

Guiding

People often show a natural interest in the bird observatory's activities. This is especially so for ringing, which can be exciting to witness at close hand. Not everyone agrees with the sight of birds hanging in the nets. But this makes it all the more important to provide information and explain why the birds are caught and what purposes ringing serves.

Visitor numbers were low in the 1960s, when ringing activities at Falsterbo Lighthouse began, though ringers carried out occasional demonstrations and showed some birds when time allowed. Thereafter, interest in nature and environment has expanded dramatically – as has the number of people living in the region. Interest in our ringing activities has grown too, so much so that it became necessary for someone to take care of the visiting groups and provide information about our work.

These days we guide an average of 5,500 people each year. Most are school children, from pre-school level upwards. Showings take place at the lighthouse and almost one hour is allocated to each group. The guide explains the basics of bird migration, with a focus on conditions at Falsterbo, and explains some of the bird observatory's activities and the results of our work, especially the environmental monitoring.

The most popular part is without doubt the ringing of newly trapped birds, which gives a unique opportunity for close encounters. The region's schools are eager to take the chance to visit Falsterbo for "live" biology education and Vellinge municipality has sponsored our guiding activities since 1984.

A considerable improvement occurred when Vellinge municipality took over ownership of whole lighthouse property in 1993. The municipality also grants us use of the former lighthouse keeper's house, which means guiding can take place indoors in bad weather. There is also a small exhibition.

In addition to typical guiding sessions, half and full-day excursions can also be arranged by special agree-



Close contact! Photo: P-G Bentz.

ment. Advance booking is always required (see p. 148). From time to time the observatory also organises bird ringing courses.

General information

In spite of all the modern channels of information that now exist, the old notice board on the south side of the lighthouse garden still displays recent sightings and ringing totals during autumn. Good relations with the birdwatching fraternity and nature-lovers in general are important and we do our best to foster such contacts.



A ringed Paddyfield Warbler, is showed to birdwatchers by Sophie Ehnbom, 12 September 2003. Photo: P-G Bentz.

On days when large numbers of birds are trapped staff have a heavy workload and at such times emptying the nets must take priority over talking to other birdwatchers. It is very important that visitors show due consideration and refrain from approaching the nets, whether there are birds in them or not. We are happy to show trapped birds to visitors (if time allows), but we need peace and quiet when releasing them from the nets.

Most birdwatchers nowadays have access to rare bird alerts, and sightings of rarities spread rapidly along the grapevine. The same applies to rare birds trapped

during our ringing activities, which are always shown to those who are around at the time prior to release. Prompt release is essential since the regulations of the Swedish Ringing Centre prohibit ringers from holding a rare bird for the sole purpose of showing it to birdwatchers at a later stage.

Honey-buzzard Day

The bird observatory also participates in Honey-buzzard Day, an annual event held on the last Sunday in August. Up to 2,000 people gather at the south-west