

NEWSLETTER

78

NUUSBRIEF

July

1965

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The 1965 breeding season has started already, and members are reminded that the various projects of the Cape Bird Club require the active support of every one of us. The projects are: Nest Record Cards, Behaviour and Migration Records and the Red Bishop Bird Enquiry. Taking part in them, and if only by filling in a few Nest Record Cards for the most common species, will give you the satisfaction of having done something for the progress of ornithology in our area. On top of this, a very keen member this year has a chance to win a very valuable prize. Dr. J.E. Nel has offered a copy of "A New Dictionary of Birds" (cf. Review in "The Ostrich", March 1965, pg. 46) as a prize to the member who contributes most to projects this year.

Garden Birds Enquiry.

The Percy FitzPatrick Institute invites members to take part in the above enquiry. The following are the details of the scheme:

Where to do a Garden Bird Count.

Usually a GBC is done in a small well-defined area which can be reached easily each day by the observer. The area chosen need not be especially rich in bird-life: provided that, during some month of the year you can expect to record twenty or so species, a count would be worth doing. The area should be between a half and twenty acres - say a piece fifty yards square as the minimum. Typical areas are local parks, the grounds of hospitals, and large gardens.

What you do.

At least four times a week make a count of all the birds in the area and record them on a form which will be sent to you free of charge. These completed forms must be returned at the end of each month. It is important that the counts are made in the same way each day and best if they are done at the same time of the day. The most valuable GBC records will come from observers who count all the year round, but counts for periods of at least two months long will also be welcome. Every observer will receive a copy of the report in due course.

If you are interested, please write to the P.F. Institute of African Ornithology, U.C.T. Rondebosch.

Doves nest on wire support.

The above note by Mr. M.B. Markus in the latest Bokmakierie June 1965 corroborates Mr. Underhill's observation reported in

News Letter 76, pg 2. Mr. Peter Steyn drew my attention to the fact that he had published, in *Bokmakierie* April 1951 pg.36, an observation of Turtle Doves using the old nests of Cattle Egrets in the now defunct Strandfontein heronry. Some birds apparently like to be encouraged by means of a wire support for their nests. The photogenic Turtle Dove in my garden, about which I reported in News Letter 60, had also built its nest on a wire support; and two wire contraptions which I had put up under the eaves of my house have been used as nest supports by Mossies. So anyone trying to attract birds to his garden, should get busy with a few bits of wire.

African Jacana in our area.

Mr. David Blaker reports: On 13 May I was amazed to see an African Jacana on a farm dam about a mile east of Faure. It was possibly the same bird as the one reported a few weeks previously at Klavervlei. It seemed quite at home and was happily trotting about on the water-weed, there being no lilies available. The record is all the more surprising as there are a number of vleis nearby which appear to be far more suitable.

Miss N. Williams: On Sunday, 6 June at 2.30.p.m., at the Maitland end of the Black River, I saw what looked like a Stilt coming in to land; as it did so, it showed a flash of brown. On studying it through binoculars, I suddenly found I had something I had not seen before and not having "Roberts" with me, could not identify it immediately. But the colour pattern was easy to remember, bronzy brown back, white on both sides of face and neck and black streak over head. On Monday at 5.30, I found the bird again in exactly the same place and watched it for a couple of minutes. Without doubt it was an African Jacana. (I can confirm this as I also saw an African Jacana at the Black River on 12 June. Editor.)

Notes on Karroo Birds.

Prof: Winterbottom writes: My wife and I made a trip to Swellendam and the Klaarstroom area in April. Rain had fallen in both places before we got there and more fell during our stay, so the veld was green and the Karroo at its best.

As I have mentioned in this News Sheet before, there is some evidence that autumn rain on the Karroo stimulates some, at least, of the birds to breed, especially after a drought; and we got more evidence of this on the present trip, though the only actual nest we found was of a Laughing Dove. Nevertheless, the condition of the sex organs of a Speckled Coly, Pied Barbet, Red-eyed Bulbul, Bar-throated Apalis, Cape White-eye, Red-headed Finch and White-throated Seed-eater all indicate that they had at least begun to come into breeding condition; and the Coly had almost achieved it.

Not connected with the recent rain was our most exciting discovery - four White-backed Ducks, two with a brood of five Ducklings, on a weed-grown vlei near Zuurbrak, east of Swellendam. There is no previous record of this species from the district.

Other interesting birds seen included Ludwig's Bustard, which was quite common round Klaarstroom, we saw one party of eight together, Quail Finches in the Bontebok Park and Red-headed Finches on the farms Rondavel and Sleutelfontein - both first records for their districts; and a Brown-hooded Kingfisher along the river at Zeekoegat, far out in the Karroo.

These Karroo rivers, with their dense growth of Acacias, Rhus and other trees, fill much the same function for our South Coast birds as the gallery forests of the tropics do for the forest birds. In January, at Sleutelfontein, I saw a Boubou in this riverine growth, and other unexpected species for the Karroo include the Tchagra, the Cape Batis and the Bar-throated Apalis, all in this riverine bush, which was also alive with Fairy Flycatchers.

The first exciting bird we saw on the trip was an example of the reverse phenomenon, the invasion of the coastal belt by karroo forms. In this case it was the Ant-eating Chat, which we saw

just outside Somerset West.

On the same day we stopped for lunch at Storms Vlei and there we saw a pair of Lanners trying to catch an Alpine Swift. But fast as the Lanners were, the Swift was just as fast and the Falcons could never gain enough to make a proper stoop.

In the Breede River, at the Bontebok Park, we watched a pair of Black Ducks feeding. They were diving at the foot of a small rapid, I presume for water-weed attached to the stones.

Finally, there were the House Sparrows. We found them established at all four of the Karroo farms we visited; and at Matjiesfontein they swarmed. Indeed, they and the European Starlings were the most numerous and conspicuous birds there. Their only rival was the Little Swift and I suspected, though I wasn't able to be sure, that the wretched Sparrows had commandeered some of the Swifts' nests.

More European Sparrow Records.

On 10 October '64 one male seen at Malan's Hoogte by G.W. Bierman and G.J. Broekhuysen.

Middle of March 65 a pair at Strand seen by E. and R. Martin.

End of April 65 one seen at Klavervlei by N. Myburgh.

European Cuckoo in our area.

On reading in News Letter 77 that the European Cuckoo has been admitted to the Check List from the Appendix, Mrs. Broekhuysen draws attention to the fact that she heard the bird at Van der Stel Kraal on 2 September 1962; this observation was reported in News Letter 68, page 2. This shows the importance of having one or two witnesses at hand when recording a new species for our area. All the conditions for the admission of a new species to the Check List were given in News Letter 72, page 3.

Great Sandplover at Strandfontein Sewage Vleis.

While doing a routine count at Strandfontein, Prof: Winterbottom, his wife, and Mr. Blaker saw a single Great Sandplover on 20 January 1965. Though it was recorded from Cape Town long ago, recent records are only from Langebaan and Cape Infanta.

Spoonbills at Zeekoe Vlei Outlet.

Mr. A. Morris first saw 10 Spoonbills there in the early morning of 21 June. Some were observed there every morning between 21 and 27 June, the numbers varied from 10 to 18. The morning of 26 June was so misty that no birds could be seen, but in the afternoon 16 were present at Tamatie Vlei.

Roberts records the food as being water insects and locusts, but on one visit a Spoonbill caught a large frog which it killed and tenderised by beating it on the mud before eating it.

Cattle Egrets on the sea shore.

Mr. Ph. Tongue reports: On 26 June at Olifantsbosch (at the beach close to the ruins of the farm where there is always a mass of decaying kelp) I saw a pair of Cattle Egrets with the usual dozen or so of Little Egrets. This is the first time in about four years that I have seen them, and I noted that they do not appear in Mr. Middlemiss's list published a few years ago.

I think that the gulls were also unaccustomed to them because the Black-backed were diving at them, a thing they never do to the Little Egrets. And it may be my fancy, but I thought they appeared to be less accustomed to shore conditions, as they seemed to get tail to the wind more frequently than the Little Egrets, and get very ruffled.

Middlemiss's list also states that the Black-shouldered Kite is occasional there; this year, since March, I have seen one each

time, so perhaps there is now a resident.

Hamerkop feeding on the wing.

On 16 May Mr. Underhill watched at a farm dam near Durbanville where a patch of water weeds was extending across the middle of the water. There were a few Dabchicks, 4 Hartlaub Gulls as well as 12 Coots which had four nests either occupied or being built.

A Hamerkop which had been standing at the edge of the dam flew up and started feeding in a rather unusual way. Keeping head-on into a fairly stiff S.E. breeze, it hovered just above the water. By merely holding the wings fully extended, it obtained sufficient lift to remain airborne over one spot for several seconds; this allowed a peck or two at something on the weeds or on the surface of the water. Then with a slight movement of the wings it would rise a few inches, move forward and peck again. In this way it moved slowly over the weed-covered surface facing into the wind all the time. Whenever it attempted to touch down, the weeds could not support it and its feet just went under the water.

After a few minutes of feeding the Hamerkop settled on a coot's nest, but the irate owner hover-landed to the attack and drove it off. This was the signal for a concerted attack by the 4 Gulls which harassed the intruder furiously. The wind favoured aerial manoeuvres and they alternatively dived on their target from above and swooped in at water level. The Hamerkop, however, was quite unperturbed and carried on feeding. In a little more than ten minutes it had covered the whole weed-covered area. After a rest at the edge it repeated this feeding flight from the same starting point.

Distraction display of the Cape Turtle Dove.

Mr. Underhill writes: During November-December I kept a check on many nests of the Turtle Dove. Often the brooding bird had to be coaxed to leave, but then rocketed off the nest and flew away directly. On one occasion, however, I observed a definite attempt at distraction display. Late on the afternoon of 23 December a Dove flew from a nest and settled about twenty yards away in an open field and then put on a "broken wing" act. It hurried through the grass dragging outspread wings for at least 30 yards, pausing and looking back at intervals. The nest contained two eggs.

Nest Record Project: 1964 Report.

submitted by the organiser. Mr. Underhill.

During 1964 Club Members submitted 880 nest record cards, covering 96 species, and 41 colonial cards covering 18 species. Of these totals, 766 and 15 respectively appertain to the Club's area for the year under review; the remainder refer to other areas or previous years going back to 1950. I do feel, however, that some members have nesting records in their notebooks which have yet to be transcribed onto cards. To facilitate the recording of the data in the files of the FitzPatrick Institute, they are exhorted to do this as soon as possible, please. Cards for previous years are, of course, also acceptable.

Several noteworthy records were filed last year.

A nest record of the House Sparrow has at last come to hand; this from Plumstead was submitted by Mr. R.K. Schmidt. Also from him 12 cards for the White-rumped Swift and 6 for the Larger Striped Swallow were received; these were the only cards for the particular species mentioned.

Of interest are the records of the Olive Woodpecker at Somerset West and the Tchagra Shrike at Stormsvlei submitted by Mr. J. Martin and his assistants.

Miss E.B. Robinson reported a nest of the Sickle-winged Chat from the district of Hopefield.

An outstanding contribution to the project was made by

Mr. B. Rowlands. For 1963 he handed in 31 colonial cards giving details of 1876 nests. Some of these cards were for colonies at St. Lucia, Natal. During 1964, he concentrated on home territory and completed 13 cards covering 1259 nests. All eggs were measured.

I would like to record my thanks to the 43 members who contributed to the project during the year. The following submitted 20 or more cards:

A.R. Brown 30; Dr. G.J. Broekhuysen 25; E.R. Johannesson 29; Mrs. E. Martin 34; A. Morris 47; E. Middlemiss 169; J. Martin 33; R. Martin 38; Dr. J.W. Nel 20; S. Pringle 29; Miss C. Robinson 23; Miss E.B. Robinson 29; B. Rowlands 56; D.M. Skead 92; R.K. Schmidt 81; W.R. Siegfried 20; G.D. Underhill 167; M. Waltner 23; Prof: J.M. Winterbottom 34.

Prof. Winterbottom wrote in Newsletter 68: Most of our members are not really aware of all that can be got out of nest record cards if there are enough of them. But how many could be considered as being enough? Certainly not the number of cards filed in 1964 for the following common breeding species:

Cape Dikkop	9 cards	Fiscal Shrike	9 cards
Kittlitz's Plover	4	Bokmakierie	9
Crowned Plover	10	Cape White-eye	8
Blacksmith Plover	4	Malachite Sunbird	8
Red-capped Lark	2	Orange-br. Sunbird	9
Cape Thrush	2	Cape Canary	3

1961's total of 1348 nest record cards is the highest so far. Let us set a target of 3000 for 1965. This could easily be exceeded if all members recorded all nests found of all species throughout the nesting season.

The Check List of Birds of the S.W. Cape gives the usual nesting times of all our breeding species and is a most useful guide in this respect.

Lifts for Outings.

Members able to provide lifts for Outings as well as members requiring lifts are advised to contact Mrs. M. Winterbottom, 9. Alexandra Avenue, Orangezicht. Phone 3-5685.

Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology.

Field Course in Ornithology 1965.

The course will be held at De Hoop Wildlife Farm, Bredasdorp District from 20 September to 24 September.

For further details see "The Ostrich" June 1965. page 99.

Chairman's Report.

Annual General Meeting 1965.

During the past year the Committee met 8 times and the average attendance was 90%. So once again you have had this year an active Committee and Members have been keen and conscientious.

A rather varied number of topics was discussed during the various Committee meetings which cannot all be mentioned in this Report. I will just select some of the more important ones and mention them briefly:

(a). The Club was host to the S.A.O.S. during their Annual General Meeting and the Committee of the C.B.C. organised a programme and an excursion.

(b). The Committee discussed the possibility of the "speed boat" problem, so acute at Zeekoe Vlei, spreading to other lakes such as Princess Vlei. The Secretary of the C.B.C. was asked to write to the authorities concerned and ask for a total ban of power boats on Princess Vlei. The reply has been quite an encouraging one.

(c). The establishment of a bird sanctuary at Tamatievlei was discussed several times by the Committee. Eventually it was decided

to approach Mr, Archie Brown and ask for his advice. As the Zeekoe-vlei Sewage Disposal Works are very much in the process of development, there are big changes and it is felt the project of the establishment of a bird observatory at a suitable spot should be postponed for the present until conditions at the Disposal Works have become more settled.

(d). A suggestion from the P.F.I.A.O. to start the preparation of a "Guide to Bird Watching in the Cape" in which certain good birding spots would be mentioned, etc, was considered. The Committee Members generally felt that it would not be advisable to advertise these good birding spots too much as this could easily lead to spoiling them. Besides it was felt that anyone really interested in finding out could do so by contacting members of the Club.

(e). A suggestion by Dr. J.M. Winterbottom to extend the Club's area to more natural limits was carefully considered. The Committee eventually decided that the suggestion was a good one, but as a new revised Check List had just been published by the Club it was better to shelve the idea for a few years and to consider it again when a new revised check list had become necessary.

(f). Your Committee and especially the Hon: Secretary, Mr.Keith Morgan have played a very active and important role in the initial stages of the selection of a Provincial Bird. The end result has been that the Cape Robin has now been selected as the Provincial Bird of the Cape Province.

Evening Meetings.

During the period under review 10 evening meetings were held. Of these 8 were the ones mentioned on the Programme:-
June, G.J. Broekhuysen, films; July, R. Schmidt, Members' evening; August, G.J. Broekhuysen, European Swallow; October, R. Siegfried, Cattle Egret; November, J.M. Winterbottom, Vlei Counts; February, C.J. Uys, Birds in Sound and Colour; March, G. Lestrangle, Slides of S.A. Birds; April, J.M. Winterbottom, Trip to S. America.

Two meetings were special ones:
October, Miles North, Tape and Slides on Birds of East Africa and also in October, A.D. Forbes-Watson on the Smithsonian Expedition to Socotra Island.

As usual the evening meetings were well attended, especially those on which films and slides were projected.

Field Outings:

A total of 8 field outings were organised, of which 2 took the form of week-end camps. The areas visited were:
1). Viljoen's Pass Flower Reserve. 2). Mud River. 3). Hessekwa River area. 4). Klavervlei. 5). Kramat. 6). Malanshoogte. 7). Rietvlei 8). Schrywershoek.

Sub-Committee and Research Scheme Organisers.

The Club owes special thanks to Miss H. Troughton and Mrs. H. Chaundy for again providing us with tea after the evening meetings. I can assure these two good ladies that their efforts are very much appreciated.

Mrs. M. Winterbottom very kindly organised lifts during field outings and while she was away her duty was taken over by Mrs. M.E. Broekhuysen. We are very grateful to both of them.

Mr. Rudolf Schmidt again very ably edited the News Sheet and in addition contributed quite a bit to it. May I once again draw attention to the fact that an index to the first 30 issues of the News Sheet is now available and can be obtained from the Editor for little cost. Mr. Keith Morgan continued as Organiser of the Red Bishop Bird Enquiry Scheme. Dr. J.M. Winterbottom again looked after the Field Cards Scheme. Mr. S. Clarke continued as Recorder of Observations on Behaviour and Mr. Underhill was in charge of the Nest Record Scheme. Mr. John Perry was in charge of the Club's colour transparencies library. Dr. G.J. Broekhuysen continued as the Club's Recorder of Migratory Movements and keeper of the Ringing Records Index.

Membership.

The membership stands at present at 271. This is not bad but it can be better. May I take this opportunity to suggest to members who have taken friends repeatedly to the evening meetings and field outings to ask their friends to join the Club. I would also like to point out that there is a "family membership" which is meant for other members of a family of which one is a full member of the Club. The fact that one is a member of the C.B.C. does not mean that all members of one's family are also members of the Club. For an extra 50 cents they can also join.

In ending this Chairman's Report, I would like to thank my co-Committee members most warmly for their keen support and the considerable amount of time they have given to the Club. Especially our Hon: Secretary, Mr. Keith Morgan and our Hon: Treasurer, Mr. Stan Clarke deserve an extra pat on the shoulder for a job very well done.

It is a pleasure to thank the Head of the Department of Zoology Professor John Day and the Acting Head of the Department, Dr. G.J. Broekhuysen for allowing the Club to use the main lecture hall for the evening meetings. I would also like to thank the Director of the P.F.I.A.O. Dr. J.M. Winterbottom for allowing the use of the library of his institute for our after-meeting conversation and tea.

G.J. Broekhuysen

Chairman.