

WSG COLOUR-MARKING REGISTER: ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES

In the late 1970s the increasing use of colour-marks by many studies of waders, especially in Europe, led to increasing problems of confusion and overlap between the different schemes. To help resolve this WSG, in agreement with the British Trust for Ornithology and Euring, established the WSG Colour-marking Register in 1980.

Its functions have been twofold: firstly to advise those planning marking schemes, so as to avoid overlap between schemes; and secondly to provide a "clearing-house" for sightings of marked waders, so that the marker hears about sightings of marked birds, and the observer is given information on the origins of any birds reported.

Since its inception the WSG Colour-marking Register has been administered by volunteers who have made considerable time commitments to allocating marking schemes and tracing sightings. In recent years the volume of work has led to the division of the work into a register dealing with permanent marks (colour rings, permanent leg flags and wing tags), and one dealing with temporary marks such as plumage dyes and leg-flags.

The permanent mark register now lists over 170 current schemes, with about 20 new schemes being registered each year. There are also some 66 discontinued schemes on file. Over 150 sightings are reported each year, often generating considerable correspondence with observers and researchers in an attempt to trace the origin of a marked bird.

It had become increasingly clear that the task of running the permanent mark part of the

register was becoming too large for volunteer labour and in late 1988 WSG agreed to arrange for the register to be administered on a professional basis, with a part-time organiser being paid from registration fees.

In January 1989 WSG appointed Jane Marchant to administer the permanent mark register. Jane has considerable experience of bird ringing, and had worked since January 1981 in the Ringing Office of the British Trust for Ornithology, leaving to start a family in 1987.

Jane's first task has been to process the backlog of correspondence. This has now largely been dealt with. The recent purchase of a micro-computer means that an era of increased efficiency in processing Register data has now begun. Computerisation will enable the Colour-marking Register to be administered effectively, both by aiding the tracing of sightings and by providing a systematic record of individual marking schemes. It means also that the annual collection of fees for the registration and servicing of marking schemes will be facilitated.

In practice, for those using marking schemes and those sighting marked waders there will be little change in the procedures to be followed. The main difference in future will be increased efficiency in the response to requests and sightings.

All correspondence concerning permanent colour-marks should be sent to:

*Mrs Jane Marchant, WSG Colour-marking Register,
Wader Study Group, PO Box 247, Tring, Herts HP23
5SN, U.K.*

SEABIRDS AND SHOREBIRDS - ARE THEY CONNECTED?

In response to various articles in the *Seabird Group Newsletter* on the subject of recent breeding failures by seabirds in Shetland, I received a letter from Dr R.G.B. Brown of the Canadian Wildlife Service. He noted:

"Something very odd happened in our own Arctic/Subarctic (in 1988), though the evidence is indirect, and it happened to shorebirds. As you know, the outer Bay of Fundy is the staging area for phalaropes in eastern Canada on their fall migration - reds (=grey) on the Nova Scotian side, red-necked in New Brunswick. The reds normally come through from mid-July to early September. But in 1988, there was a big migration in early July, but then no birds at all, until a late blip in mid-September. This sounds to me like a massive breeding failure up north, with the birds that did manage to breed, doing so very late. I'm told that red-necked were also scarce on the other side of the Bay. The mudflats at the head of the Bay are the stopover for our eastern Arctic semipalmated sandpipers. The Canadian Wildlife Service people banding them found very few juveniles this year. How did shorebird migration go on your side of the Atlantic?"

How indeed? Sadly, I am rather divorced from wader studies and ringing these days, so I am unable to reply helpfully to Dick Brown on this one. If any WSG member can help him, his address

is: *Canadian Wildlife Service, Bedford Institute of Oceanography, PO Box 1006, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia B2Y 4A2, Canada.*

*Mark L. Tasker, Nature Conservancy Council,
Wynne Edwards House, 17 Rubislaw Terrace,
Aberdeen AB1 1XE, U.K.*

(*WSG Bulletin* would also be most interested to hear from any member who has noted any breeding failures or otherwise in 1988, either from anyone visiting arctic/subarctic breeding grounds, or from migration/wintering sites further south. Any interesting comment received will be published in a future Notes and News. EDS.)