. Lapwing, 144 Dunlin and 65 Oystercatcher.

K. O'Brien (Cork) (454), including 244 Curlew, 113 Dunlin, 34 Oystercatcher and 28 Redshanks.

B. Etheridge (Banff) (242), including 78 Common Sandpipers, 72 pull. Lapwing, 24 pull. Oystercatcher, 16 pull. Ringer Plover and 10 pull. Woodcock.

S. Sporne (Hants) (205), including 94 Dunlin, 50 Ringed Plover, 20 Redshank, 10 Bar-tailed Godwit and 2 Kentish Plovers.

ACTIVITIES OF WADER STUDY GROUPS

As outlined in the editorial, we are hoping to increase the degree of information exchange and cooperative studies and aid planning of programmes by a series of articles on various local wader study groups. Peter Challinor has kindly written the first of these which appears below. We hope to receive many more from both Britain and overseas. The content of each will obviously depend to some extent on the activities of the relevant groups but some possible subjects to consider covering include: areas of work: activities of the group: methods used, especially when these may have more general application: species or aspects of special interest: any conservation importance; seasonal activities: suggestions or requests for cooperative studies with other groups: note of any reports published: outline of results etc. The Editors would be pleased to receive articles or discuss possibilities.

SCAN Ringing Group

by Peter Challinor

The SCAN ringing group has been in existence for almost three and a half years and was formed primarily to catch birds by cannon netting. The name SCAN always produces the question of what such a name stands for. Sounding more like a slick name for a trendy TV documentary, it is, in fact, simply the initials, or nearly so, of the places in which the group operates; this is to say, Salop, Conway Bay and part of Anglesey.

Our prime interest to date has been with the waders of the Conway Estuary and the Lavan Sands, where we have been catching waders at high tide roosts on the shore and on adjoining fields. We have also done some catching on wet, marshy areas on and near the Newborough Warren Reserve in Anglesey, and we have tried inland for Lapwings and Golden Plovers in Salop. The latter area is very much third on the list at the moment and, in practice, the only serious ringing we have done in Salop has been of Canada Geese in June at a time when the Welsh coast is very quiet wader-wise.

The techniques we employ are very similar to the ones used on the Wash, which is not surprising as nearly all our members have W.W.R.G. training! We also encounter in our area problems slightly different from those on the Wash. Not the least of these is the much greater interference and disturbance at our sites, by members of the public, especially during the spring and autumn months. On the other hand, we do work amongst some of the most beautiful scenery in Wales.

Since the inception of the group, we have concentrated on three species - Dunlin, Redshank and Ringed Plover and recently have added Curlew, perhaps rather hopefully, to our list. We have managed to take samples of Dunlin for most months from September to May, including one or two quite large ones of 700-800 birds. All the weight data from these catches have been pooled with the data being studied by the W.W.R.G. and we regard our work on Dunlin as very much helping to fill the gaps in our knowledge of Dunlin movement and passage within the U.K. We were particularly keen to test our ability to separate the various races of Dunlin in May, on plumage colouration but we have discovered that the passage through the Lavan Sands is of very short duration, only involving relatively small numbers of birds and that the dates and times of arrival are very variable indeed - a very different situation from what seems to be the case at other west coast sites, such as the Dec Estuary.

So far we do not have enough data on Redshank over a wide enough spread of dates to be able to produce much in the way of results. From several reasonable autumn catches - one of almost 600 - it does seem that we have quite a high proportion of long-winged birds, probably Icelandic in origin (as one would expect) and we have had one of these birds recovered from the west coast of Scotland in early spring - possibly a returning 'foreigner'. We do have a very rapid build-up of Redshank in July but we have yet to make a significant catch of birds in the summer or early autumn.

Ringed Plover is the third species we particularly go for but most of our catches are made at one site. We have ringed around 200 birds, not a very large number, but we have had some very pleasing recoveries and controls. One of these was an East German bird, ringed as a pullus, while another was a bird ringed by us and controlled on the nest in West Germany. Several of our birds have been recovered in Scandinavia and one in Ireland. It appears that all our data on the British and continental Ringed Plovers ties in nicely with the overall composite picture being built up the WSG. Again, we still need more birds from early autumn and spring and the gathering of information is slow with small catches of twenty to fifty birds the rule.

Our interest in Curlew was awakened when we made a catch of moulting birds in September two years ago. On the high spring tides, large number of these birds roost in grass fields adjacent to the shore but it seemed an impossibility to camouflage the nets satisfactorily. On this occasion, however, a field had been partially cut for silage and we were able to conceal net and cannons in the uncut grass. With the aid of a decoy, we collected all the birds in front of the nets. I suspect that the number of Curlew one can catch under a net may be relatively small as their size and strength enable them to keep a net 'airborne' for much longer than is usual. We had over 2,000 birds in front of our nets and actually fired over some 1,000 but only caught 300; I can only explain the difference between potential and actual catch in this way. It would be interesting to know what other ringers feel about this. In the winter Curlew's break up into larger numbers of smaller units and only occasionally does a chance of a catch present itself. .../

This winter, we hope to fill in some more the many gaps that exist in the data accumulated so far and, on the equipment side, to experiment with a new idea for attaching projectiles to traces, which, if successful, should virtually eliminate the problems of wear on ropes and, hence, the possible danger of a projectile breaking free. Incidentally, we have re-designed our firing box as we felt there were too many shortcomings and even dangers present in the 'standard' type and we are now able to fire four nets simultaneously off one box which is energised by a D.C. source.

Unfortunately, time and space does not permit the setting out here of any recoveries or controls nor even of ringing totals, but the group has published two reports so far and the third is in the pipe-line. These contain all details of recoveries and so forth and are available at a cost of 25p each (we have to charge this to help cover the cost of printing).

The Nature Conservancy has been carrying out a five year survey of the ecology of Lavan Sands and, earlier this year, produced their report. Unfortunately our effort came very late on in the study and so we were not able to play a full part in the work but we do feel that all our results make up a valuable pool of information on an area which, at present, is under great pressure, both from commerce and industry, as well as the tourist trade. Consequently we will, in future, work closely with the Nature Conservancy Council.

Finally, any reader who finds himself or herself in a position to join us in the field will be most welcome.

P. W. Challinor, Las Alondras, Trussell Close, Acton Trussell, Nr Stafford.

MEASUREMENTS OF WADERS LESS FREQUENTLY RINGED IN BRITAIN (1): Little Ringed Plover  
Charadrius dubius.

by C. M. Reynolds

Unlike most species of waders ringed in Britain, Little Ringed Plovers are mainly caught as pulli, with smaller numbers trapped as fledged juveniles or adults at or near the breeding grounds. Adults arrive in April and leave apparently soon after breeding in late July and August (and probably before moulting) as is shown by foreign recoveries in early August. Pulli are ringed between late May and early August, and the pattern of weights (see below) suggests that there may be some second broods as well as repeat clutches. The juveniles appear to migrate later although most have left by the end of August, with stragglers as late as October. Many juveniles are trapped before their primaries are fully grown; a condition not always noted by ringers.

In this analysis the measurements from 27 adults and 76 juveniles have been used. Of these 5 (4 adults and 1 juvenile) were measured twice. The data were obtained from the WSG files, my own records and as the results of personal requests. In recent years the sample represents about a quarter of the fledged birds handled. They are mainly from Herts (Rye Meads Sewage Farm 1962-6), Oxfordshire and Lincs (Wisbech Sewage Farm), with smaller numbers from 8 other counties as shown in Table 1. There were also single migrants from Scilly (April) and Fair Isle (juvenile in September).

1. Weights

(a) Adults. There are 30 weights of adults from probable breeding grounds between 24th April and 22nd August, mainly in July. These weights show little variation being usually between 35 and 41 gms. (see Fig 1) with mean 37.5 and st. deviation 3.3. Two in mid-summer were as light as 31 gms. which was about the weight of the Scilly bird (31½ gms.). There were two very much heavier birds of 46½ on 26th April and 46gms. on 18th August. These were presumably a female about to lay, and a migrant about to leave. Weights of 34-38½ gms. for males and 35-45 gms. for females were recorded for nesting adults in Germany (Bub. 1958), and of 31½-41½ in Spain in August. Spring migrants in

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