

EURING GENERAL MEETING

Anversa degli Abruzzi, Italy 2009

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. Until 2008, the Ringing Centre applied catching and ringing permits from the Ministry of Environment and from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry every fifth year. Since the beginning of 2008, the system became much more complicated as the catching permits are now issued by 13 Regional Environment Centres and by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (game species). This change of practice has increased the work load of our staff.

At the moment, the personnel of the Ringing Centre consist of director, planner and six assistants (of which three work only 3 or 4 days a week). In addition, we have one post doctoral researcher (working with CES data) and one grantee (working with the Ringing Atlas). 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.). For one of the assistants funding mainly comes from the Ministry of the Environment. She is responsible for running the monitoring of Finnish bird of prey populations.

Rings

We acquire our rings from I. Ö. Mekaniska AB, Sweden for all species 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. In addition, we have two different ring sizes for bats.

Ringings and recoveries

Since 1913, altogether more than 9,8 million birds have been ringed in Finland. The most frequently ringed species are the Great Tit (894,000), the Pied Flycatcher (618,000) and the Willow Warbler (584,000). There are now more than one million 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. 479,000 "interesting" recoveries remain.

Database

All ringing data since 1974 and all recoveries (and associated ringing data) are computerized. Older ringing data (1913–73) 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.

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.

Recently, we have developed a large electronic archive in which all original ringing and control files sent to us by the ringers are stored. The purpose of this service is (i) to keep original raw data (so that potential errors can be later traced) and (ii) to reduce the amount of space needed for excessive paper copies. Similarly, a software has been built in which the ringers can retrieve recovery reports of

the birds they have ringed from a web server. This will remarkably reduce our mailing and handling costs.

A specific e-mailing list for ringers ("ringer-network") was established six years ago, and now there are around 250 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.

At present we are reasonably happy with our database and associated software, but there is still some work to be done with them. We are grateful for Jan Lindström, Esko Piirainen, Petrus Repo, Taru Karttunen and Heikki Lokki for their help and expertise.

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. 20,000 euros.

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 (Baltic) Gull, Rook, Jackdaw)
- Barn Swallow (we still continue this as a domestic project)
- CES
- The Finnish Bird Ringing Atlas. We hope that the first part is ready by the end of this year and the second (and last) by the next summer.
- Update of the Ringer's Manual (available for the ringers in the internet as a pdf)

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