

WADER STUDY GROUP DATA FORMS: FIRST ADDITIONS

by Michael W. Pienkowski

The response to the new WSG data forms for ringers has been very good and many groups and individuals are now using these both for new work and old information. Inevitably some problems have arisen, particularly where some groups record measurements not at present widely used. Below are some amendments to the instructions. Most will probably affect relatively few users.

General

Our attention has been drawn to the 'rub-out' ball-point pens made by 'Paper Mate', as an alternative to pencils for filling in the forms. The advantages are that the ball-point ink is easier to read but can be erased as easily as pencil, and that the pen does not need to be sharpened. The disadvantage is the price: about £1.50 for the pen and about £0.80 for refills. Anyone using the pens should also be warned not to use them for general purposes, particularly the writing of bank cheques - unless they do not mind the risk of amendments by other people!

Capture Method

Add 8 = wilster net (see WSG Bull. 26: 10-12)

Time at capture

Use zero (or blank) if unknown - but do not mix known and unknown on the same sheet.

Time after capture

Use zero (or blank) if unknown - but do not mix unknown and the use of the 'Interval' system (see basic instruction leaflet) on the same sheet.

Scheme (and 2nd scheme, if 2 rings)

The form was originally designed for British ringers but we are delighted that it has also been adopted by some ringers in Germany and the Netherlands (in the latter country, the whole form and instructions have also been produced in Dutch!) As the instructions stand, ringers using non-British rings would have to write the scheme on every line. To avoid this, the program has been modified so that it has a list of the ringing scheme to which each ringer or group belongs. Therefore, ringing scheme normally need be entered only for any retraps or controls, and for new birds only if the ringer or group are using rings not supplied by their usual ringing schemes.

Status

It has been pointed out that it is often useful to collect measurements from dead birds. The forms can be used for these and the 'status' column can be used to indicate: D = found dead; K = killed (under licence); T = trapping casualty.

We did recognise when drawing up the scheme that occasionally space for three rings will be needed for a bird, e.g. when a bird already carrying two worn rings is caught and these need to be replaced. We did not code for this because it is likely to happen only infrequently and because all records for the bird should be traceable through two numbers on any one occasion. The best policy would be to code such birds as status '3' and to list two of the ring numbers (including any new one) in the spaces provided. The third ring number and an explanatory note should be given in the remarks space or in one of the margins.

Long ring numbers

Some American ring numbers now use 9 digits. If anyone is fortunate enough to capture one of these, we will find a way of dealing with it!

Moult

Occasionally, waders show 3 generations of feathers in one wing, e.g. new feathers moulting in (scores 1 to 5), the old feathers they are replacing (score 0), and other complete feathers obviously older than these. If desired, these last can be coded as V ("very old").

Moult code

If a bird is in active moult and the scores for each primary are given, the moult code (1) may be omitted if desired.

Colour rings

For those ringers marking birds with temporary dyes or leg flags for the current WSG project and other WSG-registered studies, a 'T' entered in the first colour-ring spaces for each bird would be helpful in keeping track of the marking.

Head and bill

Some ringers are measuring total head length (head + bill) on some small species, notably Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, to an accuracy of 0.1 mm. To code these data treat the 3 spaces under Head + Bill on the form as referring to tens, units and the first place of decimals, rather than to hundreds, tens and units. Do not write the decimal point but do enter '1' in the single (unlabelled) space on the first line of each such sheet immediately before the spaces for Ringer or Group.

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COMMON SANDPIPERS IN THE PEAK DISTRICT

by P.K. Holland

(Abstract of Talk given at WSG Autumn meeting 1979 at Nottingham University)

About 100 pairs of Common Sandpipers *Actitis hypoleucos* breed in the Peak District, England, most of them being round the large reservoirs in the upper Derwent and Goyt Valleys. Only one significant concentration of stream-side birds exists and this is the one we have mostly studied.

The first birds arrive back 15-20 April at a favoured spot where the R.Alport joins the R.Ashop. Here there is good feeding on a muddy stretch of stream and in a few fields where new lambs are kept. The males then move out to re-occupy their old territories. The order in which the territories are filled is the same from year to year. Females are more likely to occupy a new territory and have done so even when their mate of the previous year was still occupying an earlier site where they had successfully raised young. Up to the middle of May there is much display and calling. Although several birds ringed as pulli have bred they have not done so in their first year. We have, however, two records of one-year-old birds giving anxiety alarm calls, as if with young, just outside our study area. Other birds ringed as pulli have been recorded breeding in neighbouring catchment areas (less than 10 km away).

A Common Sandpiper normally weighs around 50 to 55 gm but due to the large egg size (around 12 gm) a laying female is very heavy; our maximum being 90 gm. We have not found brood patches. Both sexes incubate and tend the young. The maximum-chord winglengths of males tend to be shorter (mean 111 mm) than those of females (116 mm), but this is not distinct enough to allow sexing.

From mid-May until the hatch around 5-10 June the stream is very quiet; most females are tight sitters and the males cease most territorial activity. This contrasts markedly with mid-June when there are continued alarm calls from one pair after another. Most pairs hatch 4 young and these are tended, usually in coarse vegetation where they live until they can run quickly enough to feed in open stoney habitat and run to hide-outs when threatened. At hatching they weigh around 8g and grow fairly steadily until at 19 days, when their weight approaches 40g, wing 90 mm and bill 20 mm, and they are able to fly. However, it takes them a few more days before they tend to fly when alarmed, rather than to run and hide.

During the first ten days of July most birds leave the streams. Just a few pairs raising broods from replacement clutches remain. They all leave at low weight, some adults caught in July are lighter than their own young. Around 75% of adults return each year.

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#### ONE NIGHT AT MÜNSTER - THROUGH BRITISH EYES

by J.M. McMeeking

Bulletin 28: 17-21 included a comprehensive history of the Münster Sewage Farms in West Germany, and an account of the work being done by the Ringing Group there. Hermann Hotker and his colleagues issued a very warm invitation to British ringers at the Nottingham WSG meeting in 1979. So a visit was engineered in mid-August 1980 by adding a day to my family's journey from a holiday in Austria.

OAG Munster formerly ran its Biological Station in a collection of rather dilapidated huts which might be regarded as typical of many field stations. Now things are vastly improved: OAG seized the opportunity of a short-term government programme to obtain funds for a magnificent new building, purpose-built for their work. This is now operational, though not yet quite complete, and is a base of which any institute could be proud. Most British wader ringers would regard the living accommodation as positively luxurious, and it is supported by a vast ringing laboratory, a chemical laboratory, a dark room, a large office with full modern equipment, and a computer room complete with computer! There is also a massive garage for the bulldozer, 'JCB', and other equipment used by OAG for habitat management: already there are murmurs that less lavish accommodation might be adequate for the machinery, making room for still more workers and facilities within the main buildings.

A quick tour of the reserve used the vantage points of a large hide, and of viewing gaps in the vegetation surrounding the individual pools: highlights were a Temminck's Stint Calidris temminckii and one of the breeding Marsh Harriers Circus aeruginosus. The potential of this great expanse of artificial wetland was obvious, as was the threat from excessive growth of Reed-mace Typha latifolia which OAG works so hard to control. They must be congratulated that the wetland still exists: I learned many of my birds on the fabulous old Nottingham Sewage Farm - perhaps that could have survived too, as an inland wader station, if we had shown equal determination and worked as hard!

And so to the night's ringing: the procedure was clearly described by OAG Munster in Bulletin 28: it is the differences in equipment and technique which will interest British ringers most. First, the wader-nets which are 40 metres long - more than three times our normal length: these are mounted on galvanised steel poles of over 1" (25mm) diameter, guyed with steel wires fixed to angle-iron pegs. The wire is double-looped round the pole back to a steel hook, and holds remarkably well. The tensioning of such long nets requires considerable effort. Recent deliveries of Japanese wader nets apparently retain their length without undue stretching. The tension achieved is adequate for this inland site, but would surely not suffice in tidal conditions, and use of only one guy to each pole seemed strange. The nets are always erected singly, and are left on their pairs of poles when taken down.

Currently the standard set comprise two lots of three single nets, in areas identified as present favourite roosting beds: but fog the previous night and threatening rain meant only four nets in all and guessing which pools to cover. Intermittent rain did develop, so we could only take the dusk catch; overnight flushing and the dawn movement had to be missed. Our catch of 28, spread over 10 species, was well up to standard (anything over 60 for a full night is a good score), and processing provided several points of interest - including a juvenile Little Ringed Plover Charadrius dubius from a nest on the gravel roof of the new building.

The long series of measurements, and detailed examination for moult are conducted by teams of one worker and one scribe, and were no doubt greatly slowed by the intrusion of one English ringer and three Glaswegian trainees into the teams. Ringing above the "knee" on some species; adding up to five colour rings (they are running out of combinations for some species); learning how to measure Flugelspitze and Nalopsi (WSG Bulletin 28: 21); and 'scribing' in German were quite entertaining. On equipment, light-proof cupboards for holding birds in bags or sacks before and after ringing seemed to work well - though ventilation would surely be a problem if numbers were much bigger. Square tubs on castors (some 20" [50cms] high) seemed effective for holding sacks while being emptied, and help avoid any danger of sacks 'jumping' round the room or being accidentally crushed. The superb light makes the real difference here - this improvement on 'field' conditions at night is striking, and makes the elaborate processing possible. On weights, the standard Pesola gives way to a splendid electronic balance 'zeroed' with an ordinary postal envelope (Bird Study size) which held each bird in turn quite satisfactorily - right up to the size of Lapwing Vanellus vanellus! Despite this easy-to-use method, the morning check showed that two weights must have been wrongly read or recorded - we are all human in the wee small hours: it also revealed weight losses over 8/10 hours averaging close to 10%, which seemed high to me.

And a final note on rings: in Britain we may curse the monel B2 and C2 as we try to butt them neatly, but now I understand why the steel rings used by some continental schemes appear to be so badly applied: if ours are difficult to fit, theirs are impossible - so let us be grateful to Bob Spencer and to Lambourne's for what they have given us to use.

Seventeen hours at Münster were well worthwhile: I was most grateful to Hermann and his colleagues who will welcome other visitors, but preferably for long enough to be more help.

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