

AGEING THE KITTLITZ PLOVER

By: A.J.Tree,
6 Glenside,
Glenside Drive,
Strathaven,
SALISBURY, Rhodesia.

Although the Kittlitz Plover Charadrius pecuarius has been handled and ringed more than any other indigenous wader in southern Africa remarkably little is known about ageing and sexing technique.

Before going further I should like to mention for the sake of beginners to wader ringing who may have difficulty in separating young Kittlitz from young White-fronted Plover Charadrius marginatus that the easiest and quickest way to separate them is to have a look at their wings. In the Kittlitz, at all ages, the entire leading edge of the wing is dark blackish brown (though this is hidden a little in the juvenile by the feathers having pale edging) and this together with the blackish primaries and secondaries gives the bird an appearance, both in the hand and in flight, of having blackish wings with a pale brown patch in the centre, i.e. the median and inner greater wing coverts.

In our region most Kittlitz Plover breed from July to November, though this year there has been considerable breeding activity at Lake McIlwaine, near Salisbury, since April, thus juvenile birds have been found on the wing since late May, while normally they would only appear in September or October as was the case at L.McIlwaine in 1972.

The juvenile plumage is lost in a few months as the

bird gradually assumes post-juvenile and then immature plumages which it retains until moulting into adult plumage, passing through a short plumage phase prior to this that is very similar to the non-breeding plumage of the adult.

The moult into adult plumage is very variable. Because of the drought this year large areas of suitable breeding sites have been available right from the 1972 dry season at L.McIlwaine and juveniles have been moulting straight through post-juvenile, pre-adult to adult plumage and breeding, all within 7 to 9 months from hatching. This I consider to be unusual but may be a natural response to the stimulus of eutrophic water body with ample space, a high level of social activity at the various colonies and a larger population than would normally be the case as there was no necessity for them to migrate away from Rhodesia during the last rains. Normally the Kittlitz only comes into breeding plumage in it's second year; in 1972 several young from 1971 were present throughout the year and were still in immature dress in early 1973.

Thus there are 5 basic plumage stages at which the bird can be aged with certainty.

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| a Juvenile | Up to about 4 or five months |
| b Post-juvenile | From 4-5 to about 8-10 months |
| c Immature | May be bypassed to adult plumage under certain conditions. Otherwise about 8-10 to 18-21 months |
| d Adult (non-breeding) | Birds normally moult into non-breeding contour plumage when they are about half-way through their primary moult. The return to breeding dress usually occurs from March to June though occasional birds, possibly ♂♂, do not moult into non-breeding dress. |
| e Adult (breeding) | Needs no description. |

Two other plumage types can be recognised for ageing. If birds do happen to moult into adult plumage in their first year they can be recognised in both pre-breeding and breeding plumage.

Sexing. As yet no satisfactory method has been found to sex these birds even though the ♂ is usually the more brightly coloured of the two. However, any bird caught during the breeding season that weighs in excess of 41g can almost certainly be taken as ♀.

Age classes

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| Juvenile | All feathers of upperparts including wing coverts broadly edged with pale fawn. |
| Post-juvenile | The inner wing coverts and rump feathers edged with pale fawn. Facial markings still indeterminate with whitish eyebrow not joined with whitish nape band. |
| Immature | As post-juvenile but no pale edging to inner |

wing coverts or rump.

Adult

(1st year) Typical adult plumage but many may still have pale edging to inner lesser wing coverts, and a few will still retain edging to rump feathers. Also usually a paler version of older adults with less well defined black on forehead and through eye.

The plumage phase passed through briefly prior to assumption of adult plumage is the same as adult non-breeding but the pale edging to inner lesser wing coverts and rump feathers is still apparent.

Adult (non-

breeding) The white eye-stripe/nape band complete. Black of forehead absent. Normal black line through eye now dark sepia.

ERRATA

In the article on the Cape Weaver Ploceus capensis (SAFRING 2(1) : 23), the last sentence in the penultimate paragraph should read, "If the bird is recently fledged and has a wing-length of 86mm or more, it is very likely to be a MALE."