

MILLS, J. A. 1971. The reliability of sight recoveries of banded Red-billed Gulls. *The Australian Bird Bander* 9 (4): 83-84 [Department of Internal Affairs, Wildlife Publication No. 131].

Rings moved erratically to simulate field conditions were read through binoculars at varying distances up to 20 feet by three observers; 20 mistakes (2.8%) were made in recording the numbers of 720 rings while 4 (0.6%) were made in recording the numbers of 720 rings "read in the hand."

By any standards this is an appalling record and it is difficult to follow the author's conclusion that as "recording errors are only 2.2% greater at that distance than when reading the band from the hand, sight recoveries from banded Red-billed Gulls are considered to constitute a reliable source of recovery data."

Even more disturbing is the fact that "fewer mistakes were made in recording bands placed upside-down than for those the correct way up, possibly because more care was taken." One should have thought that any conscientious observer — let alone one on a test — would have taken maximum care to record data correctly at all times and not only when the rings were seen to be upside down.

The reviewer, well used to reading and copying figures in account books, has never had any reason to suspect that his wide experience of recording ring numbers was any less accurate. As, however, the three persons quoted are "experienced observers and are considered representative of the small number of ornithologists who regularly search for banded gulls" a fresh assessment must obviously be made.

Dr Mills is to be congratulated in publishing evidence which suggests the whole basis of recovery data (apart from rings returned to the Banding Office where two persons can — do they? — check the numbers) is suspect.

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