

CAPE BIRD CLUB : KAAPSE VOËLWAARNEMERSKLUB

# NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

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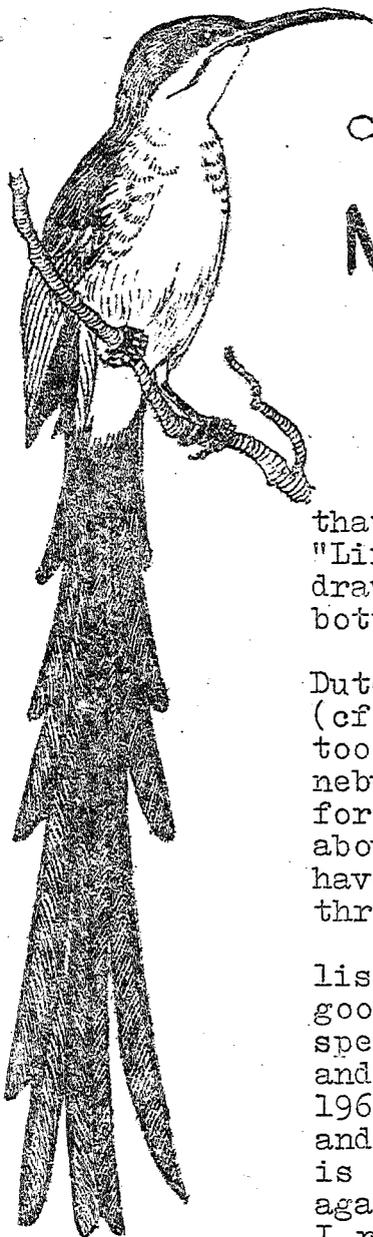
December 1964 Desember

Mr. Tongue's suggestion in Newsletter 75 that Bird Club members should compare their "Life-Lists" with those of other members has drawn an interesting reply from Prof: Winterbottom, who writes:

"I cannot produce a Life-List, like the Dutch ornithologist Prof: G.J. van Oordt, (cf. Obituary in "The Ostrich", June 1964) - far too many of my early recollections are too nebulous or too doubtful. That White Wagtail, for instance, which I identified so confidently about 1913 - ought I really to count it? And have I ever really identified a Common White-throat? I don't know.

Since 1961, however, I have kept an annual list. As a matter of fact, 1961 was not a very good year for me and my total was only 352 species. In 1962 I visited Europe and America and my list was swollen by exotic species to 575. 1963, a purely South African year, produced 418; and this year, to the end of November, the total is 468, which, considering my wanderings were again confined to the geographical South Africa, I regard as a pretty good list! I am not without hopes of adding a few more to it before the end of the year is out - the Chaffinch, for instance, and the Penguin."

"To keep an annual List seems to me a very good suggestion and I am going to make it my New Year Resolution to start one in 1965. I have also, like Mr. Tongue, looked through my notes and if I have neither overlooked nor imagined any birds, my Life-List stands at 477, which number contains 334 species in Africa and 143 in Europe. European migrants, which I had seen in Europe, I did not count for Africa again, but what should one do with the Alpine Swift, for instance? It has one race breeding in Europe and one breeding in Africa. As I have seen both and did not want my list to be too short, I counted one for Africa and one for Europe. I also swelled my European list with the Italian and the Spanish Sparrows which I was lucky to see during my trip in 1963. And with all these manipulations I did not even score 500 species in two continents during more than 25 years of bird-watching. Dr. Bierman from Holland, whom I met at the Ornithological Congress at Pietermaritzburg and during the Drakensburg excursion, told me that he had seen over 500 different species during the four or six weeks of his trip. In their new book "The World of Birds", James Fisher and Roger Tory Peterson gave a map showing the distribution of bird variety. According to this map "an expert bird recorder in active life-time could list" 250 - 500 species in the Cape; by going a thousand miles to the north-east one would get into an area with a richer avifauna where 500 - 1000 species might be listed. We all know that Roberts lists about 850 species south of the Cunene and



Zambesi rivers (the plates show 875 species but some numbers are now considered to be races). So I think most of us here in South Africa still have to record many species unknown to us and there is no danger that we shall have to close our Life-Lists for lack of new birds. If anybody should be contemplating a trip overseas with the aim of bird-watching, he is strongly advised to go to Colombia, the only country with a bird list over 1500 ("in 1963 its recorded species totalled over 1700")

Mr. Underhill sent me the following three observations:

Using old nests of different species.

A report in Newsletter 55, January 1960, mentions that a Laughing Dove made use of an old Cape Turtle Dove's nest. Dr. Winterbottom, the observer, commented that he had never before known one species of dove use the nest of another species. This year I noticed a similar occurrence. In June 1964 a pair of Cape Turtle Doves built a nest in a palm tree in a neighbour's garden; two young left the nest on 18th. July. On 13. August this nest was again occupied, but this time the sitting bird was a Laughing Dove. Two young fledged on 7 September. I should add that since then two more breeding attempts by Laughing Doves have been made in the nest. At the end of September a clutch of eggs came to grief and on 6 November I noticed that a Laughing Dove was again sitting on the nest.

Distraction Display by Tawny Pipit.

On 9 November, 1964, at Mowbray a Tawny Pipit rose from grassy ground about six feet in front of me, it fluttered about ten yards and settled on a flattened mole-hill. Here it crouched, extended its wings fully, and crawled along for about two feet before flying off. I found a nest containing four eggs and had obviously startled a breeding bird.

A Fiscal Shrike and its Prey.

On the afternoon of 9 November 1963, I was sitting at a vantage point with a view over a grassy slope down to the Black River and its vleis. A Fiscal Shrike flew past on a straight course down the slope. Its flight seemed so purposeful that I followed the bird through my binoculars. The target was soon apparent, for a small bird took wing and fled, with the Fiscal following all its twistings and turnings in hot pursuit. Then both birds dived into long grass. A few seconds later the hunter rose carrying the victim in its claws.

The load hindered its flight so much that it could neither gain height nor fly fast. I was keen to examine the victim, so the hunter became the hunted as I sprinted after it. I was gaining on the shrike when it jettisoned its load. The only visible injury suffered by the prey was a wound on the head, inflicted apparently by the beak. Prof: Winterbottom identified the small bird as a juvenile Common Waxbill. It weighed about 9 grammes. I noticed two fledgling shrikes in the vicinity. Perhaps the waxbill was intended for the family dinner.

Colour-marked Cattle Egrets.

Will members please report the date and place where Cattle Egrets marked green were seen, to Mr. W.R. Siegfried, Jonkershoek, Dept. of Nature Conservation, P.Bag 14, Stellenbosch.

Interesting Behaviour of Black-Shouldered Kite.

is reported by Mrs. Isobel Taylor who observed it during a September holiday at the guest farm "Baden" near Montagu.

Two Black-Shouldered Kites were usually present at a spot

not far from the farmhouse. On 24 September mating occurred and afterwards the male flew across the road and perched. The female remained where she was, but shortly afterwards caught a rodent and flew to a perch some distance away. The male followed, settling beside her. Thereafter he flew to the ground and appeared to be pecking in the earth. Between pecks he gave a peculiar hop and the whole performance was rather like a ritual dance. He then picked up a long stick and flew off with it while it dangled from his talons. Unfortunately he flew down and was obscured by an orchard, so I was unable to see what became of the stick. He then flew back to one of his favourite perches on tall bamboos. Mating was again seen some days later.

#### The Bredasdorp Storks.

This season, Dr. Broekhuysen and Mr. Martin found three occupied nests of the White Stork in the Bredasdorp area which seems to indicate an increase in the local breeding population. All 6 young were ringed.

On 20 December Messrs Perry and Morris and I joined Mr. Lestranger on a photographic expedition to these storks. Mr. Martin showed us the one nest which is just South of Bredasdorp. When we arrived, an adult stork had just settled on the nest and was feeding the two half-grown young. Another five adult storks were flying near this nest. We had apparently disturbed them from their feeding ground, a small vlei nearby. The car was parked about 100 feet from the nest, which was 20 feet up in a tree. At 9.30.am the cameras with their big tele-lenses were focussed on the nest, and the four of us in the car started waiting for the stork to come and feed its young again. And I, inexperienced in the art of bird photography, sometimes thought we would never finish waiting. After one and a half hours at least, the stork came back, but flew past the nest and landed in the field nearby, suspiciously watching the car. After a rather long while it again flew towards the nest, circled over it, coming lower and lower, but landed in the field again. By that time it was past noon, and we felt like breaking a hole through the back of the car to get at our food which we had left in the boot. We could see the stork or at least its head all the time as it was hunting in the vlei nearby. After four hours less eight minutes the stork eventually landed on the nest and we could watch the feeding of the young for a long time, as the bird then did not seem to be perturbed at all. I do hope the photographers got satisfactory pictures. They certainly deserved them.

The long intervals in the feeding of the young may not have been caused only by the presence of the car. About 30 yards from this nest the decomposed body of an adult stork lay on the ground, and we had the impression that the young were reared by only one adult. On our way home near Napier we saw a flock of 28 White Storks which most probably were migrants from Europe.

#### Black Storks at Rietvlei.

On 27 December Dr. Birnbaum and I went to Rietvlei where we saw 17 Black Storks feeding in the pool of shallow water which was left there. Three days later Mr. Underhill watched 20 Black Storks there. It is a pity that we shall not have a chance of seeing these rather uncommon birds so near Cape Town any more after Rietvlei has been changed into a fishing harbour. At a bigger and deeper pool nearby we saw hundreds of duck, among which there were about 50 Shelduck.

#### Swifts on Table Mountain.

I watched 20-30 Alpine Swifts and more than 50 Black Swifts at their nesting site just above the Pipe Track on 25 and 30 December. Just before the Blinkwater ascent turns off the Pipe Track there is a large brownish patch on the lower half of the

Rock face which is crowned by the Upper Cable Station. It is a good half an hours climb to the foot of this rock face, but from there one can see the swifts entering the crevices. They seem to appear in numbers only about two hours before sunset, and the lower the sun the better one can see the white bellies of the Alpine Swifts flying above, But dont stay too long as you will have to climb down to the Pipe Track again before darkness falls and there is no path.

#### Swallow Recoveries.

Mr. Martin told me about the interesting results he and other Somerset West members obtain from the catching of European Swallows roosting in the reeds of the vleis in the vicinity of Faure. In the beginning of December they caught a swallow with a South African ring at Klaver Vlei, it had been ringed by Mr. Brown at Athlone during the previous summer. A couple of days later they caught this same swallow again at a vlei about a mile distant from Klaver Vlei. The most valuable recovery, however, was made in Russia. A swallow ringed at Faure on the evening of 2 March 1964 was recovered in Georgia 42°43 east 42°15 north on 5 April 1964. This is a distance of about 5,300 miles which this swallow must have flown in not more than 34 days, an average of 156 miles per day.

#### Contributions to "Bokmakierie".

Members may have noticed that, apart from the special issue for the P.A.O. Congress, only one number of the "Bokmakierie" appeared in 1964. The editor regrets this very much, but says that there could easily be more if more people wrote articles for it. The S.A.O.S. is prepared to publish three numbers of this popular magazine for bird-watchers per year, but this can only be done if there is enough copy. So it is up to you, members, the more you contribute, the more "Bokmakieries" you will receive. On the inside cover page you will find all the information about the address of the editor, the maximum length of your article, etc.

And after you have sent off your article to the "Bokmakierie" please dont forget to drop me a short note for the Newsletter, which cannot survive without your contributions either.

I wish to thank all those members who wrote something for the Newsletter in 1964, and want to remind them that unlimited space is available in 1965. I also wish to thank the Director and the staff of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute and the Hon: Secretary of the Cape Bird Club for their help with duplicating and distributing the Newsletter.

A Happy New Year and good bird-watching to all members.