

KAAPSE VOËLWAARNEMERSKLUB

P.O. BOX 5022,
CAPE TOWN.POSBUS 5022,
KAAPSTAD.

NEWSLETTER

NO. 110

NUUSBRIEF.

MAY 1974. MEI.

STORK CENSUS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Prof. Winterbottom, Hon. Secretary of the S.A. National Section of the International Committee for the Bird Preservation writes:

"In co-operation with the International HQ, which is organising a census of White Storks in Europe during 1974, we have agreed to organise a census in South Africa for 1974 - 75. Anybody who is willing to help in this is asked to get in touch with me (c/o South African Museum, P.O. Box 61, CAPE TOWN), when the necessary form will be sent. In view of the serious and continued decline of the European population, it is most important to have adequate information from their off-season quarters."

A HABITAT REGISTER

With reference to the paragraph on the above in Newsletter 109 Prof. Winterbottom informs us:

"So much of South Africa is relatively unknown that I think a National Habitat Register would be premature. I would, however, draw members' attention to the "Guide to Bird Watching near Cape Town", produced by the staff of the P. Fitzpatrick Institute and sold by the Institute at 50c."

IMMATURE BATELEUR (R151) AT DU TOIT'S KLOOF

Mr. Peter Steyn, Bulawayo Rhodesia, expresses his doubts about this record (of Newsletter 107, page 5), but he begins by stating:

"Before going further, let me hasten to say that anything is possible in the world of birds: if the American Gallinule (R 208X) can fly the Atlantic, then Bateleurs can theoretically reach Du Toit's Kloof, even if this is way beyond their known distribution. However, when records as unusual as this are put down as hard fact, should we not perhaps be a little more critical? While not wishing to detract from the abilities of the observers concerned, I feel that this record should have been more fully substantiated. Just what, for example, is meant by three white windows in the wings? The immature Bateleur shows little conspicuous white in the wing until well advanced towards adult plumage, the whole process taking seven or eight years, by which time it would not be "brownish". My own feeling is that this sighting was of a juvenile Black Eagle (R 133) which is brownish in general coloration (especially from below), is not dissimilar to the Bateleur in having wings that wasp in at the waist, and has a white window near the tip of each wing. I should be delighted to be disproved in my opinion2

but first I would like to see more convincing evidence of this identification."

Peter Steyn also suggests to publish an appeal to all members of the C.B.C. to report all sightings of Black Eagles in the Cape Peninsula, where these birds seem to have become very rare. The editors think this an excellent idea. So let us have your recent records of Black Eagle sightings from all over the Peninsula.

In his book "Eagle Days" on page 1 Peter Steyn writes:

"In the late nineteen-fifties I knew of at least four pairs which lived on the mountains of the Cape Peninsula," and also reports that "A recent study in the Matapos revealed that of 1099 prey items recorded 98,3 per cent were dassies".

Just this specialised diet may be the cause of the decline of the Black Eagle in the Peninsula where the dassie population is supposed to have decreased owing to a disease. Fluctuations among wild creatures are, however, quite normal; both populations, prey as well as bird, may soon recover.

After moving to Tamboerskloof I (R.K.S.) had a real thrill when on 18 Nov. 1973, shortly before noon, I saw, from my garden, a pair of Black Eagles searing low over Signal Hill. Unfortunately a pair of Cape Ravens, whose territory they might have invaded, started mobbing them and the eagles flew over the crest of the hill towards Sea Point. But this proves that Cape Town is still an eagle city. May it remain so for many years to come.

FINANCING OF ORNITHOLOGICAL PROJECTS

Dr. M.A. Connor, Hon. Secretary of the S.A.O.S. informs us:

"The S.A.O.S. Council has established a fund to help to finance suitable ornithological projects.

I should be grateful if you would advise your members that applications for assistance from this fund should reach the Hon. Secretary before 1st August this year, 1974, and before 1st July in future years."

CRITICISING THE NEWSLETTER

So far only one reply has been received to the Editors' suggestion to help them by criticising (of Newsletter 109, page 2.)

Mrs. Rowan writes:

The Editors,
Cape Bird Club Newsletter.

Dear Friends,

I read Newsletter 109 with a growing sense of dissatisfaction and I resolved to take up your challenge to do a bit of criticising. I decided that I would tell you that I felt there was too much proselytizing and that you were preaching to the converted anyway And then I paused to think. It dawned on me that the almost complete absence of any "bird news" and the large amounts of space devoted to the cause of conservation must be seen as my fault and the fault of my fellow members. Obviously we were not supplying you with material of the usual "birdy" anecdotal sort that has given the Newsletter its special flavour in the past.

So instead of criticising, I want to offer a contribution!3.

When I gave up my dear old home in Claremont and came to live in a Rondebosch flat, I hardly expected to find anything of ornithological interest; but I was mistaken. True, the bird life is not as varied as it was in my garden but there are compensations. In particular the Cape Wagtails. I am not sure how many of them live here. My fellow flat-dwellers say that there are several, but I have seen only one pair and their offspring; and I do not think there are more. They have the run of the flat gardens, which include a fine croquet lawn, some date palms and lush hedges and shrubberies. However, they do not nest in the gardens. Why should they, with so many comfortable, predator-free verandahs from which to choose?

This summer they have raised at least four broods, favouring first one verandah, now another, and then returning to the original site. They build their nests among the pot plants; indeed, usually choosing the finest geranium or maiden-hair fern, which then has to go without water for the duration of the incubation and nestling periods. You have no conception of the damage so done to verandah gardens.

But every one is "Quite besotted" about the birds. The quoted words are from one of my fellow flat-dwellers who was fortunate enough to act as host to two broods. She fed them - or rather offered a saucer full of cheese fragments and mashed hard-boiled egg. The parents both made liberal use of these supplies, but never carried them to the nest. The young always had a diet of fresh garden invertebrates. In the course of this affair, the adults have become increasingly tame. They visit many of us and take shelter in our small potted gardens if it is rainy. Now (late March) the last young of the summer have flown and only the adults remain. We hope that next season they will be raising more offspring on our verandahs."

I feel that members should also enjoy the amusing little poem about the Phalarope which Mrs. Rowan addressed personally to Mr. P. Tongue, the co-editor, who is at present overseas. She writes:

"Apropos of the waders whose identification was so strongly defended in Newsletter 109, you may be amused at a little verse my Father used to quote me. I may not have the wording exactly right, but the following is near enough:

I hope that I may live to see
The Rednecked Phalarope;
Or should I say it is my hope
To see the Rednecked Phalarope.

From which you may discern that some people, my Father amongst them, consider that this bird's name deriving from the Greek, should be pronounced to rhyme with Penelope.

NOTES ON LAMBERT'S BAY

Mr. E.G. Whittal sent us this detailed report (Dated 23rd March) which contains some very useful suggestions which might be taken up by our Conservation Committee.

"I have visited Lambert's Bay three times this year and there are some matters of interest which I would like to pass on.

The effluent from the factory is serious and when certain winds blow, the current carries the poisonous oil into the sandy bay and beyond. Large numbers of fish and cormerants have been killed and some penguins. I was told that 700 Gannets were killed.

The New fence on the island is disappointing to bird photographers as its mesh is too small for photography, and the level, at its extreme end, is below the level of the main concentration of Gannets and inaccessible to the Penguins. This means that visitors are forced to climb over the wire in one place after speaking to the Harbour Master - who is very helpful. The whole matter could be resolved for the average visitor by building a raised platform at the end of the wire passage for a fine view of the nesting birds.

A young zoologist from the P.F. Institute thought that birds taking off would hit such a platform, but after watching the birds taking off for 3-4 days, I noticed that no gannets fly in that direction as the fence obscures their view. They actually take off on either side of the fence as the land falls on each side and the prevailing wind is either SW or NW.

What is needed is raised causeway running from the fence area SW so that the young gannets can take off on their initial flight and thus be air-borne before crashing into the concrete sea wall which encloses the southerly nesting area. Dr. Jarvis would well understand what I mean by this improvement. A large number of young gannets die as they cannot make the initial effort to take off under difficult conditions, so difficult that many adults fail to make height and stall below, or hit the wall, fortunately they are protected by air-sacks in their necks. I saw many fledged gannets dying from starvation.

An effort to reduce the number of Black-backed Gulls would decrease the predation on chicks and eggs. This has had to be done in the Moray Firth to protect the Guillemots.

Of the terns only a small flock of Whiskered Terns were present. Two pilots who spot fish for the fishermen told me that they had seen a vast raft of penguins 20 miles off-shore. The fishermen observers in the plane had told the pilots that these birds were not eating large pelagic fish, but anchovis only.

I suppose there were 200,000 cormorants - at a guess. There was standing room only over the whole of the island, and may be half million were there at dawn. The fishermen are worried as a cormorant eats $\frac{3}{4}$ lb of fish per day".

CLUB ACTIVITIES

The second slide show of the year on 15 March by Mr. Stafford Smith took us to a remote area unknown to practically all our members: The Falkland Isles and Antartica. The talk, illustrated by outstanding colour slides, conveyed to everyone an impression of the desolate and yet magnificent Antartica scenery as well as of the comfort which one can enjoy visiting this area in our modern times.

Mr. Nico Myburgh's slide show on 19 April was excellent as usual. He showed us not only pictures of birds, but some were real portraits. I especially liked the comical expression on the face of the young Night Heron slithering down a branch to meet his parents bringing food. Nico is a good psychologist too, just in the middle of his show he "flashed" everyone back to full attention with some dramatic photos of lightning over Signal Hill.

We are very grateful to both speakers and hope to hear them again next year.

The Tamatie Vlei Outing on Saturday afternoon, 27 April, was attended by about 70 people. So late in the season it was expected that most European Waders would be gone, but the White-winged Lake Terns in full breeding plumage were a beautiful sight. All the common local ducks and geese were seen, except the Red-billed Teal. Only Lesser Flamingoes were present. All three species of grebes: Crested and Black-necked Grebes as well as Dabchick were recorded. To round off a glorious day a Fish Eagle put in an appearance.

The Committee wants to remind you that a good member of the C.B.C. does not turn up only for enjoyable lectures and excursions, but also at the Annual General Meeting which is announced on the enclosed notices.

A HEARTY WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

It was decided to publish their names in the Newsletter to make them feel that they are now one of us. We hope that they will spend many happy hours in our midst and among the birds.

According to the lists of the S.A.O.S. the following joined the Cape Bird Club in February, March and April 1974.

Mrs. M.A. Barry	Prof. B.J. Cremin
Mrs. Dawn Rex Bertish	Mr. S.B. de Villiers
Miss. F.A. Cronwright	Mrs. G.H. Dunseith
Mr. & Mrs. J.C. Flanagan	Mrs. Louie Fry
Mrs. Joan Goodwin	Mr. S. Fletcher Fry
Mr. J.F. Harvey	Mr. Carl Grobbelaar
Mrs. J.P. Hartford	Mr. & Mrs. K. Hauser
Mrs. Peggy Heap	Mrs. A.M.V. MacEachern
Miss. J.A. Hobbs	Capt. A. Thomas
Mr. F.J. Dales	Dr. M. Angela T. Williams
Mr. M.J. Kokkinn	Mr. W. Bluhm
Mr. & Mrs. L. Kruskal	Mrs. Helen M. Clarke
Mrs. Vivienne Main	Mr. M.C.N. Schmidt
Miss. J.S.C. Miller-Cranko	Dr. P.D. Shaughnessey
Mrs. M.P. Parkhurst	Mr. Richard Stirzaker
Miss. C. Cynthia Taylor	Mr. & Mrs. P.J. van Zyl
Miss. L.E. Taylor	Mrs. J.A.E. Vine-Purves
Mrs. B.C. Tite	
Miss. I.V. Zammit	
Mr. A. Andrag	
Mr. Robert J. Benfield	
Prof. P.F. Cluver	
Mrs. J.B. Cooper	

MEMBERS' REPORTS

Mr. Lockhart, Somerset West recorded:

"One Secretary Bird soaring over a field near Westridge, Somerset West on 15 March. On 9 April, at 9.20 a.m. on a very hot morning, in the Groenvlei/Sedgefield area, he and Mr. R. Mew observed a vast cloud of European Swallows, soaring and spiralling in the air and then descending on telephone wires and nearby trees and bushes. All the time the birds set up an incessant chatter; copulation even took place on some occasions. This vast congregation of 1000 + birds seemed to be in a highly excited state and was obviously preparing for migration to Europe.

On April 16th, on a hot sultry morning, a flock of 50 European Swallows was seen flying around and resting on Escom lines running through a housing estate in Somerset West. With them were 3 European House Martins,6

their white rumps were very conspicuous in flight. After a while they all flew off together. This appears to be quite a late record for both species".

SIR MORDAUNT MILNER, BT., Klapmuts, reports:

"I seem to have written up three Blacks this month. First, in a howling South-easter, a pair of Black Eagles came down from the Simonsberg. This is the second time we have seen them, although their last visitation was in a howling north-wester. Second, when I was out riding on the farm opposite Natte Vallei, a Black Harrier came over very close about 50ft. away. Third, I found a Black Stork with a broken leg lying in a row of beans. The leg was badly broken, with 3 or 4 inches of bone protruding above the hock or the elbow, or whatever birds have. (Most probably the inter-tarsal joint or ankle; the real knee being concealed in the plumage. Ed.) The Vet amputated it, and the stork was taken to Tygerberg Zoo.

My neighbour tells me that on 24 April the Boubou Shrike which lives on his garden, was eating a mouse. I did not know that they eat mice." (Has any other member observed this? Ed.)

Sighting Red-eyed Turtle Doves is not worth recording any more in 1974. It was so in 1952 as the extract from the first year of the Newsletter shows (of Newsletter 108, page 7).

OKAVANGO SAFARIS

I had an overwhelming response to the advert in the January Newsletter for safaris to the Okavango. Up to now (1.4.74) 12 people have booked.

The Okavango Delta, the Moremi and the Savuti Channel in Chobe constitute one of the last unspoilt refuges in Africa of vast varieties of birds and game. Scenically the area is superb.

The safari season runs from May to October and during late rain seasons up to November. Transport is per 4-wheel drive Land-rover from and to Johannesburg, with a knowledgeable guide/driver in attendance. Passengers are limited to 7 and are usually drawn from various Societies - and it goes without saying - lovers of the wild. All camping gear and food is supplied - but do bring your own sleeping bag.

Since the price of the safaris is extremely low, all participants MUST realise that these are not the R 50.00 - R 100.00 per day luxury trips! Safari-goers are expected to help with setting up camp and with the cooking. There is no water-borne sewerage!

BUT these safaris put the Okavango within the reach of all of us - and the more of us that take advantage of these trips the more each one will assist CONSERVATION in its fullest terms.

I have been asked by the Organisers to draw the attention of everybody participating, to the following very important point!

The Safaris MAY NOT BE JOINED OR LEFT ANYWHERE ENROUTE. Participants MUST embark in Johannesburg and return to Johannesburg with the Landrover. The Organisers explained that Immigration difficulties are such, that it is inadvisable and would involve them in unpleasant dealings with the Botswana Authorities.

If you have any queries or want brochures and booking forms please phone me at 45-4301 - office hours only - I shall try to help to the best of my ability.

MISS. I.V. ZAMMIT.7

P.S. N.B.

Neither the Cape Bird Club nor Miss. I. Zammit can in any way be held responsible for any reason whatsoever should participants booked through them, suffer any injury, loss or damage during the Safari. Further, personal dissatisfactions regarding any aspect of the safari is not the responsibility of either the Cape Bird Club or Miss I. Zammit. The Contract entered into, is between the participants and Venture Overland (Pty) Ltd., The Cape Bird Club and in particular Miss. Zammit merely act as "booking agents" for Venture Overland (Pty) Ltd., of Johannesburg.

APOLOGIES!

From the Sugarbird on the title-page - his wife is so busy breeding that he couldn't manage to appear this month!!

HON. EDITOR: R.K. SCHMIDT - 8 Devonport Road,
ERE REDAKTEUR: TAMBOERSKLOOF.

P.S.

IF YOU HAVEN'T COMPLETED THE QUESTIONNAIRE FROM THE
CAPE BIRD CLUB CONSERVATION GROUP ----- PLEASE DO
SO IMMEDIATELY.

P.P.S.

PLEASE ATTEND THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON 14TH JUNE
AND JOIN US AT THE ANNUAL DINNER ON 7TH JUNE.