DURHAM UNIVERSITY EXPEDITION TO SIDI MOUSSA, MOROCCO - SEPTEMBER 1980

The Atlantic coast of Morocco is known to have several sites important as staging posts for waders migrating between their northern Palaearctic breeding grounds and their wintering area in Mauritania (Pienkowski and Dick 1975, Dick et al 1976, Pienkowski et al. 1976). The University of East Anglia (UEA) expedition in 1971 established Sidi Moussa (35 km south of El Jadida) to be one of the three most important sites in Morocco, and certainly the best for mist-netting waders. The site is a complex of artificial salt pans, intertidal lagoons and saltmarsh. Further expeditions in 1972 and 1973 successfully caught large numbers of waders at this site, and Sidi Moussa therefore seemed ideally suited to the aims of the current expedition, which are outlined below.

The expedition consisted of seven members, mainly from Durham University (past & present), and was timed to coincide with the spring tides occuring in early September.

At the time of writing (early October), there has been no opportunity for analyses, and we simply present the main aims and achievements of the expedition. The four principal aims were:

1. To capture migrating waders at a staging post to measure body condition of live birds (lipid and protein reserves), using techniques recently developed at Durham (Davidson 1979).
2. To measure the duration of stay of migrating waders at one such staging post, by means of dye-marking and follow-up counts.
3. To continue previous studies on the migration routes, geographical origins and moult patterns of the waders using this area.
4. To census waders and other species present in the area.

Achievements

Mist nets were in continuous use between 5 and 19 September, and despite attacks of suspected dysentry (causing various members to take up running) and several windy nights (no connection!!), a satisfying number of birds were caught. In addition to the wader totals (Table 1), 137 passerines and 106 terns were ringed. The latter include 68 Black Terns Chlidonias niger, a Whiskered Tern Chlidonias hybrida and a control of a British ringed Sandwich Tern Sterna sandvicensis (origin as yet unknown).

		New Rings	Controls [1]	Retraps [2]
Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	6	-	-
Avocet	*Recurvirostra avocetta*	2	-	-
Ringed Plover	*Charadrius hiaticula*	71	-	1
Kentish Plover	*Charadrius alexandrinus*	67	1	6
Grey Plover	*Pluvialis squatarola*	5	-	-
Knot	*Calidris canutus*	4	-	1
Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*	106	1	3
Temmincks Stint	*Calidris temminckii*	1	-	-
Curlew Sandpiper	*Calidris ferruginea*	52	2	1
Dunlin	*Calidris alpina*	365	2	23
Ruff	*Philomachus pugnax*	8	-	-
Black-tailed Godwit	*Limosa limosa*	28	1	-
Bar-tailed Godwit	*Limosa lapponica*	4	-	-
Curlew	*Numenius arquata*	1	-	-
Spotted Redshank	*Tringa erythropus*	7	-	-
Redshank	*Tringa totanus*	65	1	4
Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*	2	-	-
Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleuca*	10	-	-
Turnstone	*Arenaria interpres*	43	-	1

Table 1. Numbers of waders ringed, controlled and retrapped at Sidi Moussa, September 1980.
1 Ringed by others 2 Ringed by this expedition

The waders captured on the first six nights were classified by weight as either good or poor condition individuals, and were marked accordingly with date-specific colour dyes. Subsequent counts and observations of these birds are hoped to yield interesting information on the duration of stay at the staging post.

The controls included 2 British-ringed Dunlins and a Dutch-ringed Black-tailed Godwit. Sightings of two darvic-ringed Flamingoes Phoenicopterus ruber were also made from a flock of 15 individuals present in the area. These were known to have been ringed in the Camargue breeding colony, as pulli in 1979.

Work is in progress to produce an expedition report, which we hope to complete by February. With memories of ringing Stilts and Avocets in shirtsleeves, our enthusiasm for attacking the Tees waders this winter must surely have suffered!

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