

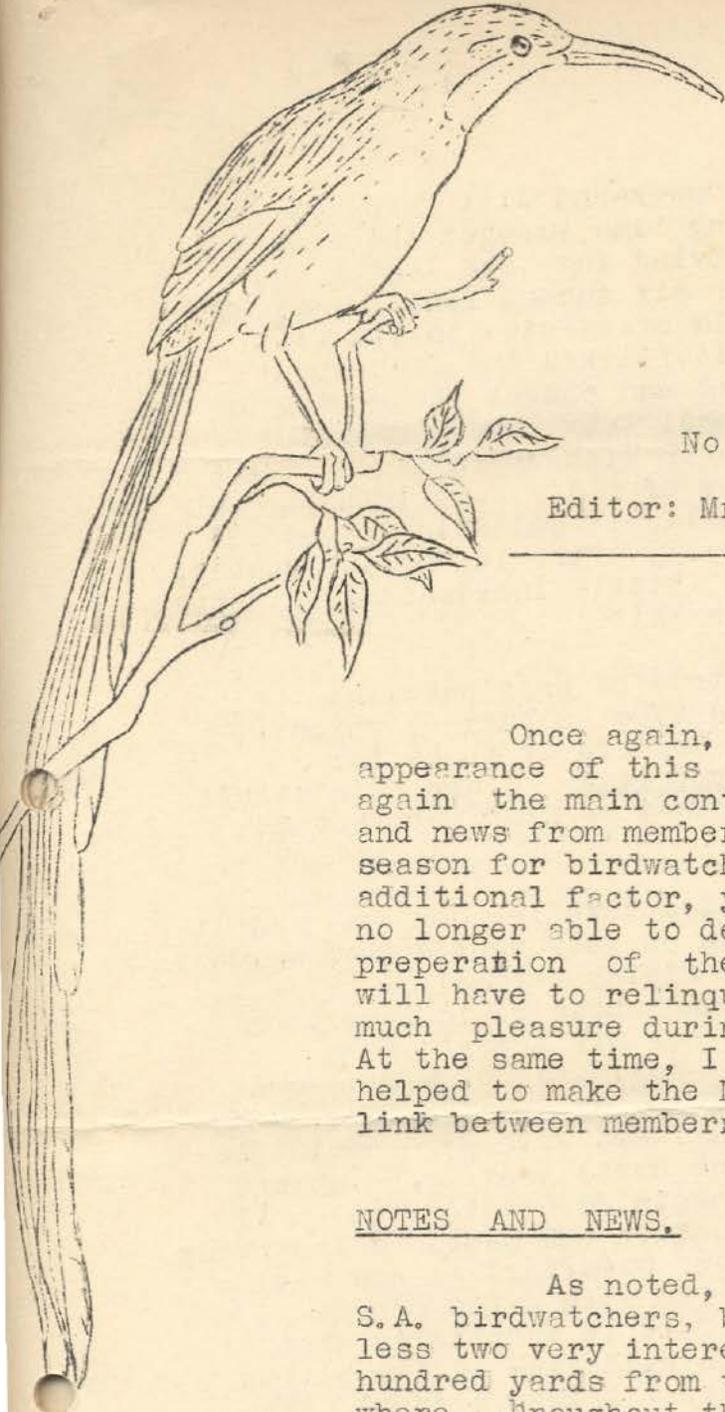
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OF AFRICAN ORNITHOLOGY,
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RONDEBOSCH.

CAPE BIRD CLUB
NEWS SHEET.

No 21

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Editor: Mrs M.K.Rowan. Tierbos Hout Bay.



Once again, two months have elapsed between the appearance of this News Sheet and the last. And once again the main contributory cause is the lack of notes and news from members. Early autumn is never the best season for birdwatchers. There is, however, an additional factor, your editor, for private reasons, is no longer able to devote sufficient time to the preparation of the News Sheet. Very reluctantly, I will have to relinquish this task, which has given me much pleasure during the past two and a half years. At the same time, I would like to thank those who have helped to make the News Sheet a lively and interesting link between members.

NOTES AND NEWS.

As noted, autumn is never the best season for S.A. birdwatchers, but Mr T. Stafford Smith has nevertheless two very interesting items to report:- A few hundred yards from the edge of Riet Vlei is small spring where throughout the year fresh water wells up out of the sand, here always, is a wonderful profusion of bird life, birds from the nearby vlei and birds from the bush - of all the birds that come to the spring the Bulbuls are perhaps the most numerous. While watching these bulbuls a few weeks ago with Mr Johannesson, we were both surprised to see that although a number of them had a conspicuous ring around the eye, there were others that showed no such markings. Were they strangers to the neighbourhood or only Juvenile Cape Bulbuls? About a mile from the spring in Table View lives Mr G. Higgs who told me that recently Cape Weavers in full breeding plumage have been in his garden, so on Sunday 17th April I set off in search of weavers. Five known breeding places were visited without success but as often happens, when you stop looking you find what you are seeking - Two males in full plumage sitting on the old broken bridge between Vissershoeck and Killarney-

Both Mr Macleod and Mr Martin have something interesting to tellus about Sugar birds; on the 25th March Mr Martin writes as follows:- The Cape Sugar birds are nesting again, even earlier then last year, so "Tierbos" should be even more interesting just now, from a bird-nesting point of view. On the 21st inst. Jack Macloed and I found a Cape Sugar bird nest with two eggs at Kirstenbosch and this week I found two nests under construction on the slopes of Helderberg. Lately there has been a lull in my "egg and nesting mortality" register, but once the Sugar birds start breeding, the Orange breasted Sunbirds follow shortly and the register will soon rapidly fill.

Jack Macleod and I spent the week-end 21st March at Geelbek and had a very interesting time amongst the waders ! Whilst watching a Caspian Tern diving into the lagoon, we saw it catch a fish about five or six inches long . Flying up into the air with its prey held cross-wise in its bill it was unable to swallow it, so it flicked the fish about three or four times in front of it and caught it smartly by the head and gulped it down. Immediately afterwards it dived into the sea again and came up with a 'springer' the same size as before. Flying forty or fifty feet into the air with the fish held by the middle, it suddenly dropped it and immediately dived down vertically after it, again catching it by the head and swallowed it. Little incidents like these certainly make bird-watching worth while."

News Sheet No. 20 mentions birds of prey puzzling observers ! I have also noticed a type of buzzard which I could not place at first, but now believe it to be the Eastern Steppe Buzzard - Buteo menetriesi. I hop this starts an argument in the news sheet and that we find out what the bird really is.

And on 19 April Mr. Macleod added this :-" How are your Sugar Birds doing this year ? With us they nested very early and on 11 April we saw young birds flying strongly. On Easter Saturday we also saw two young which would have been a week on the wing. Unfortunately our Sir Lowry's Pass proteas were destroyed in the last big fire so we have had to find new areas, on the slopes of the Heldeberg. The bush is about twelve feet high and well laced with Wag-en-bietjie and brambles so we had to change our usual tactics. Instead of searching through the bush for nests we had to wait until a ♀ appeared and then watch her back to the nest. A laborious way to get results. But we got them nevertheless and have twenty-two nests in our records so far with a few orange-breasted sunbirds for good measure. It is surprising what a big percentage of the nests are in wild vine in the bottom of the Kloof, the reason for this is, I think, because with our previous method of searching, through the proteas, we never suspected nesting in the wild vine s, and in any case even had we known that they nested there, to find a nest in that dense tangle is like looking for a needle in a haystack. So by changing our methods we have learned something new about these interesting birds."

One of the most interesting and controversial items in my mail this month was a letter from aviculturist, Mr John Perry. He issues what is virtually a challenge to the S.A.O.S. to make a serious investigation into the practice of aviculture in S.A.

"No statement, as far as I know, has ever been made by the Society regarding its attitude towards people who study bird life under captive conditions.

"In Great Britain the Avicultural Society is recognized by the British Ornithological Union and is held in high esteem for the scientific information which it gathers especially regarding the nesting habits and chick-rearing of various British birds.

"In S.A., as the law now stands, it is not permitted to capture wild birds for any purpose, much less for keeping them in captivity. Some time ago I made enquiries about a permit to catch birds, but was told that permits were only issued to scientific institutions. Incidentally, had a permit been available, I had no intention of using it. My enquiries were

purely academic. I wished to discover whether certain people who offered wild birds for sale would have captured them under permit. In the circumstances, it is perfectly obvious that, in spite of the law, many birds are being captured and sold illegally by dealers.

"I feel that the law as it stands is doing more harm than good as far as protection is concerned. As it stands the law is very one-sided and favours those whose main object in life is to destroy (the so called sportsmen) whereas those who wish to cultivate and perhaps even preserve from extinction are strictly forbidden to do so. In short all aviculturists are breaking the law, and live under a permanent cloud of suspicion. This intolerable state of affairs should be altered by some amendment to the ordinance whereby bona fide aviculturists are given permission to obtain wild birds from the field under special permits perhaps under control of some scientific institution such as the S.A.O.S.

There should be a spirit of co-operation between aviculturists and bird watchers. In the New Sheet you mentioned a pair of Redheaded Finches which were confined to a small cage and which were transported by air from S.W.A. to Cape Town. I can assure you that if any member of the Cape Town Avicultural Society had been discovered carrying out this practice he would have been subject to severe discipline and probably have been asked to resign".

This statement, sent to me for the New Sheet, was raised at a recent Council Meeting, where it received most sympathetic treatment. In this connection, it may be mentioned that the Council of the S.A.O.S. has recently expressed distress at the Society's lack of influence and authority in all its spheres of activity and has appointed an "Action Committee" to investigate the question. Amongst other matters, Mr. Perry's letter has been referred to this Committee.

CORRIGENDA.

On January 14th Dr Winterbottom wrote as follows:-

Although the statement appears under my name, I fear that I can take no credit for the discovery referred to in the last news sheet (No 19) that mossies eat birds. The type-setter found this out and my responsibility lies solely in not having seen that he had evidently considered that the buds of my original was too colourless to appeal to the public.

A second correction is also requested by Dr Winterbottom

At the Clubs outing to Sandvlei on the 14th March, those who were present will recall that the experts confidently identified one of the terns seen as the Arctic Tern, on the strength of a semi-transparent "window" in its wings. Subsequently one of the less confident of these experts checked up the point and found that it is the Common Tern, not the Arctic Tern, which has the window ! Even if it shakes the amateur's trust in the expert, it will probably gratify him to learn that Homer sometimes nods and even the self-confident expert is not infallible !

REPORT ON NESTING RECORD.

This report covers all records on nesting cards handed in up to April this year (1954).

In all there are 4,162 nests and 158 breeding colonies bringing the grand total to 4,320 records. This covers 185 species.

<u>No. of Records</u>	<u>Species.</u>	<u>Non-breeding Months.</u>
220	Kittlitz Sand plover	June or July.
208	African Coot	May
154	Stilt	December - May.
148	White fronted Sand plover	April, June.
139	Cape Weaver	Jan - May.
99	Cape Fiscal Shrike	February - June.
89	Cape Turtle Dove	April and June.
84	Cape Robin	January - June.
83	Red Bishop Bird	December - July.
78	Cape Wagtail	February - June.
77	Karoo Prinia	February - June.
74	Cape Sparrow	Feb, Mar, May, June.
73	Cape Shoveller	January & April.
68	Crowned Plover	March - June.
66	Pied Starling	January - July.
64	Yellow billed Kite	January - August.
64	Malachite Sunbird	January - June.
62	Bank Cormorant	April, July & August.
61	Grey Heron.	March - June.
61	Orange-breasted Sunbird	Jan., Mar., Oct. Nov.
56	Cape Sugar bird	Aug. - March.
54	Yellowbill	March, May, June, Dec.
52	Rosy Pelican	Feb., May, July, Aug., Nov., Dec.
50	Cape Dikkop	Feb., May - August.

* Breeding months are those in which eggs estimated laid or found present.

Close to 50 are the following species: Black necked Heron (46), Bokmakierie (47), Cape Bulbul (45), Cape Thrush (45) Cape Wailing Warbler (48), Karroo Robin (49), Le Vaillant's Grass Warbler (49).

This summary does not cover the details of each nest. However very few species have incubation or fledgling periods recorded. Such information will be reviewed at a later date.

Contributors are many and have done a very fine job. The Club is fortunate in having such public spirited members, many of whom are most active in sending in cards. Their names are listed below.

During this year a separate record will be kept giving species and contributors. In future this only will form the basis of annual reports. We hope that records will continue to flow in as fast as they did last year and we urge all members to send in any nests they see being used.

(Witness the fact that in the last few years we have only 33 records of the common Laughing Dove nesting)!

G. Alderman, H. Arton, Miss J. Ball, Bishops Orni. Soc., B. Brain, G.J. Broekhuysen, J. Broekhuysen, J. Brooks, A.R. Brown, A.R. de Graaf, Miss P.E. de Wet, B. du Toit, J. Feely, J.R. Grindley, A.H. Hamer, H. Hammann, R. Hazell, J. Heuton, G. Higgo, Miss M.C. Heginbotham, R.G. Jeffery, R. Johanneson, H.J. Joubert, A. Keen, Mrs. S.L. Knipe, J. Lasbrey, R. Liversidge, J.G.R. MacLeod, N. MacLeod, G. McLachlan, J. Martin, M. Meiklejohn, C. Murray, E. Middlemiss, C. Norgarb, J. Newbery, N. Payne, R.W. Rand, Miss J. Robinson, Miss C. St. C. Robinson, Miss E.B. Robinson, M.K. Rowan, P. Smith, W.P. Stanford, T. Stafford Smith, E. Simon, R. Schipper, R.K. Schmidt, J. Scully, A.R. Theron, A.H. Wilson, J.M. Winterbottom.
