

THE CAPE BIRD CLUB

News Letter No. 33.

February 1956

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Members will by now have received their copy of the Check List and will agree that it is an excellent production. Our thanks to all members who so kindly sent donations towards the cost of printing. The sum of £78 was collected. The book is now being sold at 3/- per copy although the actual cost price is 3/6.

Mr. Liversidge has asked me to make the following correction re observation on Indian or Little Swift seen at Laingsburg in Dec. 1955, as he now finds that the nesting of Indian Swifts at Laingsburg was reported by Dr. Gill long before the war, so that the observation is only new to himself.

Dr. Winterbottom has sent a note saying that he recorded them at Matjesfontein on 17th September 1955. He sent a note to the Recorder of Migration but, as it was outside the Club's area, not to the News Sheet. Now Mr. Martin has written to say that on 10th January 1956 he discovered a colony of Little or Indian Swifts nesting under the eaves of a three storied building in the Main Street, Somerset West. This discovery has been confirmed by Mr. MacLeod. There seem to be three or four pairs. He goes on to say: "After watching these pairs and also a number of colonies in Prince Albert in 1954, I feel convinced that a number of Swifts that nested in the Old Central Hotel, Somerset West in the early 1920's, were Little Swifts. The way they dart out from nesting sites in apparently family parties and their peculiar squeaking call point them out as being different from the White-rumped species. When the Old Central was demolished to make way for the present hotel this colony left our district."



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With reference to the Cliff Swallows seen by Mr. Liversidge who wonders how long this species will take to come further South, Mr. Royce Reed of the Witwatersrand Club has sent the following. He says: "On 14.12.53 I saw -

17 miles N. of Richmond a Cliff Swallow Colony

11 do.

9 do.

18 miles S. of Richmond a Cliff Swallow Colony

43 do.

48 do.

seems that, rather than advancing, Cliff Swallows are retreating from Cape Town". Have members any comments to make on this?

On November 29th Mrs. Bird saw a family of Crowned Plover (2 adults & 1 juvenile) while bird watching on the

Tramways Sport Ground at Diep River. On 28th December 1955 the foreman in charge of the grounds told her that the birds were nesting again, and showed her the nest, a slight hollow in the ground. This contained one egg, light brown, sharply pointed at one end and heavily marked with irregular black spots, the edge of the nest strewn with small black stones - an effective camouflage. The foreman was unable to say when they started to nest, the nearest he could get to was that, "They were into the second week".

When 4 of them approached the nest the sitting bird made off quietly and stood some distance away while they examined the nest. Then from another direction the other bird who had been feeding with the now nearly grown chick, came running up protesting volubly at their intrusion. They stood quite still several feet from the nest. The bird ran between them and with a series of subsiding squawks settled down on the eggs. This procedure was followed on their subsequent visits, one bird making off quietly, the second coming noisily to cover the egg. On their last visit (9th January) the second bird crouched down a couple of feet from the nest and not in it. Only when a poking foot disturbed it did it go on the nest. The nest was not visited again by Mrs. Bird until 16th January when she was told by the foreman that the chick had hatched on 13th January. The chick was running with its parents who had now chased their former chick away. In colouring it was rather like its egg - light brown down, with black irregular mottling, its little crown beginning to take a distinct shape. The nest was completely abandoned.

On 16th January 1956 Mrs. Penterman discovered near her house in the Glen, Camps Bay a family of Cape Paradise Flycatchers, which she had never seen before; and on 23rd January Miss E. Robinson saw one on her farm at Kraaifontein in the Paarl District.

Birds really have a sense of humour as the following story sent in by Dr. Winterbottom shows. He says: "My neighbour Mrs. Lacey of Retreat has a special wired-in enclosure for bird tables and baths. She saw three Cape Colies hanging on the wire in typical coly fashion, when along came a Cape Weaver, perched on the wire below them and proceeded to weave the Colies tails into the wire! She says she, her husband and daughter all saw it and nearly killed themselves with laughing".

Dr. Winterbottom heard a Black Cuckoo on 13th December calling in the wattles of one of his neighbours' gardens all through breakfast. He says, "No doubt about it at all. Both my wife and I heard it and we know the call well from Rhodesia". I heard it once before, about 5 years ago, but once only, so I was a little hesitant about it. Since then Miss Courtenay Latimer has recorded it from Stellenbosch.

Mr. Martin and Mr. MacLeod discovered the nest of a pair of Black Sawwing Swallows in the second week in January. They were using an old nest site of a Giant Kingfisher. The bird was sitting tight so they supposed there were eggs or perhaps very small young. A scout camp nearby prevented them from examining the nest more closely.

Dr. Broekhuysen while filming the young of a Cape Wagtail being fed by the parent birds on 12th December, watched the young leave the nest. The nest was in a hole in a wall of a building at Fish Hoek. There were three young. All three jumped out of the nest within a few minutes. He found one back on the roof of a neighbouring building and watched and filmed it. The interesting point was that it very distinctly wagged its rather short tail. The young did not come back to the nest in the evening but slept in the gutter of a nearby building. Dr. Broekhuysen goes on to say,

"It seems that there are very few Piet-iv-Vrou Cuckoos this year in the Newlands area. Where last year they were heard practically every day they are heard very infrequently this year!" Have other members noticed the same? He also has the impression that the European Swallows are more numerous this year in the Peninsula. Do other members agree?

Mr. MacLeod's interesting account of a week-end camp at Skrywershoek I am quoting in full:

"Four members of the Cape Bird Club recently spent an interesting week end at Langebaan. Camping conditions were a bit primitive and it was necessary to take with us a supply of drinking water. We arrived at sunset on Friday 27th January and soon had our tents pitched and the air mattresses inflated. Before dawn we were roused by the Chairman of the S.A.O.S. who served us with coffee and rusks in our beds. He is a most energetic person, but particularly so in the early morning !!

As the tide receded we saw flocks of waders flying out across the lagoon, a wonderful sight as they twisted and turned in the bright sunshine. Gradually as the mud banks appeared above the surface the birds dispersed to feed, and we spent much of our time watching from the shelter of our hide, which was erected on a slight rise in the lagoon opposite our camp. As the tide started to make the birds were gradually forced back up the lagoon and we had a perfect view of Curlew, Whimbrel, Greyplover, Ringed Plover, Greenshank, Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints, Turnstone, Terek Sandpiper and Sanderlings a short distance out on the higher islands not yet covered by the tide. Eventually these islands became smaller until they finally disappeared and flocks of birds could be seen flying off to their roosting areas higher up at the South end of the lagoon.

Later in the afternoon we walked along the edge of the water and in one flock counted 80-100 Terek Sandpipers, and then a flock of over 2,000 Sanderlings massed in a solid group, dazzling white birds with jet black bills.

Many bush birds were also seen in the vicinity of the camp, the Yellow Seedeater is perhaps the most numerous but we also saw quite a number of flocks of Penduline Tits, reputed to be insect feeders but these appeared to be feeding on seeds."

Mr. McClurg of Johannesburg, whilst on a holiday at the Cape saw a European Roller on the plateau above Smitswinkle Bay, during the first week in January. He saw it at close quarters and as he had often observed this bird in Pondoland, he has no doubt as to his identification. A few days later he saw what he took to be a pair of Rollers in flight at the same point, but as he was travelling by car and some distance off he could not be certain of his identification. Since receiving the above Miss Hamer tells me that she too saw a European Roller at the same place in the first week in January. This is a very interesting record as it is a new locality for the European Roller.

Mrs. Greenshields while camping at Schoongezicht, Stellenbosch from 4-14 January saw white Storks flying near the camp site every day, and on 9th counted 14 of these birds.

On 17th January Miss Hamer counted 8 at Wittedrift near Knysna. Another interesting bird seen by Miss Hamer at Kourboom River was a Peter Finfoot.

Garden Inquiry.

The number of returns for the Garden Birds Enquiry has now reached the hundred - 102 to be exact, and I propose to start analysing the results. Of the 102 returns, 43 were sent in by

non-members of the Society and the remaining 60 by members. This, in itself, reflects little credit on the Club but the position, as regards the general membership, is even less creditable than this; for the number of members who actually sent in returns were only 43 (counting one or two joint returns as 1 each). In effect, 40 members did what was asked of them and sent in 1 return; three members did a lot more than was asked of them and sent in more than 1 return and the remaining 100 or so members sat back as usual and not even personal appeals to some of them stirred their consciences. So I think it would be absurd to call this the Cape Bird Club Garden Birds Enquiry when so high a percentage of the returns has come from the general public. Disappointing isn't it?

Mr. Schmidt was told by one of his pupils that there was a Chaffinch nest 25-30 feet high in an oak tree in the Military Camp, Wynberg. On 29th November he visited the nest; there were 4 eggs. Female was sitting. One egg measured 19.7 x 14.0 mm. Eggs, greenish blue with reddish brown spots. The nest was camouflaged with lichens on the outside and resting on a fork. On December 6th there were 3-4 young. No eggs.

On 11th January Mr. Schmidt saw 3 male Namaqua Doves near Muizenberg along the new road to Strandfontein and on 6th February Dr. Winterbottom saw 3 outside Kleyweg Rest, Prince George Drive.

A solitary Yellow-bill Kite was seen feeding at Youngsfield aerodrome on 12th January by Mr. Schmidt and Dr. Winterbottom saw one flying over Youngsfield on 7th February.

Mr. Schmidt has been elected Assistant Editor. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking Mr. Clarke for his able assistance and co-operation during the last 16 months.

The following is from Dr. Winterbottom who says: "I have been reading Frank A. Lowe's THE HERON (Collins' New Naturalist Library), and a very good book it is too. However, referring to our own stamping ground, he says; 'It bred formerly in reed-beds on the Cape Flats', implying that now it only breeds in trees in this area. We know that this is incorrect but how much more do we know? It struck me that anyone in search of suitable investigation might do worse than make a survey of the heronries of the S.W. Cape - say south and west of the Berg river and Hottentots Holland Mountains."