

## Report on the first AFRING waterbird ringing course, Watamu, Kenya

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The African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) is one of the major agreements under the Bonn Convention (Convention on Migratory Species) that aims to conserve migratory waterbirds in the African-Eurasian flyway region. Part of AEWA's policy is to identify, fund and implement priority projects in order to achieve its objectives. With a lack of information on migration and ecology of waterbirds in Africa, AEWA identified the need to improve coordination between ringing schemes within Africa and provided funding to establish AFRING (African Waterbird Ringing Scheme). Spearheaded by the Avian Demography Unit, the initial focus of the five-year project will be to kick-start waterbird ringing in Africa with the goal to sustain and coordinate waterbird ringing programmes in the long-term. A large component of this includes training waterbird ringers throughout Africa and in September this year the first AFRING waterbird training course was held in East Africa. We report on the results and outcome of this course here.

Eight delegates from four African countries participated in this first training course which was held from 19-26 September 2004 at the A Rocha Bird Observatory and Field Study Centre ("Mwamba") near Watamu, on the central Kenyan coast. The course focussed on East Africa, as the ringing scheme in the region is relatively well established providing a useful platform from which to launch waterbird ringing initiatives in Africa.

The participants included Titus Imboma, Wamiti Wanyoike and Bernard

Amakobe from Kenya, Thade Clamsen and Sigaya Mgassi from Tanzania, Hamlet Mugabe from Uganda, and Samuel Nyame and Alfred Ali from Ghana. The Kenyans form part of the Nairobi Ringing Group which undertakes regular ringing sessions in and around Nairobi and operate under the auspices of the National Museums of Kenya. The two representatives from Tanzania had never been exposed to bird ringing before, while the Ugandan delegate had been involved with some ringing in the past. The Ghanaians are members of the Ghana Ringing Scheme which has been running since 1991 and were invited to complement the East African component and share ideas and information from their wader ringing experiences in Ghana. Three additional participants, Simon Valle (from Italy), Stefan Adler (from Germany) and Dónall Cross (from Ireland), joined the course during the week, all of them being based at the A Rocha centre where they were volunteering or carrying out post-graduate research projects. Dieter Oschadleus, from the South African Bird Ringing Unit assisted us with the training.

The course involved both theoretical and practical sessions, with emphasis being placed on practical training. Lectures and discussions on the ethics and responsibilities of being a ringer, catching techniques, mapping, data recording and the use of data took up much of the theoretical component. The practical sessions were done mainly in the field and consisted mainly of mistnetting sessions at two wetland sites, Mida Creek and Lake Chem-Chem. Here the trainees were shown how to extract birds

from nets and how to ring, measure, age and record moult correctly. Passerine mistnetting was also done around the field study centre to provide delegates with extra opportunities in handling birds and practicing ringing, recording biometrics and moult.

The course focussed on wader ringing due mainly to Mida Creek and Lake Chem-Chem being local wader hotspots near Watamu. No heronry or duck ringing took place as no sites exist locally which support these species in large numbers.

Mida Creek (03°19'S 39°58'E) is a tidal, mangrove-lined inlet just south of Watamu, and regularly supports up to 6000 Palearctic waders. It is also an Important Bird Area designated primarily for the diversity and abundance of Palearctic waders that occur annually at the creek (Bennun & Njoroge 2001). As with most wader ringing at coastal wetlands, catching needs to take place at night on a rising tide, and as such we spent three nights catching waders at the creek, using single, double and four panel wader mistnets. Waders have been caught and ringed at the creek since 1998 by the A Rocha research team and over 2200 birds have been ringed to date, consisting mainly of Little Stint, Curlew Sandpipers, and Greater and Lesser Sandpipers. Their experience in terms of knowing which tide height would yield a good catch certainly paid dividends during the course.

Lake Chem-Chem (03°13'S 40°02'E), situated to the north-west of Watamu is an inland freshwater lake which can dry up for 1-2 months of the year during years of significantly below average rainfall. When full, however, the lake has known to support large numbers of duck species (White-faced Whistling Duck, Garganey, Southern Pochard, Knob-billed Duck) but during the course the water level was low providing large areas of exposed shoreline and mudflats. Both Palearctic and resident waders were seen at the lake during a reconnaissance trip to the site a few days before the actual ringing session took place. Although both sites af-

forded good wader catching opportunities they did give the trainees a taste of how catching techniques and planning a ringing session can vary depending on the type of wetland or habitat selected.

The ringing at Mwamba (03°23'S 39°59'E) took place in a small patch of coastal forest/woodland where the A Rocha research team has been carrying out regular mistnetting at designated net sites. A total of 14 mistnets are used during each ringing session. Each net is allocated a number and birds are noted out of which net they were extracted. This helps in seeing how resident birds utilise the site.

A total of 288 birds of 30 species was caught during the week, most (80%) of them being waders, the balance of the birds comprising woodland/forest species. A summary of the species caught at Mwamba, Lake Chem-Chem and Mida Creek is given in Tables 1 & 2.

Of particular interest was the Broad-billed Sandpiper. This individual represented the first bird to be caught at Mida Creek by A Rocha and only the second one ever, although they have been seen on rare occasions and up to 100+ birds are regularly counted some 30kms to the north at Sabaki River Mouth during waterbird counts conducted as part of the African Waterbird Census programme (see Dodman & Diagana 2003). An immature Crab-plover was also caught at the creek; up to 1,000 birds can spend the non-breeding season at the creek and it is not uncommon to catch these birds during this period. Greater Sandpiper and Mongolian (Lesser Sand) Plover are relatively common migrant waders at the creek and are frequently caught during wader ringing sessions (CJ unpubl. data). Other less frequently caught Palearctic migrants which were netted during the course included Bar-tailed Godwit and Whimbrel. At Lake Chem-Chem, Kittlitz's Plover was the only resident wader caught, while Wood Sandpiper was only caught at the lake highlighting its preference for freshwater wetlands.

The week ended with a traditional goat

**Table 1.** Numbers of waders ringed and retrapped (in parentheses) at Lake Chem-Chem and Mida Creek, Kenya. n = the number of ringing sessions conducted at each locality. Species names taken from Checklist of the Birds of East Africa (East Africa Natural History Society).

Species	LakeChem-Chem (n=1)	Mida Creek (n=3)	Total
Crab Plover <i>Dromas ardeola</i>		1	1
Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		4	4
Common Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	2	7	9
Greater Sand Plover <i>C. leschenaultii</i>		40 (1)	40 (1)
Lesser Sand Plover <i>C. mongolus</i>		25	25
Kittlitz's Plover <i>C. pecuarius</i>	2		2
Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i>		4	4
Whimbrel <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		2	2
Wood Sandpiper <i>Tringa glareola</i>	1		1
Common Greenshank <i>T. nebularia</i>		1	1
Terek Sandpiper <i>Xenus cinereus</i>		35	35
Little Stint <i>Calidris minuta</i>	20	37 (1)	57 (1)
Curlew Sandpiper <i>C. ferruginea</i>	5	42 (6)	47 (6)
Sanderling <i>C. alba</i>		2	2
Broad-billed Sandpiper <i>Limicola falcinellus</i>		1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>201 (8)</b>	<b>231 (8)</b>

barbeque - a local celebration meal in Kenya - and the handing out of attendance certificates to all the delegates. Overall, the course was a great success and we hope that this will be the start of many more AFRING waterbird ringing courses and so fill the gaps that lie within waterbird ringing programmes and activities within Africa. The next course is planned for Ghana in 2005 which will be hosted by the Ghana Ringing Scheme and the Centre for African Wetlands. This will have West African focus, but will include some representation from East Africa.

A photo summary of the course is available at <http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/safring/kenya2004.htm>

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) for identifying AFRING as a priority project and providing the primary

funding for the course. The Highlands Ringing Group, based in Inverness, Scotland, also made a small financial contribution towards the course and we are grateful for their support and hope to continue to involve them in any future courses. A Rocha Kenya provided the venue, accommodation facilities, meals and other logistics and we are extremely thankful to them for hosting the course at Mwamba.

### References

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- Dodman, T & Diagana, CH** 2003. African Waterbird Census 1999, 2000 & 2001. Wetlands International Global Series No. 16, Wageningen, The Netherlands

**Table 2.** Numbers of non-waterbirds ringed and retrapped (in parentheses) at Mwamba and Lake Chem-Chem, Kenya. n = the number of ringing sessions conducted at each locality. Species names taken from Checklist of the Birds of East Africa (East Africa Natural History Society).

Species	Mwamba (n=2)	LakeChem-Chem (n=1)
Mangrove Kingfisher <i>Halcyon senegaloides</i>	(2)	
Red-fronted Tinkerbird <i>Pogoniulus pusillus</i>	2 (1)	
Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird <i>Pogoniulus bilineatus</i>	1	
Lesser Masked Weaver <i>Ploceus intermedius</i>	20	
Scaly Babbler <i>Turdoides squamulatus</i>	3	
Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove <i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>	2	
Tambourine Dove <i>Turtur tympanistria</i>	1	
Red-capped Robin-Chat <i>Cossypha natalensis</i>	(2)	
Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul <i>Andropadus importunes</i>	1 (1)	
African Paradise-Flycatcher <i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>	1	1
Eastern Bearded Scrub-Robin <i>Erythropygia quadrivirgata</i>	(1)	
Olive Sunbird <i>Nectarinia olivacea</i>	3 (2)	
Dark-capped Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus tricolor</i>	2	
Black-bellied Glossy-Starling <i>Lamprotornis corruscus</i>	2	
Pallid Honeyguide <i>Indicator meliphilus</i>	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>39 (9)</b>	<b>1</b>



Delegates that participated in the first AFRING waterbird ringing course. From left to right: Titus S. Imboma, Simon Valle, Donall Cross, Alfred N. Ali, Sigawa Mgassi, Thade Clamsen, Colin Jackson, Bernard A. Amakobe, Samuel K. Nyame, Wamiti Wanyoike, Doug Harebottle and Hamlet Mugabe. *Photo: Dieter Oschadleus*



An immature Crab Plover caught at Mida Creek in September 2004. *Photo: Doug Harebottle*

## **Formats to be used for article submission**

### **Article headings:**

An example of a article title

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### **Headings**

### **Acknowledgements**

### **References:**

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**The above are examples of the information format that is to be used.**