

NEWS SHEET.

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Tierbos, Hout Bay

Contributions have reached a low ebb during the last month or two. May I appeal to all readers to send me any items of local interest which may come their way.

The News Sheet was primarily intended as a vehicle for current bird-news and other announcements of interest to the birdwatcher at the Cape. However, after only six months, it is apparent that the Monthly bulletin performs another useful function. It places on permanent record members' varied and uncorrelated observations - notes which would otherwise remain buried in private notebooks for the rest of time. I hope that in years to come our files will afford much valuable information for future research workers. I hope that odd items will be extracted and collated and used to round out our sadly inadequate knowledge of South African birds. Thus, by sending in your records, you serve not only the interests of the News Sheet, but maybe Science as well!

For those who are wondering what to contribute the following suggestions may prove helpful: Records of rare birds, or birds not usually seen in your area are welcome, provided you can produce satisfactory evidence of correct identification. Send in your observations on food and feeding habits, on any form of display which you may be lucky enough to witness, on the seasonal appearances and disappearances of various birds occurring in your district. Watch for the coming of migrants, and again for their departure. Note particularly their habits in their "winter" quarters: are they gregarious, solitary, or territorial? On what do they feed, where and how do they roost? Any notes on aggression between birds of the same species, or birds of different species are of interest. All nesting records are valuable and eagerly sought after by research workers. It is extraordinarily difficult to record songs and calls intelligibly, but this is no reason why it should not be attempted, and the ebb and flow of song in various species, during a single day, or through the seasons is well worth attention. This list is by no means complete, but perhaps it will prompt more contributions.

NOTES AND RECORDS:

There is more news about sea-birds this month. Mr. Morgan writes to say that on 18 May he picked up an injured storm petrel on Fish Hoek beach. He identifies it as the British Storm Petrel (Roberts 30).

These birds were also observed by Mr. Freely, who went out on a trawler early in May. He writes: "We were able to ring 10 birds, that is 2 Black-browed Albatrosses, 1 Shy Albatross, 4 Cape Hens and 3 British Storm Petrels. The Shy Albatrosses aren't so shy, and were in quite respectable numbers, about 1 to every 8 Black-browed. The Cape Hens and Black-browed Albatrosses were present in about equal numbers, estimated at 500 to 700 each, and there were six other trawlers in the neighbourhood, all with a similar complement of birds. (Compare this with trawler notes published in No. 2 - January - when Cape Hens were estimated at 300 per ship, and Black-browed Albatrosses in slightly smaller numbers - Ed.) One Greater Shearwater was seen, and 2 Malagas (Cape Gannets) still in black "immature" plumage. Most of our time was spent between Lambert's Bay and Dassen Island".

The British Storm Petrel crops up a third time in this month's news as Dr. Ashton and Dr. Kettlewell, bound for England on the Edinburgh Castle at the end of March, ringed a single specimen, which came aboard off the West Coast. They also banded two Leach's Petrels, a very similar little bird, distinguished from the former species by its slightly larger size and deeply forked tail.

These two travellers, supplied other interesting bird news. On 8 April off the coasts of Portugal, no less than 15 European Swallows and one House Martin came aboard. These birds must have been on their "home-ward" migration. Two swallows died, but the remainder were released, wearing "pretoria Zoo" rings.

when the ship was 15 miles west of Finistere on 9 April. It is interesting to note that all the birds flew north-east.

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Mr. Stanford has kindly helped to elucidate the status of the Namaqua Dove in the Peninsula, a question raised in the last News Sheet, "I have seen these birds (he writes) on several occasions at Strandfontein, just where the road from the sea changes from tar to gravel, about 400 yards from the beach, usually a single pair at a time. At Zeekoe Vlei, where the direct road meets the vlei, Dr. Grosvenor (National Geographic Magazine), Dr. Broekhuysen and I saw a pair. These were all summer records. Stark and Sclater record Namaqua Doves from Tulbagh, Wellington and Worcester in December and January, and suggest that they migrate here during the summer months. Dr. Gill says he has often seen Namaqua Doves at Visserhoek during the summer, and they become more plentiful to the north. He has noticed odd pairs at Milnerton and Blaauwberg, and along the Ottery Road, about 2 miles beyond Youngsfield".

Namaqua Doves are essentially birds of the dry scrub country, and it is interesting to note that they penetrate to the fringes of the Peninsula during our own dry season. This is an example of those seasonal movements, mentioned in the introduction to this News Sheet.

Mr. Stanford has also supplied some unusual records: Black Storks at Vissershoek on 30.12.49 and at Zeekoe Vlei on 27.3.49; a pair of Black Duck at Zeekoe Vlei on 12.4.49; an African Jacana in a marshy patch off Roscommon Rd. on 25.6.49 and a European Roller at the top of Grey's Pass on 12.1.50. Has anyone else seen this bird so far south?

Finally Mr. Stanford has some remarks about Flamingoes. "There is no doubt", he says, "that they have been more plentiful round the Peninsula and its environs this year than for many years past. Before the war, we used to see them both at Zeekoe Vlei and Lakeside, but then they disappeared. They were, however, present at Langebaan and elsewhere. I have some very inadequate and very incomplete records, and would be grateful for any observations for the S.W. Cape during the past few years. The mystery of their breeding grounds in Africa, if they breed here at all, still remains unsolved. That they used to breed in many parts of Africa is undoubted (see Layard, Anderson, Roberts, Jackson, etc.), but whether they do so now is not known. Perhaps the birds we see here migrate from known breeding grounds in the Rann of Kutch, or the Camargue."

Mr. Stanford's own records include 3 flocks totalling 4000 at Langebaan during August, 1949; 300 near Lamberts Bay in January 1950, and intermittent counts at Alderman's Vlei during the summer of 1952. He states that the birds were present throughout the summer, never exceeding 22 in number. Flying round the Peninsula and Flats on 10 May, 1952, Mr. Stanford counted all the flamingoes to be seen in the area. There were 15 at Alderman's Vlei, 150 - 200 at Strandfontein Vlei, 150 - 200 at Riet Vlei, and none anywhere else. By this rather unusual sort of census he estimates that we now have about 400 birds in the Peninsula and its neighbourhood. It is interesting to note that a large proportion of this local population (an estimated 200 or more) moved to Ronde Vlei on 26 May.

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It may interest those members who visited Tierbos on 18 May to follow the history of the two nests they saw. In the Sugarbird's nest, the two eggs, which were laid at an interval of 48 hours, on 13 and 15 May, hatched together on 30 May, giving an incubation period of 15 days, plus or minus one day. The chicks which are well covered with long fine brown-grey down, are growing fast, but at three days of age show no signs of developing feathers. Their eyes are tight shut, of course, and their bills bear not the faintest resemblance to the graceful curving beaks of the adult. They are short and wide, and the gape is a rich butter-yellow. At a sharp tap on the edge of the nest, both chicks instantly stretch their necks upward and open their mouths.

The chick of the Orange-breasted Sunbird, which hatched on 15 May, left the nest 16 days later. It is, however, still in the dense bush in the immediate neighbourhood of the nest, and is still being fed by the parents.

NEW HANDBOOK OF SOUTH AFRICAN BIRDS:

A notice appears in the current (March) "Bee-eater", concerning a ~~proposed~~ new handbook of South African Birds. It states that a sub-Committee of the S.A.O.S. under the Chairmanship of Mrs. C. Niven, was set up to deal with this project. They have now made definite progress with a plan to issue separate monographs on each family as the text becomes available. The first to be ready will be Mr. Vincent's monograph on the Fringillidae, that is, the family comprising Siskins, Canaries, Seed-eaters and Buntings. (Roberts. 855.- 875). Although Mr. Vincent's monograph is all but complete, he feels that many members of the S.A.O.S. may have useful information about some or other of these birds, which would help to fill the gaps in our knowledge. From the "Bee-eater" notice it appears that Mr. Vincent is seeking particularly precise notes on distribution, but would also welcome any information on nesting, incubation, display, feeding, song and field characters. Finally, artists are invited to submit samples of their work, with a view to illustrating the monograph.

SOUTH AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE:

The S.A.O.S. has been asked to advise its members that the S.A. Association for the Advancement of Science is holding its Annual Meeting in Cape Town from 7 to 12 July 1952. These annual meetings always take the form of conferences, at which papers are read and excursions organised. The proceedings are enlivened by two or three very pleasant social functions. This year's meeting is rather special as it marks the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Association and coincides with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Royal Society of South Africa, which will participate.

Members of the S.A.O.S. are cordially invited to attend meetings at which papers are presented. However, those who are not members of the Association and who wish to participate in excursions and functions, should apply for "Associate Membership" for the duration of the annual meeting. The official address is - Kelvin House, Marshall Street Johannesburg.

Meetings and most functions will be held at the University of Cape Town.

FIELD CARDS AND BIRD HABITATS:

At a recent Meeting Dr. Winterbottom urged members, when filling in field cards to use a separate card for each separate type of habitat. However, as he points out, "there is one important preliminary to precision in the recording of habitats, and that is an agreed classification of the habitats themselves. Without it, there will be no uniformity amongst observers as to what does and what does not constitute a habitat". With this end in view, Dr. Winterbottom has prepared "a preliminary classification of habitats for the Cape Area", and suggests that members should use it when filling in Field cards. This classification is based on Nicholson's more elaborate scheme for the British Isles.

A. Sea and Salt Water.

1. Oceanic (beyond 3-mile limit).
2. Offshore (low-water mark to 3-mile limit).
3. Offshore islands.
4. Seashore, rocks.
5. Seashore, cliffs.
6. Seashore, sand.
7. Docks.
8. Tidal mudflats.
9. Lagoons.
10. Saltpans.

B. Fresh Water.

1. Permanent vleis
2. Temporary vleis, flooded fields, sewage farms.
3. Reservoirs.
4. Mud Flats.
5. Reed beds.
6. Swamps.
7. Tree-enclosed rivers.

9. Rivers with sandy beds.

C. Indigenous Bush.

1. Sand dunes.
2. Precipices and bare rocks.
3. Rushy tracts on mountains.
4. Indigenous scrub on mountains.
5. Indigenous scrub on flats.
6. Protea bush.
7. Indigenous forest.

D. Exotic woodlands.

1. Oak woods.
2. Pine plantations.
3. Gum plantations.
4. Wattles.
5. Hakea bush

E. Manmade Environments.

1. Ploughed fields.
2. Pastures and commons.
3. Wheatfields.
4. Vineyards.
5. Orchards.
6. Commercial vegetable gardens.
7. Town gardens and parks.
8. ~~Classed~~ towns without gardens.
9. Farm yards.
10. Quarries

The South African Association for the Advancement of Science is holding its Jubilee Meeting in Cape Town from 7 to 11 July. The Council of the S.A.O.S. would wish the Cape Bird Club and its members to support this to the best of their abilities. In particular there is an urgent need for cars and drivers to convey members of the Association on their excursions, listed below. Would any member who can offer a car with or without a driver, for any of these excursions please get in touch with Mrs. Davie University of Cape Town stating for which excursions the car will be available and how many passengers can be taken? Our reputation for hospitality is at stake.

List of Excursions (all at 2 p.m. unless otherwise stated)

Tuesday, 8 July: Visit to Africana II; Ronde Vlei; Geological Excursion
Wednesday, 9 July: Kirstenbosch; Castle; Groot Constantia.
Thursday, 10 July: Cape Explosives, Somerset West; Steenbras Reservoir.
Friday, 11 July: Jonkershoek Fisheries (1.45 p.m.); Forest Research Station (1.45 p.m.); Royal Observatory (8 p.m.).