

# Bird ringing at the Tristan da Cunha islands, 1982-1985

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*Bird ringing activities at the Tristan da Cunha islands are summarised for the period October 1982 – November 1985. A total of 3 341 birds of 16 species was ringed during the period, bringing the total number of birds ringed in the island group to 7 480 of 19 species since 1937. Details of recaptures and recoveries are given.*

*Voëlberingingsaktiwiteit op die Tristan da Cunha-eilande vir die tydperk Oktober 1982 tot November 1985 word opgesom. 'n Totaal van 3 341 voëls van 16 soorte was gedurende die tydperk gering, wat die totaal wat sedert 1937 op die eiland-groep gering is op 7 480 voëls van 19 soorte te staan bring. Besonderhede van hervangste en terugkrygings is gegee.*

## Introduction

This report summarises bird ringing activities at the Tristan da Cunha islands (Tristan, Nightingale and Inaccessible) in the South Atlantic Ocean near 37°S, 12°W, between October 1982 and November 1985 and supplements information given by Morant (1977). Birds ringed during 1977-1982 at Gough Island, often considered to be part of the Tristan da Cunha group but lying approximately 350 km distant at approximately 40°S, 10°W, have been reported previously (Cooper 1983).

## Results

A total of 3 341 birds of 16 species was ringed during 1982-1985 by four ringers (Tables 1 and 2). Of this total, 1 904 (56 %) were ringed with British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) rings and 1 437 (43 %) with South African Ringing Unit (SAFRING) rings.

The most commonly ringed species in 1982-85 were the yellow-nosed albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchos* and the great shearwater *Puffinus gravis*, representing 91 per cent of the total number ringed (Table 2).

Seabirds formed 94 per cent of the total ringed and only 185 "landbirds" (including a single shorebird) were ringed (Table 2). Most birds, (3 081 individuals of 16 species; 92 per cent) were ringed at Inaccessible Island (37°17'S,

12°40'W) by MWF (Fraser 1983, Fraser *et al.* 1983). Fifty adult incubating yellow-nosed albatrosses were ringed at The Ponds, Nightingale Island (37°24'S, 12°28'W) on 16 November 1984 by JC. A further 110 incubating yellow-nosed albatrosses were ringed at this locality by B.W. Stead on 17 November 1985. Totals of 97 yellow-nosed albatrosses, two sooty albatrosses *Phoebastria fusca* and one Tristan thrush *Nesocichla eremita* were ringed at Tristan da Cunha by MWF and R. Grundy during 1982-85. These birds were ringed mainly on the Base (37°03'S, 12°18'W) above Edinburgh Settlement.

The only species ringed that does not breed at the Tristan da Cunha islands (Richardson 1984) was a single white-rumped sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* ringed at Inaccessible Island.

Only two birds ringed at the Tristan da Cunha islands during 1982-85 have been recovered away from the island group. A great shearwater (FR 19454), ringed as an adult on 10 December 1982 at Inaccessible Island, died after hitting a ship's aerial at night in the North Atlantic Ocean at 45°30'N, 48°30'W on 27 July 1983. A second adult great shearwater (FR 65201), ringed at Inaccessible Island on 27 February 1983, was caught by a trawler in the North Atlantic at 48°32'N, 53°06'W on 31 July 1984 (R. Hudson, British Trust for Ornithology *in litt.*).

Eight adult yellow-nosed albatrosses out of 21 ringed on The Base, Tristan da Cunha in the 1982-83 summer season were recaptured alive during the 1984-85 summer season. Seven of these individuals were breeding when recaptured (R. Grundy *in litt.*). In addition, five yellow-nosed albatrosses ringed prior to 1982 were recaptured at The Ponds, Nightingale Island on 16 November 1984 (three incubating, two on empty nests). These individuals were ringed by J.H. Flint at Nightingale Island as adults during 13-18 September 1964 (Morant 1977, R. Hudson *in litt.*). No ringed yellow-nosed albatrosses were recaptured at this locality on 17 November 1985.

## Discussion

No birds are known to have been ringed at the Tristan da Cunha islands between 1974 and 1982. Therefore the total

Table 1  
Bird ringing, numbers of birds ringed and years of operation at the Tristan da Cunha islands, 1982-1985

Bird ringers	No. of species ringed	Total	Year of visit	Islands visited*	Origin of rings used
M.W. Fraser	16	3 124	1982-83	T, I	SAFRING & B.T.O.
J. Cooper	1	50	1984	N	SAFRING
R. Grundy	1	57	1984-85	T	SAFRING
B.W. Stead	1	110	1985	N	SAFRING
Totals	16	3 341	1982-85	T, I, N	

\* T: Tristan da Cunha; I: Inaccessible Island; N: Nightingale Island

**Table 2**  
Birds ringed at the Tristan da Cunha islands,  
December 1982 – March 1985

Species	Chick	Full grown	Numbers
Yellownosed albatross <i>Diomedea chlororhynchos</i>	606	1 344	1 950
Sooty albatross <i>Phoebastria fusca</i>	19	17	36
Softplumaged petrel <i>Pterodroma mollis</i>	0	18	18
Kerguelen petrel <i>P. brevirostris</i>	0	1	1
Broadbilled prion <i>Pachyptila vittata</i>	0	1	1
Whitechinned petrel <i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i>	0	5	5
Great shearwater <i>Puffinus gravis</i>	109	980	1 089
Whitebellied stormpetrel <i>Fregata grallaria</i>	0	15	15
Inaccessible flightless rail <i>Atlantisia rogersi</i>	0	15	15
Whiterumped sandpiper <i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>	0	1	1
Subantarctic skua <i>Catharacta antarctica</i>	18	20	38
Antarctic tern <i>Sterna vittata</i>	2	0	2
Common noddy <i>Anous stolidus</i>	1	0	1
Tristan thrush <i>Nesocichla eremita</i>	2	112	114
Tristan bunting <i>Nesospiza acunhae</i>	1	44	45
Wilkins' bunting <i>N. wilkinsi</i>	0	10	10
Totals	758	2 583	3 341

number of birds ringed since 1937 when ringing commenced (Morant 1977) is 7 480 individuals of 19 species (Table 3). Yellownosed albatrosses and great shearwaters form 85 per cent of this total.

Only two species of birds (yellownosed albatross and great shearwater) ringed at the Tristan da Cunha islands have been recovered or recaptured elsewhere. This is not surprising since they form the large majority of the birds ringed. Hagen (1952, 1982) and Morant (1977) list the recoveries away from the islands of these two species known to them. Two further records can be added, both of yellownosed albatrosses caught at sea off South West Africa/Namibia. Adults ringed on 16 and 19 September 1964 by J.H. Flint at Nightingale Island were caught by fishing boats on 13 May 1981 (ring no. 501 9774) at 27°00'S, 14°40'E and on 22 August 1977 (104 8339) at 19°25'S, 12°18'E respectively (R. Hudson *in litt.*). In addition, a yellownosed albatross (501 9938) recaptured on its nest at Nightingale Island on 20 September 1972 had been ringed as an adult there on 15 September 1964 (R. Hudson *in litt.*). These recoveries and

**Table 3**  
Birds ringed at the Tristan da Cunha islands, 1937-1985

Species	Numbers
Rockhopper penguin*	589
Yellownosed albatross	3 620
Sooty albatross	122
Softplumaged petrel	18
Kerguelen petrel	1
Broadbilled prion	27
Whitechinned petrel	5
Grey petrel*	4
Great shearwater	2 702
Whitebellied stormpetrel	17
American purple gallinule*	2
Inaccessible flightless rail	15
Whiterumped sandpiper	1
Subantarctic skua	38
Antarctic tern	38
Common noddy	1
Tristan thrush	221
Tristan bunting	49
Wilkins' bunting	10
Total	7 480

\* Rockhopper penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome*, grey petrel *Procellaria cinerea*, American purple gallinule *Porphyryla martinica*.

recaptures do not increase the greatest longevity of a ringed yellownosed albatross at the Tristan da Cunha islands of 36 years 9 months (Hagen 1982). A search was made at The Ponds on Nightingale on 16 November 1984 for yellownosed albatrosses ringed there by Hagen (1952) in 1937-38 but none was found. Hagen (1982) reports that by the 1970's such rings were becoming very worn. By 1984, it is possible that all had been lost. Twelve yellownosed albatrosses ringed at Nightingale Island during September 1964 were recaptured alive at First Pond, Nightingale by M.E. Richardson on 11 September 1974. Unfortunately the rings were removed before the birds were released (R. Hudson *in litt.*). These local recaptures are not mentioned by Morant (1977) or Hagen (1982).

Morant (1977) did not report three local recoveries of great shearwaters at Nightingale Island. Three adults ringed on 16 September 1964 (SS19029), 19 September 1964 (SS19054) and 16 September 1965 (SS1920?) were "found dead" on 4 May 1974, 19 September 1973 and 4 May 1974 respectively (R. Hudson *in litt.*). It is possible that some of these individuals had been killed for human consumption (e.g. Richardson 1984). Morant (1977) is incorrect in stating that J.H. Flint ringed 500 great shearwaters at Nightingale Island in 1964. In fact, Flint ringed 128 in September 1964 and 372 during September 1965 (R. Hudson *in litt.*).

The recoveries away from the islands of yellownosed albatrosses and great shearwaters reported here for the first time do not add materially to what is already known of the species' migration patterns (Hagen 1952, Morant 1977, Hagen 1982).

It is worthwhile pointing out that Hagen (1982) did not make use of several of the yellownosed albatross recoveries given in Morant (1977) since he was not aware of the publication (Y. Hagen *in litt.*). Similarly, Morant (1977) did not include all records made prior to 1977 and given by Hagen (1982).

Ringling at the Tristan da Cunha islands since its commencement in 1937 has been conducted in a relatively non-systematic manner and with little or no continuity of effort. It is recommended that future ringling efforts concentrate on species that can be easily retrapped and at a few specific localities in the island group. A suitable candidate is the yellow-nosed albatross at The Ponds on Nightingale Island and on the Base, Tristan da Cunha. To make such a study worthwhile it is essential that regular, preferably annual, visits be made to recapture ringed birds.

#### Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the financial and logistical support of the South African Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research and the South African Departments of Transport and Environment Affairs. MWF acknowledges the support of the Denstone Expeditions Trust. We thank R. Grundy, Y. Hagen, R. Hudson and B.W. Stead for supplying information and the Island Council of Tristan da Cunha for sanctioning the research.

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