

Observations of Colour-ringed Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) of Camargue origin in the „Grosser Knechtsand” moulting area

von
John G. Walmsley

This is the third visit by the author to the most important Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* moulting area in Europe, the "Grosser Knechtsand", situated 25 km from the mainland in the German Wadden Sea. Previous visits to this area were in 1981 (WALMSLEY 1981a & b) and in 1982. The aims were to establish whether Shelduck belonging to the "West Mediterranean" breeding population undertake a northerly moult migration each year, and moult alongside birds from the northern breeding populations in the German Wadden Sea.

The moult migration of Shelduck in North-west Europe is well documented. In July and August between 80 000 and 100 000 Shelduck gather together on the Grosser Knechtsand to moult, which is ideally suited to their requirements (GOETHE 1961b; OELKE 1969a & b). The latest estimates reveal a substantial increase in numbers in the Elbe-Weser estuary, to well over 130 000 birds in 1984 (OELKE, pers com.).

In the Camargue in southern France, some 400-500 young Shelduck were caught and ringed during the period 1978 and 1983 (320 with colour rings). Each bird was ringed with a metal ring on one leg, and an engraved colour ring with an individual combination of two letters on the other leg. These 'Darvic' rings are easily identified in the field, when birds are out of the water, and the letter codes can be read at distances up to 300 metres in good light. Considering the relatively small number of Shelduck colour-ringed in the Camargue, and the thousands of birds assembled on the moulting grounds in Germany, the chances of resighting any Camargue ringed birds looked very slim. The results however were positive, with Camargue birds seen on all three visits.

In 1981, 3 colour-ringed Shelduck were observed: the first an adult ♀ with a white 'Darvic' ring FI, was the first colour-ringed bird identified on the second day of my visit, on 23. August. On 27. August 2 immature birds in full wing moult were identified, but the letter codes not read. This observation is equally important because it is the first proof that second year birds from the "West Mediterranean" population undergo their first complete moult in the "Grosser Knechtsand" area.

In 1982, 2 colour-ringed Shelduck of Camargue origin were positively identified: an adult ♂ with a white 'Darvic' ring ID was controlled on 22. August, and an adult ♀ with a white 'Darvic' ring GL controlled on 23. August.

In 1987, in spite of the late visit to the moulting area, bad weather, with strong winds and exceptionally high tides resulted in only a few observations of colour-ringed birds. I was fortunate however, to identify yet another Camargue ringed bird: an adult ♂ with a yellow 'Darvic' ring AX on 11. September. The ringing dates, and all subsequent resightings of Shelduck identified on the "Grosser Knechtsand" moulting area are given in the table.

The 6 observations of colour-ringed Shelduck on the "Grosser Knechtsand", not only confirm the moulting area of birds belonging to the "West Mediterranean" population. They also show that the German Wadden Sea is of International importance for moulting Shelduck from western and southern Europe, and every effort should be made to protect this type of habitat, and the thousands of waterfowl which depend on the future existence of this particular area during their annual cycle.

Table 1: Colour-ringed Shelducks of Camargue origin identified on the "Grosser Knechtsand" moulting area, during the period 1981-1987.

Darvic rings	Metal ring	Age	Sex	Ringling date	Ringling & Control localities & Coordinates
FI	CA 23736	pull.	-	05.08.1978	Salines, Salin-de-Giraud (Bouches du Rhone), France (43°-25'N, 04°-44'E).
	Controlled:	"	-	07.08.1978	Salines, Salin-de-Giraud
	"	2nd.yr.	♀	02.05.1979	" "
	"	"	"	28.05.1979	" "
	"	"	"	29.05.1979	" "
	"	"	"	05.06.1979	" "
	"	3rd.yr.	"	23.04.1980	" "
	"	Ad.	♀	23.08.1981	"Grosser Knechtsand", German Wadden Sea, Niedersachsen (53°-50'N, 08°-25'E).

ID	CA 23793	pull.		02.07.1980	Salines, Salin d'Aigues-Mortes (Gard), (43°-34'N, 04°-11'E). France.
	Controlled:	3rd.yr.	♂	22.08.1982	"Grosser Knechtsand", German Wadden Sea, Niedersachsen (53°-50'N, 08°-25'E).

GL	CA 23759	pull.	-	14.08.1978	Salines, Salin-de-Giraud (Bouches du Rhone), France (43°-25'N, 04°-44'E).
	Controlled:	2nd.yr.	♀	05.06.1979	Salines, Salin-de-Giraud.
	"	Ad.	♀	23.08.1982	"Grosser Knechtsand", German Wadden Sea, Niedersachsen (53°-50'N, 08°-25'E).

AX	CA 24664	pull.	-	08.07.1982	Salines, Salin-de-Giraud (Bouches du Rhone), France (43°-25'N, 04°-44'E).
	Controlled:	Ad.	♂	09.06.1986	Salines, Salin d'Aigues-Mortes (Gard), (43°-34'N, 04°-11'E). France.
	"	Ad.	♂	06.05.1987	Salines, Salin d'Aigues-Mortes
	"	Ad.	♂	11.09.1987	"Grosser Knechtsand", German Wadden Sea, Niedersachsen (53°-50'N, 08°-25'E).

Summary

Three visits have been made by the author to the Shelduck moulting grounds of the "Grosser Knechtsand" in the German Wadden Sea, during the period 1981 and 1987. The aim was to look for colour-ringed Shelduck of Camargue origin, and thus establish beyond doubt that birds belonging to the "West Mediterranean" population, fly north to the "Grosser Knechtsand" and moult alongside birds from the northern European breeding populations. The results were positive, with colour-ringed Shelduck from southern France identified on each visit. During the three visits, a total of 6 Camargue birds were identified, and a further 56 colour-ringed Shelduck originating from breeding populations in the British Isles.

Zusammenfassung

Zwischen 1981-1987 besuchte der Verf. 3mal das bedeutende Brandgans-Mausergebiet Gr. Knechtsand, Elbe-Weser-Mündung, um farbberingte Brandgänse der südfranzösischen Camargue-Population wiederaufzufinden und einen Nachweis für Kontakte und insbesondere Mauser der westmediterranen *Tadorna*-Population inmitten mausernder nordeuropäischer Brutpopulationen zu führen. Bei den Kontrollbesuchen ließen sich eindeutig insgesamt 6 Mittelmeer-Brandgänse (nähere Daten in Tab. 1) und 56 farbmarkierte britische Brandgänse identifizieren.

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Anschrift des Verf.: John G. Walmsley
Station Biologique, La Tour du Valat,
Le Sambuc, 13200 Arles, France.

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Autor(en)/Author(s): Walmsley John G.

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