

Helsinki Ringing Scheme (Finland)

Annual report for EURING GM August 2003 / Jari Valkama

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Organisation

Ringing Centre is situated at the Zoological museum which belongs to the Finnish Museum of Natural History. Every fifth year the Ringing Centre has to apply catching and ringing permits from the Ministry of Environment and from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The licences for 2003 -2007 were renewed at the end of 2002.

At the moment, the personnel consists of director (JV), secretary (Päivi Kare) and four assistants (Jukka Haapala, Petteri Lehtikoinen, Pekka Puhjo and Jarmo Ruoho). The assistants have specialised in slightly different topics and questions (e.g. input and maintenance of ringing & recovery data, correspondence with ringers and the public, administrative tasks, etc.).

Ringings and recoveries

During 2002, a total of 259447 birds from 223 species got a Finnish ring. This was a new record (together with 40228 barn swallows, 1258 black cormorants, 6132 kestrels, 3296 pygmy owls and 3762 dunnocks). Since 1913, altogether almost 8.4 million birds have been ringed in Finland. There are now more than 772000 recoveries of these birds, but many of them are less interesting retraps from the same site within a couple of days. When these are omitted there are 373000 "interesting" recoveries left. Some of the most interesting recoveries perhaps deserve to be mentioned: an arctic skua, which was found dead in Stockholm archipelago 31 years after ringing; an eagle owl which was found dead close to his place of birth 26,5 years after ringing; and, in addition, around 10 barn swallows which were controlled in South Africa during the last winter. Finally, we must also mention "Harri", a male osprey breeding in the northernmost Finland, who travelled more than 12000 kilometres to his wintering grounds in South Africa in autumn 2002 and returned back to Utsjoki in spring 2003 (as revealed by satellite tracking; see also www.fmnh.helsinki.fi/satelliteospreys).

Database

All ringing data since 1974 and all recoveries (and associated ringing data) are in electronic form. Older ringing data (1913-1973) are being stored, but the work is slow as it demands extreme care and patience. Nowadays perhaps 90% of ringing and recovery data from ringers come in electronic format.

A specific e-mailing list for ringers ("ringer-network") was established around two years ago, and now there are around 170 members in this service. The purpose of the list is to increase communication and exchange of information between ringers. This list cannot, however, be used for official informing purposes by the Ringing Centre, because still around one third of ringers don't have access to internet (especially older ringers) or do not have their own email address.

Finance

So far, we have been able to keep both rings and ringing permits free of costs for all ringers. Rings are paid from the budget of the Zoological Museum, and the annual costs have been approx. 17000 euros. However, this sum has been growing year after year due to use of more expensive steel rings and also due to increased ringing numbers.

Problems (only minor)

The number of foreign and domestic resightings from gulls equipped with plastic “read-rings” has drastically increased during the last few years (for example, there are 75888 resightings from 12532 read-ringed Herring gulls) and it has also significantly increased our work load. Due to printing capacity problems, we have changed the structure of our thank-you letters, which are now more condensed than before. We have also limited the use of plastic read-rings, not only because of problems mentioned above but also because their durability and safety for the birds is still slightly unclear.

We have also started to check carefully our ringer database in order to ask back rings from those ringers who have been very passive during the last few years or who have been otherwise “problematic”. The total number of Finnish ringers is now almost 700, of which 81 were found to be more or less passive in August 2003. They have now been asked to make final decisions regarding their ringing career: to increase activity or to withdraw completely.

One additional problem is that certain species (especially waders and waterfowl) receive too little attention among ringers, but on the other hand there seems to be too much enthusiasm to ring huge numbers of passerines by using mist nets without any scientific goal. Similarly, in the past, far too few birds have been measured when ringed but now we have put more effort in this and really tried to encourage and motivate ringers to measure each bird they get.

Projects

- Raptors (eagles, osprey, raptor grid, raptor questionnaires)
- CES
- Barn swallow
- The recovery atlas of birds ringed in Finland (under process...)
- Bird observatories
- Smaller projects: during autumn especially dunnocks, buntings and pipits; during winter waxwings and pine grosbeaks