

Editorial

A CENTURY OF RINGING IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

A centenary is a worthy milestone in any endeavour but, for ringing in Britain and Ireland, this centenary celebrates a transition from early beginnings as a means of studying migration into a key tool for the development of conservation policy on the global stage. This has largely been achieved through the efforts of thousands of volunteer ringers, without whom a ringing scheme on the scale necessary to make a major contribution to bird conservation science would be unsustainable. Although 'volunteers' in the sense that few ringers get paid for what they do in support of avian science and conservation, their level of skill, training and commitment makes them 'professional' in every other sense. These dedicated individuals collect scientific data which has informed and enlightened practically every area of bird biology, ranging from detailed behavioural studies on a few marked individuals to studies on populations at continental scales.

This issue of *Ringing & Migration* contains commissioned reviews illustrating the importance of ringing as a research technique across a range of disciplines which, to be successful, depends on the knowledge and skill of an extensive community of passionate ornithologists. In the first two papers, an historical perspective of ringing in Britain and Ireland provides the background for considering future challenges for the scheme. The remaining papers fall into three groups dealing, respectively, with bird migration, bird populations and their conservation, and birds as individuals. Inevitably, there is overlap: knowledge of migratory pathways and stopover sites, quantifying survival rates and identifying measures of environmental change at an individual level are all key conservation issues that can only be addressed by highly trained ringers working within an adequately funded ringing scheme. These papers also highlight the importance of maintaining adequate sample sizes of marked birds, even for common species, and of obtaining accurate biometric data now that computerisation offers immense potential for detailed analytical work on population-level processes in relation to measures of individual condition and behaviour. Co-ordinated application of new technologies (radio tags and other devices for locating individuals remotely) and intrinsic markers (stable isotopes and DNA markers) will complement and extend the value of conventional ringing.

The increasing use of these new technologies will generate data of considerable significance for conservation and our understanding of avian biology. *Ringing & Migration* publishes papers on all aspects of ringing and migration



research and we encourage ornithologists, both volunteer and professional, to publish the results of their studies in this journal. We would especially like to encourage ornithologists using new techniques such as radio tags and GPS loggers, or intrinsic markers, to consider *Ringing & Migration* as a suitable vehicle for disseminating their results to the ornithological community. Studies demonstrating proof-of-principle or addressing the safety of new techniques are particularly relevant as these may provide the springboard for funding larger and more-extensive projects.

Finally, we would not be celebrating a centenary without the effort, dedication and financial contributions of thousands of ringers over the last 100 years. We would also like to thank the thousands of people who found and reported a ringed bird to us as the recoveries of ringed birds are an essential element in the success of the scheme. The British and Irish Ringing Scheme is currently funded by a partnership between the British Trust for Ornithology and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside in Northern Ireland), The National Parks and Wildlife Service (Republic of Ireland) and the ringers themselves. The scientific and conservation achievements of the Ringing Scheme are a tribute to the continuing success of this partnership.

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