

A
ringed
Yellow
Weaver



Budding ornithologist Daniel Oschadleus with his uncle Dieter Oschadleus, ringing birds at Thulasihleka Pan at Richards Bay

Ringling is for the birds

Angela Kelly

A YOUNG birder has earned his wings with the BirdLife Zululand flock.

Fifteen-year-old, Daniel Oschadleus, is a budding ornithologist who has taken up the hobby of bird ringing.

This is a technique where a small, individually numbered, metal or plastic tag is attached to the leg or wing of a bird. If the

bird is captured again or its body recovered, the ring provides information about when and where it was tagged, yielding potentially valuable data for researchers, conservationists and wildlife managers.

Daniel, a Grade 10 pupil at Grantleigh School has been fascinated with birds for the past 13 years.

He has already applied rings to 358 birds of 64 different species.

His early mentor was his uncle, Dieter Oschadleus, who is in charge of the South African Bird Ringing Unit (Safring) based at the University of Cape Town and later his step father Tony Roberts.

Safring provides bird ringing services in South Africa and other African countries.

'I first started birding in my gran's garden in Hattingspruit,' says Daniel.

Under the supervision of a qualified ringer, learners are taught to carefully remove the caught birds from the very fine capture nets. Various measurements are taken and wing and tail feathers examined for moult patterns. The bird is then ringed and released.

According to BirdLife Zululand twitcher Alison Gouws, feisty birds pose an occupational hazard, with the thick-billed weaver, for instance, capable of drawing blood.

The saying 'the early bird catches the worm' rings true with twitchers. Or rather, 'the early birder catches the bird'.

'The only task I don't enjoy is the placement of the nets and dismantling them. The nets need to be in place well before even the hint of sunrise to catch the early birds,' says Daniel.

Daniel appreciates being so close to the birds as it enables him to study them.

'The glowing ruby eye of the yellow weaver is awesome when seen up close,' he said. His other interests include fishing, sport, wildlife photography and collecting old and unique money.

Safring keeps a register of qualified bird ringers which includes only about 130 people countrywide.

Daniel has to ring about 500 birds to qualify.