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Ruddy Turnstones in southern Africa

I would like to comment on the final paragraph of the short paper by Williams (2006). Here he states that “The two-phased arrivals and departures suggest that the Ruddy Turnstones spending the non-breeding period on the Namibian coast might be derived from two distinct breeding areas . . .” and “The recovery of a Canadian-ringed Ruddy Turnstone on the Namibian coast (Tree 1999) raises the possibility that one of these populations might breed in the tundra zone of N America”. This suggests that Tony Williams overlooked a recent publication (Underhill *et al.* 1999) in which the potential origins of the populations visiting southern Africa, together with their migration routes, were discussed in some detail. As this publication is not widely available outside of South Africa, I quote extracts from it as follows:

“. . . Summers *et al.* (1989) developed a model for the migration strategies of three breeding populations of Ruddy Turnstones. The NE Canada-Greenland population was thought to migrate to W Europe, but they acknowledged that the numbers of Ruddy Turnstone in W Europe in winter was less than the estimated size of this population. The Fenno Scandian-W Russian population was thought to migrate mainly to W Africa, and the Siberian population to S Africa. Subsequent observations challenge this model.

The evidence that the Siberian population migrates to southern Africa is based on six recoveries around the Black Sea and one from the Caspian Sea made between mid-Aug and mid-Oct on southward migration, clearly from this breeding area. A bird recovered in Burundi on 4 Oct was most likely of Siberian origin and migrating southwards. An adult ringed at Swakopmund, Namibia, on 3 Jan 1977 and recovered at St Croix Island, Eastern Cape, on 6 Oct 1980, suggests the possibility of a loop migration: birds, presumably of Siberian origin, migrate south through E Africa, move west along the southern African coast to their non-breeding areas, north along the west coast as far as the Gulf of Guinea and then across the Sahara Desert. Three recoveries in the central Mediterranean basin are consistent with this hypothesis: southern Italy on 1 May, Greece on 5 May and Malta on 9 May. A Polish-ringed Ruddy Turnstone controlled near Port Elizabeth had been ringed near Gdansk on the Baltic Sea on 6 Aug; the Fenno Scandian-W Russian population migrates through this area (Summers *et al.* 1989), and this bird is likely to have be-

longed to this population. In addition, two birds were seen on the Namibian coast in Feb and Mar 1999 with Polish and Finnish rings respectively, but the ring numbers could not be fully read in the field (AJT pers. obs).

Ruddy Turnstones from the NE Canada-Greenland population also occur in southern Africa. In Mar and Apr 1999, a colour-marked adult male was observed near Swakopmund, Namibia: one colour-ring was missing, so that its individual identity could not be determined, but it was almost certainly one of nine birds (six breeding adults, one nestling and two fledglings) ringed between 23 Jun and 13 Aug 1996 at Alert (82°30'N, 62°20'W), Ellesmere Island, NE Canada (R.I.G. Morrison in litt.). Two birds were recovered in Ghana on 29 Oct and in Gabon on 16 Sep, and because they were on the W Africa coastline on southwards migration, it now seems plausible that they belonged to either the Fenno Scandian-W Russian or NE Canada-Greenland population.

This new analysis suggests that the divisions between the non-breeding ranges of the three Turnstone populations along the eastern Atlantic coastline, considered by Summers *et al.* (1989) are less distinct than previously understood. The migration patterns of this species are complex, and could profitably be the subject of an international study; results would accumulate rapidly if birds were individually marked with reliable colour-rings.”

It is clear from the above that *three* populations of Ruddy Turnstone occur on the E Atlantic seaboard of southern Africa and that this was established in the light of information available in 1999 (to which little has since been added). It is of interest that the bird from Alert, Canada, returned to exactly the same short section of coastline in Namibia each austral summer until 2005/06.

Summers, R.W., Underhill, L.G., Clinning, C.F. & Nicoll, M. 1989.

Populations, migrations, biometrics and moult of the Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* on the east Atlantic coastline, with special reference to the Siberian population. *Ardea* 77: 145–168.

Underhill, L.G., Tree, A.J., Oschadleus, H.D. & Parker, V. 1999. *Review of Ring Recoveries of Waterbirds in Southern Africa*. Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town.

Williams, A.J. 2006. Arrival and departure periods of Ruddy Turnstone from an especially favoured Namibian coastal locality. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 109: 92–94.

