Bird ringing on Inhaca Island, Mozambique

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Introduction

Inhaca Island lies 35 km east of Mozambique's capital city, Maputo. The island, with the Machangulo Peninsula, forms the eastern boundary of the Bay of Maputo. Inhaca Island is separated from the Machangulo Peninsula by a very narrow (500 m) straight. The major habitats of the island are inter-tidal sand- and mud-flats, mangrove swamps, freshwater swamps, subtropical evergreen forests ranging from regenerating to mature, and a semi-natural mosaic of trees and bush clumps interspersed with small villages, subsistence agricultural fields and regenerating, no longer used, agricultural fields (Kalk 1995, De Boer & Bento 1999).

Two people have ringed on the island previously. Ian Sinclair ringed 45 bush birds during five days in October–November 1976, in addition to 450 waders during October–December 1976 (SAFRING data). Peter Nilsson ringed at the Marine Biological Research Station of Eduardo Mondlane University (MBS) on 21–22 May 1988 (SAFRING data; De Boer & Bento 1999).

We stayed at the MBS during winter (1–7 June 2003) to do a bird survey of the island (in prep.) and ring (this study).

Methods

We conducted four ringing sessions in widely separated parts of the island. Two of these sessions were in forest and two were in open areas (Table 1).

Due to our poles being lost at the Maputo airport, we asked the MBS staff for poles and they kindly cut some rough poles from trees. These worked well under the circumstances, although the height was less than poles usually used. We used three or four nets of 12 m-length and four shelves, and sometimes we added a fifth, single-shelf, 12 m-net.

For each bird, we recorded standard measurements and for most birds we also took blood samples.

Results

At the MBS we placed the nets in the paths on the forested slope on the eastern side of the buildings. Seven birds were trapped (Table 2), the first being a Terrestrial Bulbul in the single shelf net. The second was an African Goshawk that HDO saw flying into a net while chasing a passerine (that escaped the nets!). It was an adult male captured at 10h30. A CD was briefly played of Spectacled Weaver and a pair of these birds appeared in the canopy above the nets, but were not caught. An immature was trapped some hours later.

At Ngomela we put our nets along a path in coastal dune forest. Four birds were caught and ringed (Table 2). The nets were under a tree with berries that attracted many Sombre Bulbuls and other species, but unfortunately this was well above the height of the nets, which was limited by the branches of the canopy.

An attempt was made to catch Masked, Yellow and Spotted-backed Weavers in some open woodland, where flocks had been observed on a previous walk. On the day of ringing the wind picked up and did not stop. The weaver flocks were present in the general area but did not come near the nets.

We also made an attempt to ring weavers at the Nhaquene swamp. This swamp consisted of a patch of dry, low *Phragmites* reeds, with very little standing water. The surrounding area is cultivated. Previously, various weaver species were noted here, but hardly any birds were present on the morning of ringing. We did capture one Tawny-

flanked Prinia.

Of the birds handled, two showed primary moult and the rest had new or old primaries. The Olive Sunbird, an adult female, had moult 5555555432 and the Tawnyflanked Prinia had 0055555531. Tail moult was present in two Natal Robins and the Tawnyflanked Prinia. There was some body moult in most of the birds ringed.

Discussion

The most exciting capture was the Yellowbellied Bulbul ringed at the MBS, as this is regarded as a 'rare vagrant on Inhaca' according to de Boer & Bento (1999). Trapping it early during our stay alerted us to the presence of this species and we subsequently recorded (saw and heard) it on most days on the island.

The forest patches at the MBS and Ngomela are not prime forest, but regenerating (Kalk 1995, Fig. 10.1). The catch rate was similar between these sites (Table 2) although there is probably greater human disturbance at the MBS forest.

Mature forest occurs at the north-eastern end of the island around the lighthouse and near Ponta Torres. Future ringing at these sites could produce good results, albeit at a low catch rate. These relatively remote forests may contain bird species not found in the widespread regenerating forests of the island (De Boer & Bento 1999).

Ringing in the open woodland and swamp can potentially be rewarding, but we had poor results. The reason was largely due to wind and the large area available to foraging birds in winter. In summer one could place nets at breeding colonies of weavers, which would ensure good catches. While weaver flocks had been seen in both areas, on the ringing days they foraged nearby but away from the nets.

Little ringing has been conducted on Inhaca and in Mozambique in general. Nilsson ringed 507 birds in Maputo during 1988–1990 and twelve birds on Inhaca (Table 2). In 1976, Ian Sinclair was primarily on the island ringing waders (Waltner & Sinclair 1981) and helping two UK ringers from Maputo University start up a ringing station on the island. They were initially using Ian's rings and nets. This ringing station does not seem to have materialized. We will list the waders ringed by Ian in a wader paper (in prep.), while his bush birds are listed here (Table 2).

Ringing on Inhaca is hard work but potentially rewarding. Transporting ringing gear to the island by ferry is no problem, but the charter ferry only runs on weekends (at least at the time of our visit). There are daily charter flights, but luggage is most certainly limited. Getting around the island is possible by boat and 4x4, but is not easy as there are cost and logistic factors to take into account (details available from the authors). We walked to the two open sites with all our gear.

Ringing on the island was disappointing in that HDO wanted to trap weavers and only caught one. At the same time the ringing was rewarding, as all species except the prinia were new ones: HDO has only done limited forest ringing in the past and CNL has done none! Wader ringing was not attempted, but this would also be rewarding in summer. However, time to get to know the wader roost sites and movements would be required.

Table 1. Ringing sites on Inhaca Island, Mozambique

Site	Habitat	Coordinates	Altitude a.s.l (m)
MBS	Forest, regenerating	26°02.345'S 32°54.196'E	11
Ngomela	Forest, regenerating	26°01.571'S 32°58.073'E	20
Field	Semi-natural mosaic of bush	26°01.956'S 32°54.380'E	47
Nhaquene	*Phragmites* swamp, disturbed	26°02.937'S 32°55.071'E	58

Table 2. Birds ringed on Inhaca Island, Mozambique, 1–7 June 2003, with a comparison of bush birds previously ringed on Inhaca.

		This study					Previous ringing efforts	
Date		2/6/03	4/6/03	5/6/03	6/6/03	Total	Nilsson May 1988	Sinclair Oct.–Nov. 1976
Locality		MBS	Ngomela	Field	Nhaquene		MBS	Inhaca
Nets (12m, standard + single shelf)		3+1	4+1	4+0	4+1			
160	African Goshawk *Accipiter tachiro*	1				1		
398	Pygmy Kingfisher *Ispidina picta*						2	
438	Goldenrumped Tinker Barbet *Pogoniulus bilineatus*							1
518	Squaretailed Drongo *Dicrurus ludwigii*						1	
545	Blackeyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*							16
546	Terrestrial Bulbul *Phyllastrephus terrestris*	1			1	1		
550	Yellowbellied Bulbul *Chlorocichla flaviventris*	1			1			
551	Sombre Bulbul *Andropadus importunus*							1
579	Natal Robin *Cossypha natalensis*	2	3			5	4	
625	Yellowbreasted Apalis *Apalis flavida*							1
627	Bleating Warbler *Camaroptera brachyura*		1			1		1
649	Tawnyflanked Prinia *Prinia subflava*				1	1		
673	Chinspot Batis *Batis molitor*							1
680	Bluemantled Flycatcher *Trochocercus cyanomelas*						2	2
721	Gorgeous Bush Shrike *Telophorus quadricolor*							1
756	Purplebanded Sunbird *Nectarinia bifasciata*							1
761	Neergaard's Sunbird *Nectarinia neergaardi*							1
766	Olive Sunbird *Nectarinia olivacea*	1				1		1
771	Collared Sunbird *Anthreptes collaris*							2
774	Scarletchested Sunbird *Nectarinia senegalensis*							2
791	Spectacled Weaver *Ploceus ocularis*	1				1	1	2
792	Lesser Masked Weaver *Ploceus intermedius*							8
797	Spottedbacked Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus*							3
842	Grey Waxbill *Estrilda perreini*							2
Totals		**7**	**4**	**0**	**1**	**12**	**12**	**45**
Hours		9	5	4	3			
Birds/hr		0.78	0.80	0.00	0.33			
Birds/hr/net		0.19	0.20	0.00	0.08			

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Ringing courses

15–23 November 2003, Lambert's Bay

A week-long ringing session will be held at Lamberts Bay, with a focus on ringing terns at night – so don't expect much sleep! Experts Tony Tree and Mark Boorman will co-ordinate the tern ringing. There will again be opportunity to do some seabird work on Bird Island, e.g. ringing Cape Gannets and Kelp Gulls, coordinated by Leshia Upfold of Marine and Coastal Management. There will also be some mistnetting sessions of bush birds as usual.

Lambert's Bay has plenty of accommodation ranging from a municipal camping site to guesthouses. Some guesthouses are large so that ringers can share accommodation. All booking can be made through a central booking office (027-4321040).

Cost for trainees for the week is R500 (excluding accommodation, food and travel to Lamberts Bay).

3–9 January 2004, Wakkerstroom ringing training

This course will be held at the BLSA Wetland Centre, Wakkerstroom, in conjunction with BirdLife South Africa. It will be similar to courses held there in the past.

Costs and more details about the course will appear on our web page in due course: http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/safring/notices.htm

Registration for both courses:
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