

POSITION STATEMENT

Bird Ringing

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The fitting of birds with coded leg bands, also known as bird ringing, has scientific merit and, if done responsibly, can add substantial value to species research and conservation. BirdLife South Africa believes that bird ringing is a valuable scientific tool that can provide essential information for conservation, not obtainable using other techniques.

Bird ringing and related marking techniques, including colour-rings, data loggers, radio and satellite transmitters, allow individual wild birds to be identified and to be followed in space and time. This can provide information of importance to the conservation of species and their key habitats through expansion of our understanding of their broad- and fine-scale movements, survival, ecology and behaviour which would otherwise not be obtained without marked individuals.

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA POSITION STATEMENT

BirdLife South Africa supports the targeted ringing or tagging of birds when this is carried out for the purposes of ethically-approved scientifically-driven research that will benefit the understanding and conservation of a species. (Please refer to the BirdLife South Africa Position Statement on Tracking of birds for more information on tagging). BirdLife South Africa is not opposed to responsible social ringing, acknowledging the likely benefits to ornithology and bird conservation, nevertheless, increasing effort should be made to align bird ringing activities to clear training, education or research aims. The ringing of birds, whether colour, alphanumeric, or standard, is preferential to wing-tagging.

- BirdLife South Africa does not administer the ringing scheme or issuing of ringing permits. This is carried out by the South African Bird Ringing Unit (SAFRING) based at the University of Cape Town.
- All ringers in South Africa must be registered with the South African Bird Ringing Unit (SAFRING – www.safring.birdmap.africa) and must acquire the necessary provincial ringing permits, as well as the permission from the landowner on whose land the ringing takes place. Careful and accurate records of all birds ringed must be kept and timeously be submitted to SAFRING.
- BirdLife South Africa recommends that training in South Africa be administered by well experienced, ethical bird ringers who are committed to developing the highest standards of bird ringing skills.
- A high level of training of ringers is required to ensure that trapping and marking have no long-term effects and that risks to the birds are minimised.
- All ringing inevitably involves some degree of disturbance and a very small risk that birds will be injured or even killed.

- It is thus paramount that the well-being of any bird caught and handled for ringing should be the most important consideration.
- It is incumbent upon everyone carrying out ringing operations to ensure that the scientific value of the data being collected justifies the level of disturbance and risk to which individual birds are subjected.
- No capture of birds should be attempted under conditions that could result in birds becoming severely stressed and which could result in injury or death.
- If large flocks of birds are caught over a short period of time, ringers should endeavour to close their nets while these birds are being processed to prevent any unmanageable backlogs particularly if climatic conditions may put the stored birds at risk of heat-stroke, hypothermia or dehydration.
- Handling time of bird should be kept to the minimum and traps always checked regularly.
- BirdLife South Africa recommends that ringers should be aware of breeding seasons and prevent any undue disturbance to breeding birds that may cause their breeding attempts to fail.
- Equipment used in bird ringing should be kept clean to limit disease transfer between individual birds and transfer of disease to ringers. Bird bags should be cleaned between ringing sessions, and re-use should be minimised, if possible, during one session.
- Beware of ringing nestlings at too advanced an age as they may leave the nest prematurely.
- No qualified ringer may allow unqualified persons to use his/her equipment to capture and handle birds, or fit rings, except under close supervision.

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