

Newsletter No. 42.
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Although Spring and Summer activities are past there is still much for us to look out for during Winter. Apart from nesting - some of which takes place in Winter - habits, feeding and behaviour are always interesting studies to record.

Miss D. Clarke, in reply to Dr. Broekhuysen's query in News Letter No. 41 re abandoned Cape Thrush's Nest says. "On 10th February I saw a Thrush's nest containing two sturdy youngsters, by the 15th the young had left the nest and were not seen again. On the 17th shortly after 9 a.m. one of the parent birds came and inspected the nest. While watching a Cape White-eye alighted and thoroughly inspected the nest. Soon after its departure a Cape Turtle Dove came and did likewise. At 11 a.m. two European Starlings arrived, started to pull the nest about trying to settle in. Unfortunately, they must have loosened the nest, as, a few days later after much rain and a high wind the nest was dislodged and blew down.

I was very pleased to receive a letter from Mr. Liversidge, whom I think we miss more than we realise, ever faithful to the Bird Club, he has sent a couple of items for the News Letter.

You will be interested to learn that he and Dr. McLachan are making favourable progress with Roberts, and hope to finish the text by April, and although there is so much extra work involved, at the moment they are hoping a few special copies may be bound in time for the Pan-African Ornithological Congress.

"Imagine", says Mr. Liversidge, "Missing with a stone three times an animal 5ft. long"! However the incident he watched with a boomslang was less tragic. A Little Sparrow Hawk, a bold little raptor (smaller than a dove) flew in unmercifully and physically attacked the snake. The Hawk only attacked when the snake's head was within a patch of vegetation. The snake retreated and left the area after what must have been a more uncomfortable experience than three misses and a miss hit.

Mr. Liversidge thinks that generally the Treble Banded Sandplovers do nest near the same spot. Some time ago when he was regularly visiting the Salt River Marsh, he found a nest next to a culvert. In the following year in what he considered to be exactly the same spot he found another nest - presumably the same bird, in this case there was very little scope for the bird to nest elsewhere.

In News Letter No. 41 Dr. Winterbottom stated that there were only 11 habitats for which we had 30 or more cards. He now finds that this was an error - there are 12 such habitats, as we have 36 cards for a 2, Offshore. In this habitat, four species occur in 40% or more of the lists - the Gannet (24 lists), the White-breasted and Cape Cormorants (22 and 31 respectively) and the Black-backed Gull (35). Next come the Swift Tern (14) and Hartlaub's Gull (11). No other species reaches double figures.

The following records from Dr. Winterbottom are interesting:

20th Feb. 1957, at Bot River, several Lesser Striped-breasted Swallows.

6th March, at Verkeerds Vlei, near Touws River, 2 Wood Ibis, 5 Spoonbill, 4 Turstones.

14th March, Du Toit's Kloof, Victorin's Warbler (not apparently, in our records for any District except Caledon and Somerset West, though there is no reason why it shouldn't occur more widely).

Mr. R.W. Rankine, whose colour transparencies the Club had the chance of enjoying recently, has been collecting birds during the time he stayed here. The skins are destined to be divided between the South African Museum and the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia, but are meanwhile deposited at the former. This is neither the time nor place to make a detailed report, but some points may be mentioned.

In Bain's Kloof Mr. Rankine obtained two White-winged (or Layard's Seed-eaters) out of a flock of four or five, and several Victorin's Warblers. In the case of the latter, the Club had no records from this area until I obtained one about a month ago in Du Toit's Kloof. At Geelbek Mr. Rankine got a Layard's (or Fairy) Tit-babbler.

After remaining completely unknown in our area for nearly 90 years after its first discovery, it is now becoming clear that the bird is quite widespread in suitable from Ysterfontein northwards.

Mrs. Taylor found an albino Crowned Lapwing on Green Point Common on the 5th of January, 1957. She spoke to a man and a woman on the field and learnt that they had been watching this bird and its mate prior to the hatching of the young on the 26th of December, 1956.

Dr. Broekhuysen visited the field on the 6th of January and I quote from Mrs. Taylor's letter his description of the albino together with one or two points he made.

"Breast and neck white, upper collar across lower breast is normal, upper mantle is heavily flecked with white. Markings and colour of top of head is normal except for white towards the back of the neck. Some white spots on the primaries. Colour of bill and legs normal".

"I filmed the bird and at the time there were two pairs of Crowned Lapwings, both with young on the same field. There were repeated clashes between the two families and I saw twice displaced copulation behaviour in the pair of which the one was the albino and I saw it once in the other normal pair. These displacements copulations usually occurred immediately after a clash between the two pairs and they probably were not real copulations. It was noticed that it was the albino which mounted and it is very probably therefore the male".

Mrs. Taylor goes on to say that she again met the couple at the playing field who told her that a dog had rolled on one of the young, and that they thought the albino was a male as twice that day they had seen it copulating. She checked again on the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th and 15th of January and on the latter date all Lapwing had left the field, and she did not see the albino again until the 26th of January, when it appeared on another field full of rubble against which the birds were well camouflaged. There was one fully feathered chick which appeared quite normal (it was exactly a month old).

On the 30th of March the Club had week-end camp at Schrywershoek at the southern end of the Langebaan lagoon, about 20 attended and a few more came out for the day on the Sunday.

On the way out 50 European Storks were seen wheeling around in the air near Mamre, otherwise the veld seemed destitute of birds, probably owing to the storm which was brewing. It was high tide and the lagoon looked lovely as we approached, and as we drove along the beach we saw hundreds of waders, mostly Curlew Sandpipers, some in advanced breeding plumage.

After pitching camp some of us wandered along the beach looking at the birds until it was time to cook our supper. No sooner had we finished supper than the storm broke - thunder, lightning and rain. The more hardy ventured out but most of us retired to our tents or cars to keep dry. When the rain stopped about 10 p.m. four of us went down to the beach to watch the lightning playing round in the distance hills.

Next morning being fine but overcast, we set out to look at the birds. As the tide was low they were some distance off but gradually came nearer with the rising tide. Among others seen were 45 Bar-tailed Godwits over 30 Curlews, Whimbrels, several Terek Sandpiper, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, some in advanced breeding plumage, Greenshank, Hartlaub's and Black-backed Gulls, Caspian, Swift and Sandwich Tern, at least 3 Sacred Ibis, very few Little Stint, quite a number of White-fronted Sandplover, Oyster Catcher, both common and White-fronted Cororants, and Gray Heron. Away on the other side of the lagoon were a flock of about 60 Flamingo. After lunch a small flock of 15 Turnstone were seen sitting on a grassy patch well above the rising tide.

Of land birds there were quite a variety: Bunting, Bar-throated Apalis, Cape Robins, Lesser-double Collar Sunbird, Fiscal, Larks, Yellow Seed-eaters, Mossies, Wailing Warbler, Bulbul, and one European Swallow.

All too soon our outing came to an end, and soon after 4 p.m. we were wending our way homeward, stopping near the Geelbek entrance to look at a small pool, all we saw were Little Stint, but in the marshy land beyond were 3 Black Storks. One last look at the lagoon now again covered with water and another successful outing was ended.

And now an appeal from Prof. Hall whose letter is quoted below:-

"I am doing a field study of the Blacksmith Plover in the Western Cape area, primarily with the view to collecting a long series of observations of the behaviour of this species during the breeding season, although I am interested also in their social behaviour at other times of the year. My intention is to compare the instinctive behaviour pattern, typical postures, etc. with those of the Crowned Lapwing, and too with those of certain European species that have been thoroughly studied in a similar way.

In addition to these behaviour observations, however, I would like very much to get other information about the Blacksmith's habits, distribution and movements in our area, and would be most grateful to members who could send me any observations they have on the following points:-

- (1) Approximate numbers of breeding pairs observed in a particular area.
- (2) Dates of the finding of egg clutches.
- (3) Nesting sites chosen, i.e. nature of terrain, bare earth, low grass etc.
- (4) Number and dimension of eggs in clutch.

- (5) Length of incubation period.
- (6) Records of flocks occurring in winter in a particular area with any available data of their habits or movements.

With the aid of such information, it is hoped that I can build up a fairly comprehensive picture of this species which is a comparative new-comer in our area. Many other observations that members have made that do not fall under the above headings would also be most welcome".

Will members having any such information please send it to:

Proferror K.R.L. Hall,
Dept. of Psychology,
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RONDEBOSCH.