

EURING GENERAL MEETING

Fertőújlak, Hungary 2007

Report of the Helsinki Ringing Centre (Finland)

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 licenses for 2008–2012 will be renewed at the end of this year.

At the moment, the personnel of the Ringing Centre consist of director, secretary and four assistants. The assistants have specialized in slightly different topics and questions (e.g. input and maintenance of ringing & recovery data, correspondence with ringers and the public, administrative tasks, etc.). In addition, we have one research assistant whose funding mainly comes from the Ministry of the Environment and who is responsible for running the project to monitor Finnish bird of prey populations.

Rings

We acquire our rings from I. Ö. Mekaniska AB, Sweden for all birds except the Black Cormorants whose rings we order from Porzana, UK. At the moment, there are a total of 26 ring sizes of differing diameter in use, but due to use of both aluminium and steel rings the number of different ring types amount to 36.

Ringings and recoveries

Since 1913, altogether more than 9,3 million birds have been ringed in Finland. The most frequently ringed species are the Great Tit (846000), the Pied Flycatcher (595000) and the Willow Warbler (572000). There are now more than 950000 recoveries of Finnish birds, but many of them are less interesting retraps from the same site within a couple of days. When these are omitted, approx. 445000 “interesting” recoveries remain.

Database

All ringing data since 1974 and all recoveries (and associated ringing data) are computerised. Older ringing data (1913-1973) are being stored, but the work is slow as it demands extreme care and patience. Nowadays perhaps 80% of ringing and recovery data from ringers come in electronic format.

In 2006, the entire database was moved from an old-fashioned and unsafe Oracle7 server to a new Oracle10g environment. At the same time, a new web-based interface, with which the personnel of the Ringing Centre can communicate with the database, was put to use.

At the moment, we are developing a system in which all original ringing and control files sent to us by the ringers are stored in a large electronic archive. The purpose of this service is (i) to keep original raw data (so that potential errors can be later traced, if needed) and (ii) to reduce the amount of space needed for excessive paper copies. Similarly, we are building up a system in which the ringers can retrieve recovery reports of the birds they have ringed from a web server. This would remarkably reduce our mailing and handling costs.

A specific e-mailing list for ringers (“ringer-network”) was established four years ago, and now there are around 220 members in this service. The purpose of the list is to increase communication and exchange of information between ringers. In spring 2007, a system was created through which the Ringing Centre can send an email to all ringers whose email address is in the database. This tool can be used for urgent official informing purposes by the Ringing Centre, because it covers almost 90% of all our ringers. More importantly, this service saves time and money.

Although at present we are reasonably happy with our database and associated software, there is still a lot of work to be done with them. Not surprisingly, the main problem for further development is lack of money. Fortunately, Jan Lindström and Heikki Lokki and his team have been able to help us, and we are very grateful for all of them for their help and support.

Finance

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. 18000 euros. However, this sum has been growing gradually year after year due to metal price increase, increasing use of more expensive steel rings and also due to increased ringing numbers.

Projects

- Monitoring of birds of prey (Eagles, Osprey, Peregrine, Gyrfalcon and other raptors and owls; raptor grid; raptor questionnaires)
- Colour ringing (e.g. Common Crane, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Siberian Jay)
- Barn Swallow
- CES. In 2006, 39 ringers took part in this project at 24 different sites in 21 municipalities. In autumn 2006, Kone Foundation awarded a 3-year grant for the analysis of the Finnish CES data. Results of first analyses were presented in EBCC meeting in Chiavenna in 2007.
- The Finnish Bird Ringing Atlas (still delayed due to lack of funding)
- Smaller projects: during autumn especially Dunnocks, buntings and pipits; during winter Waxwings and Pine Grosbeaks
- Update of the Ringer’s Manual

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