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**Report of Sofia (BULGARIA) bird ringing scheme
to EURING General Meeting,
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Scheme

Sofia (Bulgaria) bird ringing scheme is officially coordinated by the Bulgarian Ornithological Centre (BOC), which is a separate department within the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

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Short history

Bird ringing started in Bulgaria back in 1928 when the Bulgarian Ornithological Centre was founded at the Royal Nature History Institutes. Since 1947 it is part of the Institute of Zoology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, which entered (together with another two institutes) the newly established Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research in 2010.

Red-rumped Swallow (*Hirundo daurica*) was chosen as logo of BOC in 1980.

Until the early 1990s bird ringing was performed in Bulgaria on a regular basis at two ringing stations and about ten bird observatories. The subsequent economic crash led to their abandonment and to 4-5-fold reducing of ringing activities (see the graph in "Activity" chapter below), as well as to break down of the network of volunteer-collaborators. During the recent years the situation is comparatively stable in terms of yearly totals of ringed birds.

Ringers & stations

The average annual number of ringers who are ringing more or less regularly and actively is about 50, though more than 700 ringers and voluntary collaborators have been listed in the Bulgarian Ornithological Centre database since the mid-1970s.

Ringing permit is given to persons who have worked actively at least two seasons at a ringing station and have positive recommendations of at least two experienced ringers. The attitude of the candidates to living birds kept in hand is also taken into account. System of grading the ringing permits is not developed.

The ringers are licensed on the base of permits issued by the Ministry of Environment and Water (see below "Difficulties & problems").

Regular (migration-based) bird ringing activities are performed at the stations “Atanasovsko Lake” (along the Southern Black Sea Coast) and “Kalimok” Biological Experimental Station (along the Danube), which takes part in the Southeastern Bird Migration Network (SEEN).

Rings & other equipment

Bulgarian Ornithological Centre at Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research (BAS) provides metal rings for all activities involving ringing of wild birds in Bulgaria. BOC also handles all recoveries of metal rings and resightings of cr-birds within the country.

Currently 15 ring sizes are in use. Some of the rings have been made in Bulgaria (ring-producing machine was constructed and used in the 1980s, but no more after 1987), and by Mekaniska (Sweden), then by Aranea (Poland) and currently mostly by Porzana Ltd. (UK)¹. Ringers do not pay for the rings.

Colour ringing

CR-projects are increasing every year, reaching nowadays at least 16 projects: Night Heron, Little Egret, Black Stork, White Stork (ELSA rings), White-fronted Goose, Red-breasted Goose, Griffon Vulture, Egyptian Vulture, Eastern Imperial Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Lesser Kestrel, Yellow-legged Gull, Sandwich Tern, Red-backed Shrike, Woodchat Shrike, Raven. Regular contacts exist with the international coordinators in relation to the projects run by BOC, as well as with the local coordinators based in various NGOs responsible for running colour-marking projects.

Activity

About 668,000 birds of more than 280 species have been ringed since 1928.

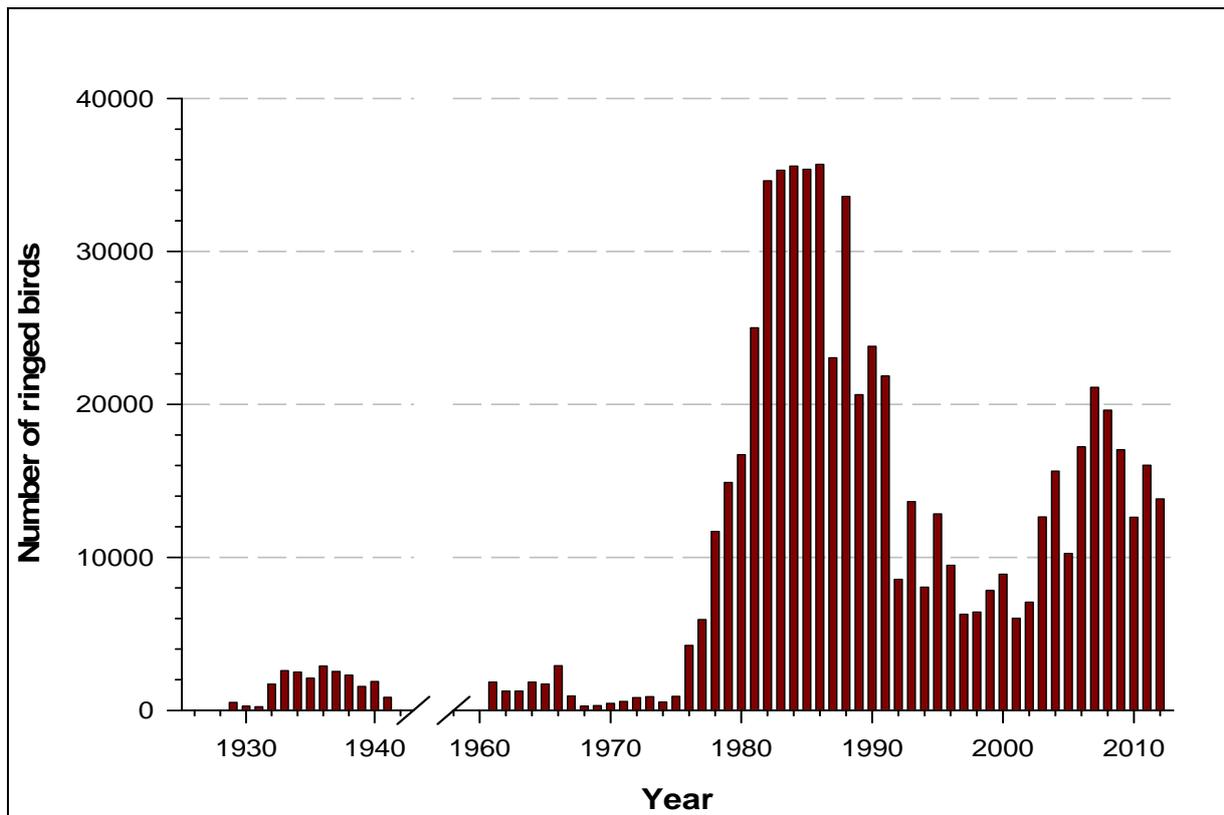
Between 13,000 and 20,000 birds are ringed annually during the last five years. “Atanasovsko Lake” ringing station and the group of ringers in Bourgas area hold $\geq 50\%$ of all ringed birds per year. In general, most numerous species ringed are Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*), Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*), Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*), Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*), Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) etc.

Most of the ringing data and foreign recoveries from the last ~10 years are computerized (*Excel* base). Unfortunately the bulk of the data is still on hard copies. An elaborate and long process of its digitization has already started. Obtaining suitable software for handling all ringing and recovery data is of high priority.

After a long-year break the Bulgarian Ornithological Centre renewed publication of the annual ringing reports in a *Bird Ringing Bulletin* in 2008, which is the successor of the *Bird Banding Bulletin* published for the last time in 1989 (issue No 10) and containing the reports for 1985-1986. The 2008 issue (No 11) holds the ringing reports for 1987-1988. Next issue (No 12) holding the ringing reports for 1989-1993 is nearly ready for publication. One of the priorities for BOC is to raise funds in order to publish the remaining ringing reports in the near future.

No CES-network has been developed to date.

¹ We express our sincere thanks to Aranea Ltd. and the Wetland Trust for the continuous support of the Bulgarian Ornithological Centre!



Difficulties & problems

Similarly to other schemes, except for some limited cases (related to ringing stations or transferring donations to the ringers in the form of ringing equipment) Bulgarian Ornithological Centre has not financial possibility to supply the ringers with mist-nets and ringing equipment (calipers, pliers, balances etc.). In addition, due to the low living standard in the country ringers often cannot afford purchasing ringing equipment. BOC assists in providing a list of recommended companies and finding the cheapest solution when necessary.

Only on a very irregular basis small amount of equipment is purchased within projects dealing with scientific research (run by academic bodies) or nature conservation (run by NGOs). Ringing station "Atanasovsko Lake" still needs considerable investment in order to start functioning properly.

Obtaining funding for publication of the annual reports in the *Bird Ringing Bulletin* on a regular basis, as well as obtaining suitable software for handling all ringing and recovery data is of high priority.

The process of applying for and issuing ringing licenses by the Ministry of Environment and Water is still elaborate for both sides – BOC and MoEW. In the light of forthcoming changes in the Bulgarian environmental legislation BOC submitted to the MoEW a list of recommendations in 2012 how to improve the whole procedure, supported by a letter from EURING.

September 2013
Sofia