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MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT



White Stork A 4098 (born in Mannheim 2004) in Mosselbay / South Africa
Foto 31.1.2005 by Jan Hofmayr (via SAFRING)

Vogelwarte Radolfzell Status Report 2005 of the Bird Ringing Centre



by Wolfgang Fiedler

Vogelwarte Radolfzell is a subdivision of the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology. Two new directors, Manfred Gahr and Bart Kempenaers – both working at the main institute in Seewiesen –, now replace the former directors Eberhard Gwinner (who sadly passed away in september 2004) and Peter Berthold (who is Emeritus since January 2005). Information about the MPI for Ornithology is available at <http://www.orn.mpg.de>. The local head of Vogelwarte Radolfzell since January 2005 is Wolfgang Fiedler.

The Bird Ringing Centre at Vogelwarte Radolfzell issues bird rings with inscription „Radolfzell Germania“ for use in Southern Germany, Berlin and Austria. Strong efforts have been made together with colleagues from Austria (especially from Konrad Lorenz Institute for Comparative Ethology in Vienna) to organize bird ringing independently by a future Austrian Ringing Scheme. The future chairman for bird ringing in Austria is in close contact with our ringing scheme and gets intensive training in how to organise a ringing centre efficiently. There is good hope that this mainly administrative workload, which has been taken over for Austria for historical reasons decades ago, can be ended soon.

Within Germany all three existing bird ringing schemes (besides Radolfzell: Helgoland - northern Germany and Hiddensee - former GDR area) work closely together on a high level of efficiency. In 2004 different scenarios have been reviewed among the responsible heads of the schemes. It turned out clearly that a fusion of the German bird ringing schemes would not decrease costs on the administrative side but would decrease quality of the close and fruitful relationships between the bird ringing centres and their assigned volunteer ringers. For the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology – with its subdivision Vogelwarte Radolfzell - it is a clear advantage to have these close relationships to the volunteer ringers instead of using more or less anonymously collected databases from any remote ringing centre. In the current situation we can make direct use of the immense competence of the volunteer ornithologists, stimulate directly any focus projects and get instant notification of actual developments in the field such as good and bad breeding seasons, delays or advances in onset of breeding or migration, changes in breeding success, trends in population developments, bird communities etc. for much more species than we could monitor with Vogelwarte staff.

After reducing the bird ringing activities to focus projects and largely reducing mass ringing without clear scientific aim in the 1980ies and 1990ies the annual totals are now at approximately 22,000 ringed nestlings and 35,000 ringed fledglings. The complete bird ringing database comprises 4,765,343 bird ringings and 71,030 recoveries between 1947 and 2004. Through different focusses of interest and limited data storage capacity in earlier decades many retraps of ringed birds at the same site have not been entered in the central database at the ringing centre. Since especially these retraps at the same site bear inevitable information about local survival, dispersal and other crucial aspects of birds' life histories since 2000 we strongly encourage ringers to send these data also to the central database. Since 2005 ringers with new or renewed licenses have to declare by contract that they will do so.

In 2000 we introduced the electronic database system RINGZENT which has been developed together with the Helgoland bird ringing scheme (Institute for Avian Research Wilhelmshaven). With the component RING ringers in 2004 delivered 73% of all fledgling ringing data (2002 - 38%, 2003 - 74%) and 51 % of all nestling ringing data (2002 - 12%, 2003 - 36%) by electronic way to the central database. Electronically available ring recoveries increased from less than 0.2% of the annual ringing totals before the year 2000 to more than 1% until 2004 which means that electronic recovery data is available for one out of 100 ringed birds on average

which is a fairly good rate regarding that recovery probabilities of birds range between <0.01 and (rarely) 20%.

To increase reporting probabilities of recoveries the setup of a European wide reporting platform for ring recoveries in the internet has been brought forward in cooperation with the British Trust for Ornithology and the ringing centres in Italy and The Netherlands under the roof of EURING. In 2005 in a test series of larger rings for owls, falcons and storks in addition to the usual inscription the internet address www.ring.ac has been imprinted which points to a multilingual website (hosted and administered generously by the BTO) where recovery specifications can be entered by the finder and are processed to the national ringing schemes. For the White Stork which is clearly a focus species for Vogelwarte Radolfzell a laser inscribed bird ring made of Polyoxymethylene (ELSA ring, developed by Vogelwarte Radolfzell together with Fraunhofer Institute for Chemical Technology in Pfinztal) has been successfully established. These rings are easy to read from a distance in the field and enable us to gather multiple encounters with the same individual through it's entire life.

Projects (selection):

- EURING Swallow Project (9 plots with > 1500 ringed nestlings per year)
- Integrated Monitoring of Songbirds (Constant effort sites; in cooperation with the other German ringing schemes): 5 plots
- Bird Ringing Fieldstation "Mettnau" (supported by up to 60 volunteers each season)
- Studies of breeding and population biology in various species (Barn Owl, Little Owl, Peregrine, Mediterranean Gull, Dipper, Wheatear, Field Sparrow, House Sparrow, Jackdaw, Whinchat, Stonechat, Reed Warbler, Great Reed Warbler, Hoopoe, Swift, Barn Swallow, House Martin and other). Also a study of population biology and dispersal of a semi-feral and urban population of Greylag Geese as well as a study of neozoic Ring-necked Parrakeets have been started recently.
- Nestbox project (17 plots with ca. 2000 nestboxes).
- Nest record scheme: breeding biological data of 65.000 broods of 152 species are stored at Vogelwarte Radolfzell. The most numerous ones are Kestrel (700 records), Barn Owl (1023), Little Owl (1040), Barn Swallow (1861), Great Tit (7087), Blue Tit (3568), Wren (2904), Black Redstart (1045), Robin (1509), Pied Flycatcher (4618), Collared Flycatcher (3745), Redbacked Shrike (3711), Field Sparrow (3010).
- Focus Project "White Stork" (in cooperation with the other German ringing schemes): Integrated population monitoring; measurement if immigrants, emigrants, recruitment, survival and age structure; migration behaviour and changes in migration.
- special projects with various partners: fitness differences of Blackcaps wintering in Spain and in the UK; Wintering areas of Wheatears as revealed by stable isotope analysis; population genetics of a rapidly increasing Wheatear population in intensive farmland; studies of global change effects on birds.