

# NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

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At the last Evening Meeting of the Cape Bird Club on 11th November Professor Winterbottom invited keen members to an outing at Schrywershoek, Langebaan Lagoon. Here is his report about it:

During the week-end 9th-11th December, The Percy FitzPatrick Institute, in co-operation with members of the Cape Bird Club, made an experiment in the netting of waders at night. Prof. Winterbottom, Mr. Blaker and Mr. Underhill (who has helped in so many Institute enterprises from vlei counts to the boring job of cataloguing Nest Record Cards) went down on the afternoon of the 9th to make a preliminary trial and were joined on the 10th by eight other club members, among the most hard-working of whom was junior member Stephen Pringle. The results of these strenuous efforts (Mr. Blaker had, virtually, no sleep for 36 hours and Mr. Underhill very little more) were more profitable in showing us what we had still to learn than in what was actually accomplished. The total number of waders ringed was 19, of which 12 were actually caught in daylight on the 11th. Moreover, as the subjoined list shows, disproportionately few of the Curlew Sandpiper, which far outnumbered all the other species put together, entered our nets. The breakdown, by species, of the total is:

Terek Sandpiper	7
Turnstone	4
Curlew Sandpiper	3
White-fronted Sandplover	3
Grey Plover	1
Sanderling	1

Particular attention is drawn to the Terek Sandpiper, a species which has probably never been ringed before in South-Africa - or anywhere else.

If the main result of the exercise was somewhat disappointing (though we hope that what we have learnt will enable us to plan a more successful assault next time), there were a number of side-issues which were not. A single net erected in the Standveld behind the salt marshes caught 20 birds, including 6 Cape Bulbuls and 14 other species. The rare Black-tailed Godwit was identified on the 10th by Prof. Winterbottom and Mr. R.K. Schmidt; and on the return journey, an Ant-eating Chat, a karoo species whose extension of range southwards has been a feature of recent years, was seen between Darling and Mamre.

The warm co-operation of Bird Club members is gratefully acknowledged and it is clear that the organisation of enterprises

of this sort fulfills a definite demand among the more serious amateur students of our birds. We look forward to continuing collaboration of this sort, to the enrichment of ornithology - and of the experience of Club members.

Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Pelteret saw two or three Ant-eating Chats near the same place on 21 December as well as two White Storks, of the latter species 22 had been seen near Mamre by Mr. Clarke and me. (cf. Ant-eating Chat in The Ostrich March 1966).

#### European and other Swallows

Mr. Ferguson has the impression that the European Swallows have tended to reach the Peninsula very late this year and seem to be scarce. Have any of our local members also felt this?

Prof. Winterbottom recorded three European Swallows at Vissershok on 14 August and Mr. Siegfried reports European Swallows at Paarl Sewage Farm on 18 August; Pearl-breasted at De Hoop on 21 August and Larger Striped Swallow at Stellenbosch on 24 August.

#### Black Cuckoo Shrike and Swee Waxbill

After Mr. Mew who reported the Black Cuckoo Shrike first (cf. Newsletter 81), Mr. Siegfried reports seeing a male at Stellenbosch on 24 July, this is his first record of this species in the south-western Cape; and Mr. Lockhart saw a female Black Cuckoo Shrike near Somerset West on 28 August.

During July and August Mr. Siegfried often observed small parties and pairs of Swee Waxbills, sometimes together with Common Waxbills, on the lawn of his garden at Stellenbosch. All his records of Swees in the Stellenbosch district are for the winter months. Mr. Perry saw a pair of Swee Waxbills in his garden at Pinelands on 16 April, but thinks that they were escapees from an aviary. I wonder whether the male Golden Bishop Bird in full breeding plumage which I saw among a flock of Red Bishops at Philippi on 21 December, was also an escapee.

#### African Quail at Rondebosch

Mr. Seamus Wilson found an African Quail dead just off the Rondebosch freeway on 21 September. It appears to be the first Peninsula record for September. It was given to the FitzPatrick Institute and the skin was prepared.

#### Gannet ringed in 1953

Mr. Wetmore, a student, picked up a ring on the False Bay shore in mid-August 1966. It was from a Gannet ringed at Malgas Island on 3 April 1953. This is the oldest recorded ringed bird in South Africa.

Birds frequenting the Intertidal Zone  
(cf. Ostrich March 1966)

At Melkbosch, on the open beach north of the houses, Mr. Tongue saw a Lesser Double-collared Sunbird prospecting along the dry kelp at the highest water mark, on 24 July.

Another bird, although not observed on the shore of the Cape Peninsula, could be added to Mr. D.M. Skead's List: the Giant Kingfisher which Mr. Clarke and I watched fishing successfully in a rocky pool near Hermanus on 6 September 1964.

Disappearance of Cape Wagtail

Although this report is from outside our area, it is important as similar observations may be made elsewhere. Mr. Marius Verster, 117 Donkin Street, Beaufort West, reports on 26 November 1966:

Within almost a matter of months the familiar Cape Wagtail or Kwikkie appears to have entirely disappeared from these surroundings and there has been a marked increase in the activities of Sparrows - some say these are of a different species of "immigrant" which has crowded out the indigenous variety.

However that may be (and the possibility of poisoning through lawn insecticides etc. cannot be discounted either) it is an alarming thought that the endearing little wagtail may be threatened with extinction over perhaps a wider area than may be suspected at the moment.

The Gull Colony at Swartklip - A lost paradise?

Many members will have read the article "Peace-until now" in the Cape Argus, December 9, 1966. The text, accompanying the beautiful photos, says: "The gulls have lived in peace there for many generations - until the recent opening of the new coast road to Swartklip. Now, for the first time, sightseers are disturbing their privacy. The more callous among them steal the gulls' eggs from their nests. Others throw stones at them." A friend of mine, who visited the colony on the Sunday after the publication of this article was shocked to see the senseless destruction of eggs and young carried out by some of the many visitors. In his book "Halcyon Days" (1963) Prof. C.J. Uys could still say: Although Swartklip is not more than 23 miles from Cape Town, it is for practical purposes inaccessible, and the breeding ledges can only be reached by a four-wheel drive jeep or by footslogging many weary miles over beaches of fine sand. No doubt this relative isolation ensures the existence of a breeding colony so close to a major city."

Certainly any city should be proud of having such an oasis of wild life as an attraction for visitors, and something should be done to keep it undisturbed in spite of the new road. In the booklet "Protected Birds of the Cape Province" the Southern Black-backed Gull is shown, the Department of Nature Conservation should therefore be able to take action. A fence round the not very extensive breeding area would give some protection at least and would not prevent any visitor from watching the gulls soaring above the cliffs in a strong wind - a magnificent sight without which the False Bay coast would have lost some of its charm.

### Whiskered Terns at Philippi

Since the beginning of October about ten Whiskered Terns were regularly seen fishing at Jacobs Vlei Philippi. As they often flew towards a nearby vlei where I had seen four Whiskered Terns in November 1963, I checked there and on 12 November 1966 I found two nests containing three and one egg respectively, on this vlei, which is overgrown with Wateruintjies (*Aponogeton distachyus*). Both these nests were found destroyed the next day, not even the birds were seen any more. Fortunately they returned and on 19 November three pairs were busy building nests in the same vlei. On 20 November Messrs. S. Clarke and A. Morris also saw the birds on their nests. To avoid attracting the attention of children I never checked the contents of these nests which had increased to five on 4 December, on that day I watched all ten Terns attacking a few Hartlaub Gulls which were flying over the vlei quite low. On 7 December the water-level of the vlei had sunk very much. When I returned on 12 December in order to see whether any chicks had hatched I found the vlei practically dry and to my great disappointment could not discover a trace of any eggs or young, the adult birds had also left the area.

### Ringling Report (1 July '65 - 30 June '66)

Dr. Broekhuysen reports: During the above period a total of 2533 birds consisting of 56 different species, were ringed by members of the Cape Bird Club., that is 981 more than during the previous year. A total of 14 people ringed birds (counting the Percy FitzPatrick Institute as one person). Ten of these ringed more than 20 birds each. They were:

Jack MacLeod	1955	Dirk Uys	89
Nico Myburgh	1581	David Blaker	89
John Martin	953	Rudolf Schmidt	63
Mrs. Knipe	456	E. Ashforth	57
Archie Brown	260	G.J. Broekhuysen	42

The 2011 European Swallows form the highlight and the members of the different teams which ringed these birds in their roosting places can be congratulated on a very fine effort. The number of Greater Striped Swallows ringed (26) is rather disappointing as it is so easy to catch these birds when they sleep in their nests during the night.

Ringers please note: On the Ringing Return Card the number under which a bird is listed in "Roberts Birds of South Africa" should be put next to the name of the bird ringed. (European Swallow 493).

### Look-out Point at Rondevlei Bird Sanctuary

The Advisory Panel of the African Wildfowl Enquiry wishes to draw the attention of the public to the existence of this Look-out Point on the road between Ronde and Zeekoe vleis, which offers an excellent opportunity for watching vlei birds.

### "Anting" Behaviour of Cape Bulbul

On 12 July Mr. Siegfried observed two bulbuls at Stellenbosch in a Syringa tree (*Melia*) - bulbuls are partial to the

poisonous (to humans) berries. The birds were about 18 in. apart on the same branch 16 ft. above ground. One was perched normally, seemingly watching the other indulging in unusual behaviour. This bird was squatting low on the branch with its wings partly and the tail completely spread out; all the contour feathers were raised and ruffled. The bird was quivering and slowly gyrating its head and shoulders; the beak was held wide open. These motions continued for a full minute before the "normal" bird flew off - probably as a result of my close APPROACH - to be followed by the other one.

Mr. Siegfried would be pleased to hear from members who have information which would add to this apparent "anting" behaviour.

#### A strange fostermother

Dr. Millard's son, Peter, has a varied collection of pets, including Bantams, budgies and a domestic duck with a brood of downy young, all of which live in a large aviary in her garden. A short while ago Peter found a young thrush, fallen from its nest, and, with much devoted care, has succeeded in raising it by hand. Now that this bird is starting to feed for itself, it has joined Peter's other pets in the aviary where it has formed a curious attachment. Each evening when the duck assembles her offspring for bed, they are joined by the young thrush, which also spends the night, sleeping with the ducklings, within the warm shelter of her feathers. (reported by Mrs. Rowan).

#### Report on the Cape Bird Club Field Cards by Prof. Winterbottom.

The total number of completed cards in the files to date is 4,756. Major contributors during the year, in addition to the Organiser, have been Messrs. P.S. Lockhart, G.D. Underhill, R.K. Schmidt, H.K. Morgan and D. Blaker.

Of the 4756 cards, 803 are unallocated as to habitats. Habitats for which most cards exist are:

Permanent Vleis	500
Temporary Vleis	434
Coastal Macchia	434
Macchia	404
Town Gardens	263
Pastures	249
Wattles	184
Strandveld	135
Lagoons	132
Rocky Shore	122
Offshore	113
Sandy Shore	112
Coastal Renosterbosveld	105

There are fewer than 100 cards for any other habitat, though Grain Fields reach 97.

The cards for Macchia, Coastal Macchia, Coastal Renosterbosveld and Dense Protea have been used by the Organiser for a paper now in the press in The Ostrich; and three other papers based on the cards are in MS. awaiting publication.

Attention has been paid recently to distribution by Districts by months. 129 species have now been recorded every month in one or more Districts, including several migrants such as the Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Greenshank, Common, Sandwich and White-winged Black Terns and the European Swallow.

The Cape Turtle Dove and the Mossie have been recorded in every month in 13 Districts and the Fiscal in 12.

Among the habitats for which we badly need more cards are Vineyards, Orchards, Sea Cliffs, Salt Pans, Oak Woods and Gum Plantations. We also badly need more cards for the Vanrhynsdorp District.

In conclusion, I should like to thank all those who have sent in cards during the year and urge them, and others, to send in even more cards in 1966-67.

The Editor of the Newsletter wishes to thank all those who contributed in 1966 and wishes good birding to all members in 1967. Would anyone who spots a colour-ringed Lesser Double-collared Sunbird please report date and place.

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