

April 1959.

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Although I cannot expect all members to be as fond of Swallows as I am, I think they will find Miss Joan Robinson's report most interesting. It even seems to give a hint how to attach swallows permanently to a house in spite of accidents with nests. She writes as follows:

When visiting a house in Firgrove about four weeks ago, I was shown an unusual nest of a Stripe-breasted Swallow.

This nest consisted of a large 4 lb. jam tin which had been fixed lengthways under the eaves of a building. The swallows had built their funnel-shaped entrance round the opening of the tin and successfully reared their young in this unusual nest.

Last year the swallows had built in an out-building; the nest, however, fell down. One nestling was killed, the others were carefully picked up and placed in the jam tin which had been fastened up under the eaves. Towards evening the parent birds were seen entering the tin and so much did they approve of it that they successfully reared the young birds.

Returning this year they adopted the tin again building their funnel-like entrance around the opening of the tin and using the tin as a nest they have again successfully reared their young.

Misses J. and C. Robinson also report having seen 2 Black Crows at Plumstead on 28th August, 1950 and 24th February, 1955 (cf. News Letter No. 51).

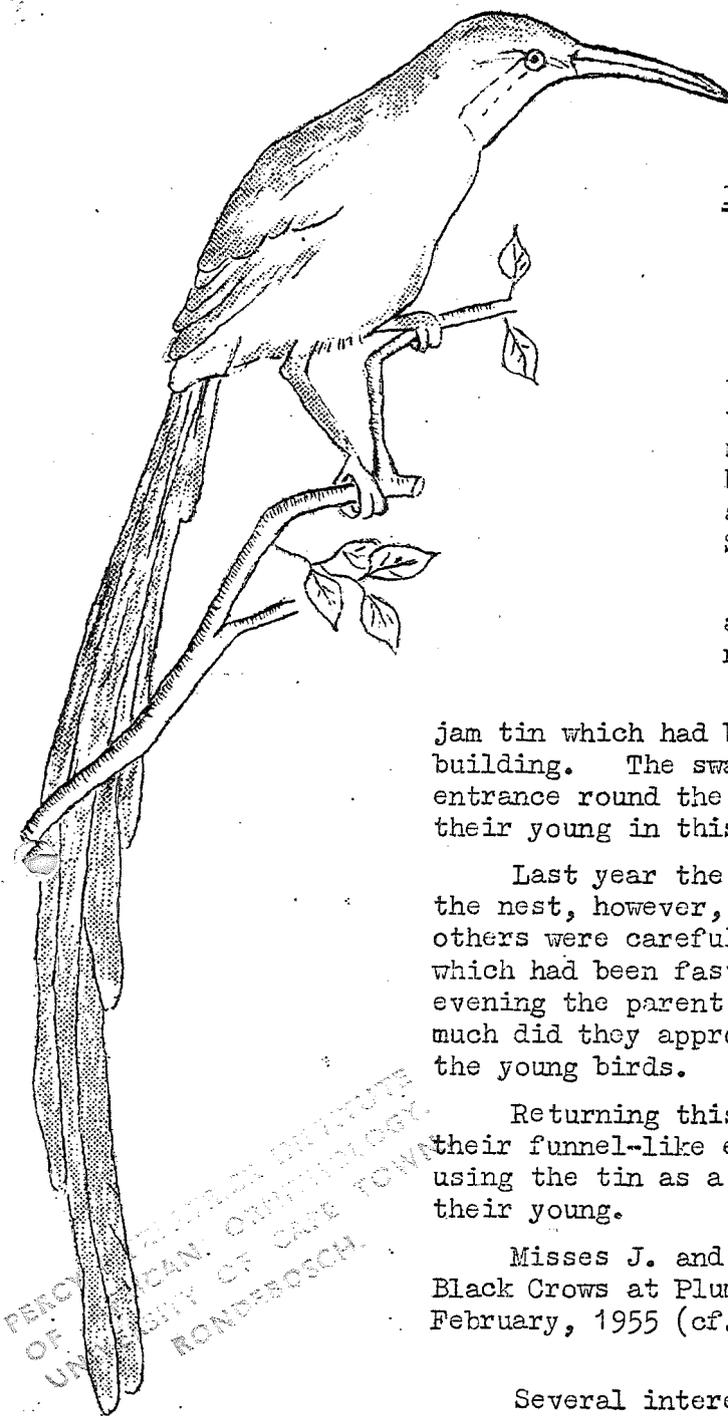
Several interesting observations come from Mr. John Martin:

(1) During last September Elsie, Robbie and I were watching White-throated Swallows and Sand Martins hawking insects over Paardevlei at the Cape Explosive Works. One of the swallows started hovering a few inches above the deep water of the vlei and allowed itself to drop on the water, wings and tail outspread, fluttering vigorously in such a way that water was splashed over its back. It then rose from the water and after giving itself a good shake as it rose, flew around for a while before repeating this performance. In all, it bathed itself in this way on eight or nine occasions within as many minutes. Hardly had it completed its ablutions, when we were surprised to see a Sand Martin do exactly the same thing, this bird, however, being quite satisfied with three dips in the water. As I had once before seen Cape Rock Martins bathing in this way on Longkloof Dam, Vergelegen, it would appear that Swallows and Martins normally bathe in this manner. (Larger Striped Swallows even dive in from a few feet above the water. Editor.)

(2) On the same Paardevlei on another occasion we again saw White-breasted Cormorants drinking water from the vlei whilst in flight in the way swallows, martins and swifts do. The cormorants were on their way to their roosting tree on the far side of the vlei and flying low over the water when one of them dipped its beak into the water three times. On a previous occasion I had seen cormorants do the same thing.

(3) While Jack MacLeod and I were watching at the nest hole of a Malachite Kingfisher at Morning Star a few weeks ago, we noted that each time a bird fed, it would come from its nest and dive straight into the river water. It would then either fly off or would perch on a suitable root or branch over the water and dive in again and even a third time, before going off for more food. On examining the nest

hole



hole we found a tar-like substance oozing from the nest tunnel which in this instance sloped upwards from the outside.

(4) During February of this year Elsie, Robbie and I were in the car on the upper grazing lands of Vergelegen watching a large number of Ravens turning over dry cow-pats and feeding on the larvae found in them. While we were watching this performance, a Lanner suddenly dived onto the field and while still in flight lifted a cow-pat in its talons and settled on the top of a fence post close by, to feed on the larvae for a few minutes. After dropping the cow-pat it again flew low over the field, once again lifting a cow-pat in its claws while in flight and perching once more on a post, again spending a minute or two feeding. This it did four times in all and then made off towards Helderberg.

(5) An interesting new record for Hottentots Holland was the presence of 4 Spoonbills on Klawervlei, Faure, during February. One morning I was told by Mrs. Brodie, whose farm house is quite close to the vlei, that there were hundreds of Flamingoes feeding in the shallow water. In the evening we drove out to see these birds only to find that they had flown away, but much to our amazement saw the four African Spoonbills instead. As this species was reported from Rietvlei only a few years ago and as the small breeding colony was discovered on Kersefontein, Hopefield, only in 1956, it would seem that this bird is definitely spreading farther afield from its usual stamping grounds.

There are 3 reports about Albino birds:

On 11th January, 1959 Mrs. Taylor again saw the Albino Crowned Plover with mate and half-grown young, it must have nested on Green Point Common.

In February and March Mr. Clarke often saw the Albino Wagtail in Pluto Road, Plumstead. (cf. News Letter 51.)

On 22nd February our Junior Member, David Pelteret, saw a Laughing Dove with a totally white tail. On 11th January he also saw a rather unusual Cape White-eye, large patches on its breast and back were yellow instead of the usual green and grey. Both observations were made at Pinelands.

On 25th February Mr. A.H. Wilson and Mr. P. Bolt were watching the Tomato Vlei Flamingoes - about 250 strong - flying up and down parallel to the adjacent beach just outside the breakers about 100 to 150 yards from the shore. This I have seen before, but then - new to me - they settled on the water the same distance out. There was quite a swell and as they were in a tightly compact group one got the effect of a 'swell' of flamingoes - quite a sight. We estimated they must have been swimming - or floating - in at least 20 feet of water. Shortly afterwards they all flew over to Tomato Vlei which of course is only a few hundred yards from the sea.

Mr. E. Ashforth sends a very interesting report about a third brood of a Cape Dikkop:

On 23rd August, 1958 our attention was drawn to the eggs of a Cape Dikkop at Bergvliet, Cape. These were on the ground by the side of a tree among a group of trees. Egg size 51 by 39.

The first chick hatched on 25th August at 12.30 p.m. leaving the nesting site the following day. The other egg - though left for a period - was not hatched, but upon being opened showed a fully-developed chick inside. The young chick was ringed on August 30th, and seen again up to September 20th. The chick was apparently healthy, but was found dead on September 21st.

On 2nd October the parent Dikkop laid two more eggs, sizes 53 by 40 and 53 by 38. This second clutch hatched on 26th October, the young were seen on 8th November, one was ringed on November 16th, no trace could be found of the second chick. One chick was much larger than the other.

Two more eggs were found on 27th December, the parent Dikkop being seen daily sitting until the hatching. Egg sizes: 51 by 37.5 and 51 by 39. Both parents and the one young of the second brood were seen together on 9th January, 1959 and also on 17th January.

This third clutch was hatched on 20th January; one young emerged at 8 a.m. and left the nest site about 11 a.m. The second chick hatched at 11.30 a.m. leaving with the parent bird at 2 p.m. Again one chick grew faster than the other.

On 30th January, while in company with a chick of the third brood, the parent bird was seen to display aggressive action against the chick of the second brood, evidently endeavouring to drive it away.

The larger

The larger chick of the third brood was ringed on 31st January, but no trace could be found of the smaller chick.

These observations show that there were:

Three broods in the season	Six eggs were laid.
Five chicks were hatched	Only two chicks survived.

Mrs. Taylor reports that this year the Hartlaub's Gulls returned to the roofs near High Level Road, Green Point on 1st of April already, about a month earlier than usual.

Dr. Winterbottom calls on all members to help fill in certain gaps in our knowledge of bird distribution. He writes:

From time to time members have read plaintive bleats from me about our inadequate knowledge of bird distribution within, and in the neighbourhood of, our area. So if you are going away during the school or University winter holiday, please make, and let us have, a list of the birds you see. Areas for which information is particularly lacking include: Tulbagh, Worcester (especially the Breede River Valley - Goudini, Worcester, Brandvlei, etc.), Robertson, Montagu, Riversdale, and Ladismith. Any list of even the commonest birds from these areas will be a useful addition to our knowledge, however incomplete it may be. But if you are not going to any of these districts but are going somewhere else, send in your list all the same. Don't be modest about it - there are very few 'experts' and they can't go everywhere; some of our worst gaps have been filled in by lists from junior members, so why not by you?

Dr. Winterbottom also sends an interesting account of a trip to the Berg River at the end of February:

I recently spent five days at the Berg River. Many members will recall the wonderful excursion there to see the breeding spoonbills, the discovery of which by Peter Wilson put all the experts' noses out of joint. This time, however, I saw no spoonbills; and very few water birds of any sort, for there was water only in the river itself. Darters, white-breasted cormorants, a flock each of Egyptian geese and pelicans, fish eagles, a solitary white stork and a few herons were all I saw in that line.

However, the birding elsewhere was not without interest. All four of our Western Cape swallows were present, including at least 20 pearl-breasted, usually so sparsely distributed. Evidently Mr. Schmidt will have to have a 'diplomatic illness' which will necessitate a long convalescence in this area next spring! There were also several spotted flycatchers about; and on my last day, I discovered a place where there were three or four chat flycatchers. There were plenty of the usual bush birds - karoo and thick-billed larks, bulbuls, crombecs, apalis, karoo robins, tit-abblers, prinias and yellow and white-throated seed-eaters. Lark-like buntings were common, too.

My total list was 84 species, so I obviously cannot list them all; but among the non-passerines, the black korhaan was rather scarce but the Cape pheasant literally swarmed by the river and especially by the house. Our new C.B.C. member, Mr. Melck, who owns the farm, never shoots them there and they seem to know they are safe. Two owls were identified, the barn and spotted eagle owls. New for the Piquetberg District were the greater honeyguide and the cardinal woodpecker, both in the trees beside the river. Of the mouse-birds, only the white-backed was seen.

There were fan-tailed warblers and cloud-scrappers in the dry grassland and a small party of wattled starlings joined with the much more numerous pied and European starlings in the garden most evenings.

But the most exciting bird, alas! cannot be ticked off as definite, final and certain. One evening, just at dusk, I saw a largish raptor, about the size of a steppe buzzard but with pointed wings. I feel quite sure in my own mind that it was a bat hawk; but the nearest known locality is 1,000 miles away, so the record must await confirmation by others.

The last bird I shall mention was not seen at Kersfontein but on the way there, at Oudepost, north of Malmesbury - a locality I have rarely visited without seeing something interesting. This time it was a couple of double-banded coursers, standing beside the road. They are, of course, known to occur as far south as Somerset West but I have not seen them so near Cape Town as this before myself.