

# NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

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In this Newsletter you will find Mr. Underhill's report on the Nest Record Card Project for 1965. The increase by 386 cards over the 1964 total is most pleasing, and, with the organiser, I hope that 1966 will yield an even bigger crop.

### What every member should do.

I should like, however, to ask members not just to record as many nests as possible, but rather to pay several visits to the same nest whenever they have a chance to do so. This makes a nest record card much more valuable for working out clutch-sizes, nesting success etc. In his paper on the Red-knobbed Coot (Ostrich, June 1966) Prof. Winterbottom could use only 90 of 437 Coot nest records for estimating clutch-size; the clutches in the remaining 347 nests had not been confirmed by subsequent visits.

It is often disappointing to return to a nest and find it destroyed, but even such a negative record is valuable for calculating the nesting success. Many nests of a certain species have to be watched for prolonged periods during several years before reliable figures can be worked out. In Prof. Winterbottom's book "The Bird and its Environment" the table 6 on page 103 shows the Lesser Double-collared Sunbird as having the lowest annual increment of young birds with a nesting success of 25%. This figure was found after observations during two breeding seasons at Strandfontein and was based on 68 eggs producing 17 chicks. After four seasons I found that 90 eggs had produced 28 chicks, which raises the nesting success to 31%. This season will probably change the figure again and only after many more years will we

know whether this sunbird is really such an unsuccessful nester.

If you watch the same species for several years, you will get most interesting results. In 1965, for the first time after nine years of watching Larger Striped Swallows, I found a clutch consisting of five eggs, four of which hatched. Gill in "A first Guide to South African Birds" (1936) gives the clutch as 4 to 5, but Roberts states that only 3 to 4 eggs are laid by the Larger Striped Swallow. Up to 1965 I had had my private theory that clutches of 4 eggs were dependent on good food supply, as I had found such big clutches only at Philippi near a dairy farm. This theory went by the board because the 5-egg clutch, as well as another with 4 eggs, was laid at Plumstead far away from any dairy farm. The White-rumped Swifts also exploded my theory of big clutches depending on good food supply. Up to 1965 I had found only two 3-egg clutches of swifts, both at Philippi near the dairy farm, but in 1965 I found two 3-egg clutches at Plumstead and Wetton. My new theory is that it is the individual female and not the good food supply which produces big clutches.

Every member with a keen interest in birds can do a little bit of research which, according to David Lack, is "one of the most delightful of all pastimes". He goes on to say: "This pleasure is within the reach of all ornithologists, being easier technically, though harder morally, than most people think. Do not suppose that it is something which should nowadays be left to the professional, for in this field the amateur has as many advantages as the professional, though they are different advantages". (David Lack: Enjoying Ornithology. London 1965. page 14.)

### Birds of our Islands.

Professor Winterbottom writes: Far too little seems to have been put on record about the bird populations of the islands off our coast; and this is true even of the better known ones, Robben Island and Dassen Island. From what little has been published and from the C.B.C. records, the following is a list of species recorded from these two islands. (Birds whose names are followed by R or D were recorded only from Robben or Dassen Islands respectively, those unmarked were recorded from both these islands).

Jackass Penguin	Wandering Albatross	Mollymauk D
Giant Petrel R	Cape Hen D	Cape Pigeon R
Rosy Pelican D	Cape Gannet	White-breasted Cormorant
Cape Cormorant	Bank Cormorant D	Crowned CormorantD
Grey Heron	Little Egret	Cattle Egret R
Sacred Ibis	Egyptian Goose D	Yellow-billed Duck R
Black Oystercatcher	Turnstone	Ringed Plover D
White-fronted Plover	Kittlitz's Plover	Grey Plover R
Crowned Plover	Curlew R	Whimbrel R
Cape Dikkop R	Antarctic Skua R	Black-backed Gull
Grey-headed Gull	Hartlaub's Gull	Common Tern D
Kerguelen Tern D	Swift Tern R	Damara Tern R
American Purple Gallinule D		Rock Pigeon D
Cape Turtle Dove R	Laughing Dove R	Cape Colly R
Cape Bulbul R	Familiar Chat R	Cape Robin R
Fiscal Flycatcher R	Cape Wagtail	Fiscal Shrike
Bokmakierie R	European Starling	Cape White-eyeR
Malachite Sunbird R	Cape Sparrow	

Have any of our members additional records which would help to round out these lists?

### Some unseasonal and some unusual records.

Mr. MacLeod reports: A nest of a Bully Seedeater with 3 eggs and a nest of a Cape Canary with 2 eggs were found at Klaver Vlei on 25 June, 1966.

On 29 January 1965 Nico Myburgh and I caught 73 European Swallows at Alderman's Vlei, Firgrove. Two of these birds have since been recovered in Russia.

On 11 June 1966 at Melkkamer, Bredasdorp, Dr. Uys saw 3 European Swallows with long tail streamers.

Mr. Lockhart reports having seen the following birds flying over his garden at Ridge Acres, Stellenbosch Road, 3½ miles from Somerset West: 3 European Storks on 17 February and a Cape Vulture on 30 May, 1966, the first vulture to be seen by him there in 13 years.

On 13 February, near his home, he observed an albino Crowned Guinea Fowl in a flock of 40 Guinea Fowls. The albino was very light grey in colour, appearing almost white.

On 23 June he observed, in his garden, a Fairy Flycatcher, the first he ever saw at Ridge Acres. After returning from his holiday

he was most pleased to see a Fairy Flycatcher again in his garden on 15 and 16 July although the warm sunny weather of June had changed to cold and cloudy conditions.

Mr. R.D. Mew, Somerset West, was lucky to see a male Black Cuckoo-Shrike. This bird is very rarely seen; MacLeod and Murray: The Birds of the Hottentots Holland, Ostrich June 1952, record only one female which visited a garden in Somerset West in July 1937. Mr. Mew saw the bird on 10 July on a tree beside a reed-filled and well-sheltered dam, and again near the same place on 16 July. He had a very good view of it, the plumage was a very glossy black with a hint of blue and a well-defined yellow tear-shaped patch at the shoulder was very noticeable.

Mr. G. Wright, the Ranger in charge at Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve, reports that 7 White Storks appeared on the Kommetjies-gift section of the Reserve on 4 April 1966. This is a new record for the Reserve. The birds were foraging in veld which had been cut by the Bushcutter. Mr. Wright also reports that several pelicans have been haunting Circles Vlei and Die Mond for some days.

During a routine count of Riet Vlei on 24 November 1965, Prof. Winterbottom observed the following birds of note:

14 African Spoonbills

1 Spotted Crake

1 or more Grey-backed Finch-Larks (first record for Peninsula area)

On the previous day at "Tamatie Vlei" his wife and he estimated the number of Greater Flamingo present at 2,000, an "all-time high" for this vlei. He also noted many Little Stints on the newly gravelled road between that vlei and vleis 7, 19 and 20.

On 22 May 1966 Mr. C. Gow observed a Little Egret Walking on shale reefs exposed at low tide at Melkbosstrand. The bird was seen to capture a Klipfish 4 to 5 inches long from a rock pool and swallow it with much difficulty while being harassed by a Hartlaub's Gull. (Little Egrets are often seen along the sea shore, but there are no records of what they catch.)

On 1 March 1966 along the national road between Albertinia and Mossel Bay, Miss L. Heine of Plumstead, saw about 80 European Storks in a field. Among these she noticed what she was sure to be 3 young birds, they were resting in the grass, only necks and somewhat woolly heads were visible, their beaks shorter than those of the adults. (These might be the young from a nest of European Storks recently reported from that area. During a recent visit to the Giants Castle Reserve in the Drakensberg I was told that a pair of European Storks had successfully bred there in 1964 or 65.)

#### Aberrant colour variety of the Southern Black-backed Gull.

While camping on the sea-coast near Plettenberg Bay in early January 1966, Mr. D. Pelteret watched a Black-backed Gull which daily visited the site. This bird showed a regular-shaped white patch on the primaries at the front edge of the top of each of the wings.

This agrees with the description and sketch of such a gull published in The Ostrich, March 1966, p. 56. The interesting question is: Are there several such abnormally coloured gulls around our coast or was it the same bird that moved from Port Elizabeth to Plettenberg Bay?

European Sparrow at Pearly Beach, Bredasdorp District.

Mr. Underhill spent the last week of April 1966 at Pearly Beach. In occupation of the camp site, a group of six bungalows overlooking the sea, were three European Sparrows, a male and two females. They were in evidence throughout the day and appeared to roost under the corrugated asbestos roofing. Should any member visit Mr. Puren's camp, would they please check and report any additions to these pioneers.

Check List of Table Mountain Birds.

Mr. Tongue suggests the compilation of a list of bird species occurring on Table Mountain above the building line, with the stream running down Hout Bay Valley as a southern boundary, the other boundaries might be the De Waal Drive - Rhodes Avenue - Victoria Road line. He thinks that such a list would have to be a general list, not one confined to any particular habitats, though these could usefully be noted. Such a list could be roneoed and made available to the Visitors' Advice Bureau.

Project Prize for 1965.

The copy of "A new Dictionnary of Birds" offered by Dr. J.E. Nel as a prize to the member who contributed most to projects (cf. News Letter 78), was awarded to Mr. P.S. Lockhart of Somerset West.

Chairman's Report.

(for the year ending 30 May 1966)

During the year the Committee met eight times and the average attendance at these meetings was 83 % which is very satisfactory. It certainly is an indication that the Committee Members took their duties seriously.

During these Meetings a large variety of topics were discussed and only some can be mentioned in this Report.

1) The Cape Bird Club was offered the use of a cottage at Schrywershoek for a limited period and the proviser that the Club should help with restoration. Although this offer was rather tempting, the Committee eventually decided not to make use of it because of costs involved and insufficient security. Moreover the cottage belonged to the person who has obtained a long-term lease and intends to start a salt-winning plant in the most southern part of the Langebaan Lagoon and the Committee felt that it would be better for the Club not to be under any obligation to him.

2) The Committee discussed and planned an Exhibition and a film show to be organised by Mr. Peter Lor and Dr. J.E. Nel in the Library at Stellenbosch. The aim of the Exhibition and the filmshow was to advertise the Club's activities and to try to enroll new members. Some of the Committee Members assisted Mr. Lor and Dr. Nel. Although a lot of work went into this, the results were rather disappointing.

3) On the initiative of one of the Committee Members and after discussion, the City Council was approached with the request to fence in the Zeekoevlei Outlet. This outlet at particular times attracts considerable numbers and quite a variety of interesting waders. The Committee's request met with success and the outlet is now fenced in and only accessible to Permit holders.

- 4) The Committee played an important part in assisting the Provincial Authorities to come to the selection of a Provincial Bird. The Knysna Loerie was eventually selected.
- 5) The fate of the Potberg Cape Vulture breeding colony in the Bredasdorp District was discussed and certain recommendations were made. As a result, the colony has been visited by biologists several times. Thus information has been gathered on the size of the colony, and a number of young birds have been ringed. Attempts are being made to have this rather unique Colony proclaimed a reserve.
- 6) As the Cape Bird Club was host to the S.A.O.S. on the occasion of their A.G.M., the Committee was involved in considerable organising activities. Main items were the dinner at St. James' Hotel which was attended by 86 people, the Saturday Evening Meeting and the Excursion on the following Sunday.

To everybody's satisfaction everything went smoothly.

#### Excursions and Evening Meetings

During the period under consideration 13 Excursions and 10 Evening Meetings were held. All were very well attended.

#### Membership

The membership of the Cape Bird Club stands at 290 which is an improvement on last year's figure. It should not be too difficult to pass the 300 mark this coming year.

#### Sub-committees and Scheme Organisers

The Club once again owes very special thanks to Miss H. Troughton, ably assisted by Miss K. Irish for organising the tea after the evening meetings, and also for doing the catering for the teas during the Annual General Meeting of the S.A.O.S. We all realise what a self-sacrificing job this is and we are extremely grateful.

We are also grateful to Mrs. J. Sawkins for all the trouble she has so cheerfully accepted during the past year, obtaining the necessary permits for the many different areas visited during the excursions.

I take this opportunity to thank her on behalf of all of us who enjoyed these excursions.

Mr. R.K. Schmidt again edited the News Sheet which maintained its excellent standard. Mr. John Perry was once more in charge of the Club's Slide Collection. Mr. H.K. Morgan continued to act as Organiser of the Red Bishop Bird Enquiry Scheme. Prof. J.M. Winterbottom was again in charge of the Field Card Scheme, and Mr. G. Underhill looked after the Nest Record Card Scheme.

Dr. G.J. Broekhuysen acted as distributor of Rings and was responsible for the filing of the completed Ringing Forms. He also collected the information, submitted by members on the movements of migratory species.

#### Prize for the most active non-professional Member

This year Dr. J.E. Nel has made available a prize consisting of the recently published "A New Dictionnary of Birds" edited by Sir Landsborough Thomson to award to that Member of the Club who during the past year has contributed most to the different investigation Schemes, and who is not a professional ornithologist.

I can assure Dr. Nel that his extremely generous gesture is very much appreciated by all of us.

In ending this report it is a very great pleasure to thank my fellow Committee Members for their enthusiasm and cooperation which

they always showed and which has made the task of the Chairman a very light one.

Further I wish to record the Club's sincere thanks to the Head of the Department of Zoology, Professor John Day for allowing us to have our Evening Meetings in the lecture hall of the Department of Zoology. Finally our thanks also go to Prof. J.M. Winterbottom for allowing the Club the use of the Library of the Sir Percy FitzPatrick Institute for a final chat and a cup of tea after the Meetings.

G.J. Broekhuysen.

Report on the Nest Record Card project for 1965.

During 1965 1307 nest record cards (2 colonial cards included) were submitted by Club Members. It is pleasing to report that this considerably exceeds the previous year's total of 921 cards.

Repeatedly, during the past ten years, the organisers of this project have stressed that, to be of real value, a large number of nesting records for each species is required. Hundreds of cards, even for the most common species such as doves and sparrows, are still required. The Total number of cards for some of the species with easily found nests are shown below; the previous year's figures are given in brackets for comparison.

Dabchick	11	( 2)	Cape Robin	50	(36)
Yellowbill	17	(12)	Fan-tail Cisticola	30	( 8)
Cape Wigeon	6	( 4)	Levaillant's Cisticola	41	(33)
Cape Shoveller	30	(28)	Karoo Prinia	73	(35)
Cape Dikkop	16	( 9)	Fiscal Shrike	28	( 9)
Red-knobbed Coot	48	(81)	Bokmakierie	13	( 9)
Black-winged Stilt	15	(17)	Cape White-eye	17	(10)
White-fronted Sandplover	47	(29)	Orange-breasted Sunbird	11	( 9)
Kittlitz Sandplover	16	( 6)	Lesser Double-coll.Sunbird	26	(21)
Crowned Plover	37	(11)	Cape Sugarbird	15	(15)
Blacksmith Plover	15	( 4)	Red Bishop	23	(10)
Cape Turtle Dove	91	(70)	Cape Bishop	18	( 3)
Laughing Dove	86	(46)	Common Waxbill	16	( 4)
Cape Wagtail	22	(19)	Cape Sparrow	67	(51)
Tawny Pipit	24	(32)	Cape Canary	13	( 2)

The rarer species, however, were not neglected; 1964's records covered 96 species; during the year under review 124 species were represented. Here are a few of the more notable contributions:

Mr. Peter Steyn, during his short vacation at the Cape, submitted 79 cards. This much appreciated contribution included seven cards for the Whiskered Tern - one of these cards gave details of 21 nests. On another 2 cards 32 nests of the Black-backed Gull were recorded. There were 5 cards for the Ethiopian Snipe, four of which were submitted by Master J.S. Pringle.

Mr. R.K. Schmidt submitted 20 of the 21 cards referring to the White-rumped Swifts. He also recorded two nests of the European Sparrow. Mr. R.I.G. Attwell and Mr. W.R. Siegfried submitted a colonial card covering 32 nests of the Cape Vulture nesting on the Potberg, district of Bredasdorp.

Mr. A.R. Brown recorded 7 nests of the Red-capped Lark.

Mr. P.S. Lockhart found the nest of the White-winged Seed-eater at Somerset West; it contained 3 young and 1 infertile egg.

Two nests of the Cinnamon-breasted Warbler were found. One card was submitted by Messrs. John and Robert Martin and the other by Mr. Allan Morris on behalf of the Cape Bird Club. These are the first records of this species breeding in the South-West Cape.

Fifty-five members contributed to the Project; thirty of these handed in less than 10 cards. Let me hasten to add that their record cards were much appreciated.

The following submitted more than 10 cards:

Messrs. R.I.G. Attwell, 16; D. Blaker, 66; A.R. Brown, 28; Dr. G.J. Broekhuysen, 26; Messrs. D. Findlay, 29; E.R. Johanneson, 48; G.K. Lestrangle, 36; P.S. Lockhart, 30; J. Macleod, 13; Mrs. E. Martin, 73; Messrs. J. Martin 81; R. Martin 73; D. MacKenzie 12; A. Morris 63; E. Middlemiss, 141; Johan Myburgh 12; Nico Myburgh 32; J.S. Pringle 105; R.K. Schmidt 96; W.R. Siegfried 82; P. Steyn 93; G.D. Underhill 229; M. Waltner 31; Prof. J.M. Winterbottom 45; Miss Norah Williams 20.

I would like to thank all members who participated in the project during 1965 and express the hope that one and all will record every nest found during the coming nesting season.

G.D. Underhill.