

CAPE BIRD CLUB : KAAPSE VOËLWAARNEMERSKLUB

NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

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The "Clean Cape Association" has approached the Cape Bird Club for support. According to its Constitution the objects of the association are: (a) To stir the pride of inhabitants in the appearance of their cities' and towns' streets, their homes, their vacant lots, their buildings, public places, parks and countryside.

This is a most laudible aim which, I am sure, all our members would like to support. As bird-watchers we spend much of our leisure time out of doors and love the unspoilt veld. We also notice, however, that the most lovely places often become an eyesore owing to the litter left by careless campers or picnickers. We should therefore try to help the above association. Anyone can become a member by paying an annual subscription of not less than R 1. Further information can be obtained from the Honorary Secretary of the Association: Mr. R.M. Tait, P.O. Box 814, Cape Town.

SWALLOW RINGING.

The editorial of the latest "Bokmakierie", (March 1967) expresses doubts about the usefulness of further ringing of European Swallows. Until the experts give their answers to the questions raised, it can be stated that the ringers of the Cape Bird Club have collected most interesting information about the European Swallow. Mr. Archie Brown, who can be called the pioneer of swallow-ringing at the Cape, obtained several recovery records in Russia and he caught most of the birds on which Prof. Broekhuysen and Brown's paper on the moulting pattern of European Swallows wintering near Cape Town is based. (Ardea 1963). The members of the Somerset West Ringing Team produced the proof that a European Swallow can fly from Faure to Russia in 34 days (cf. Newsletter 76) and they still add to our knowledge about this common migrant whose survival in great numbers is also threatened by "The Hand of Man" spraying insecticides. Mr. J. MacLeod reported only recently about his ringing at Bredasdorp, together with Mr. Brown: "During a second visit to Melkkamer Farm (24 Febr. - 6 March) we ringed 1 Pearl-breasted, 8 Larger Striped, 15 White-throated and a further 786 European Swallows. Two of the latter carried British rings, making four in a total of 1372 swallows handled on this farm.

Six of the European Swallows had bloated ticks on them, three had them on the throat, one on the crown of the head and two on the nape of the neck.

We also caught and ringed three Paradise Flycatchers and a Willow Warbler, but unfortunately lost an Oriole which hit the mist net and bounced off. At Melkkamer the birds



come to bathe and drink at a small, tree-enclosed reservoir near the homestead."

At Klaver Vlei, on 14 January 1967, Mr. MacLeod caught a White-eye which he had ringed near the same place on 4 February 1962, nearly five years before.

BIGAMY OF CAPE SPARROW.

Mr. Underhill reports: " On 27 November 1966 I noticed one male and two females lining a nest in the power lines under the eaves of a house at Mowbray. This, I thought, will be a good opportunity to check, whether, in a case like this, the breeding cycle of the females is synchronised. Would two eggs appear in the nest each day? I was too late though, as on the 28th there were already eight eggs in the nest. On the 30th the nest was still being lined but the total number of eggs was still 8. On eight December all the eggs, except one which contained a dead embryo, had hatched. Throughout the nestling period the three adults fed the young, at times queuing up on the electric wires to enter the nest with food. At the final check on 19 December the nesting-chamber was packed with feathered nestlings -- how they survived is a mystery. Similar cases of three adults at a nest were reported in Newsletters 64 and 65."

On 22 January 1967 Mr. Underhill saw an albinistic White-throated Seedeater which was white on the head (except for one dark gray feather), neck, mantle and breast, but the abdomen, coverts and primaries of the wings, rump and tail were the normal colour. It was feeding and flying with a normally plumaged White-throated Seed-eater.

DISTRACTION DISPLAY OF LAUGHING DOVE.

On 10 November 1966 Mr. Underhill climbed a ladder to check the nest of a dove in a bougainvillaea growing close to the road in a garden at Mowbray. The brooding bird dropped to the pavement and, feigning injury, tripped and fluttered along the pavement until it disappeared round the corner. He descended, walked to the corner and found the dove, standing quite still, about 2 yards away. It immediately resumed its display, dropped into the gutter and, beating its wings on the tarmac, crossed the road and continued on the pavement for some twenty yards before flying away.

Has any member observed such behaviour in a habitat other than gardens and paved roads?

LARGE NUMBER OF FLAMINGOES AT LANG VLEI.

Dr. J. Grindley reports: "1450 flamingoes were counted on the Lang Vlei Salt Pan between Elands Bay and Lamberts Bay by my two research assistants and me on 5 January 1967. About 700 birds were spread over the pan feeding and the remaining 750 were gathered in dense flocks near the mouth. Both the Greater and Lesser Flamingo were present, but it was not possible to estimate their relative abundance. Dense concentrations of filamentous algae and large numbers of brackish water snails were present in the pan. The area was searched for signs of nesting, but there was no evidence of nests anywhere."

A NEW BIRD SPECIES FOR OUR AREA?

Mr. Lockhart, Somerset West, reports seeing a Yellow-throated Flycatcher (Roberts No. 671) at the Cascades Tea-room Betty's Bay, on 1 April, 1967. He observed the bird for about ten minutes, noting the eye-stripe, the brown on the head as well as the yellow throat and under tail-coverts. It did not skulk and behaved like a Spotted or a Dusky Flycatcher. It was later joined by a small flock of White-eyes and they all flew off together. This agrees with the description given in Roberts where this bird is stated to be found at Swellendam. Mr. Lockhart asks all members to look out for the Yellow-throated Flycatcher at Betty's Bay. A species, new to our area will be accepted for the Check List only if there was either a specimen or a recognisable photograph or if the bird had been identified by at least two members of the Records Committee.

The Betty's Bay Nature Reserve is certainly a good place for bird-watching as Mr. Martin observed two Willow Warblers there on 2 April 1967 and Mr. Pelteret saw an Olive Woodpecker there on 27 November 1966. The 1963 Check List does not record these two species for the Caledon district.

ROOST RECORD CARDS.

Roost record cards have been introduced as a new S.A.O.S. Scheme. Interested members can get supplies from the Honorary Secretary or the Percy FitzPatrick Institute.

UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR OF CLAPPER LARKS AND SWALLOWS.

Prof. Winterbottom reports from a visit to the Bontebok National Park in Swellendam towards the end of February 1967: "Nothing was heard and very little seen of the Clapper Lark during the daylight hours. But well after sunset on the first night, when most of what light there was came from the moon, at least two birds were heard clapping. I have often heard them performing early in the morning before sunrise, but this is the first time I have known them to clapper by moonlight."

The second observation relates to the Pearl-breasted Swallow. Two of these birds flew alongside the car, crossing in front of it from time to time and obviously using it as a prey-scaring agent. This happened on two different afternoons.

BLACK CUCKOO SHRIKE AND SWEE WAXBILL.

With reference to this heading, in Newsletter 82, Mr. R. Liversidge from Kimberley wrote: "Memories are short or records incomplete. The Black Cuckoo Shrike has been seen at Kirstenbosch and on one occasion many Club members saw it; Bernard Wagner picked it up first. Swee Waxbills too used to occur frequently at Kirstenbosch."

This is true, and both these records are mentioned in the 1963 Check List. But as these two species have not been noticed so far south west recently, new observations may point to another extension of their range and should be recorded. In the 1930's the Swee Waxbills even bred at Constantia. During the weekend 3rd to 5th September 1966, Miss N. Williams observed some ten Swee Waxbills behind the Bains Kloof Hotel. Mr. R. Mew saw two female Swee Waxbills in the Helderberg Nature Reserve, Somerset West on 30 March, 1967.

Many members of the Cape Bird Club do not seem to read "The Ostrich" or do not possess a Check List (Obtainable from the Honorary Secretary for 40 cents). After Professor Broekhuysen published his article about the Ant-eating Chat in the Darling-Mamre area (Ostrich March 1966), records of this bird from

north of Darling can hardly be called news, whereas records from farther south are of course most interesting. The fact that Mr. P. Lockhart and Mr. R. Mew heard Sombre Bulbuls calling repeatedly in the Diepgat Gorge in the Hottentots Holland Mountains at Lourensford on 5 April 1967 really makes news, as the 1963 Check List states of the Sombre Bulbul "inexplicably absent from Hottentots Holland". The distribution of this bird sets a task for all birdwatchers in our area, as the Check List records it from only four districts: Bredasdorp, Caledon, Peninsula, Swellendam.

I should like to remind prospective contributors to the Newsletter that usually only observations within our area are reported.

CHANGE IN THE RATIO OF LAUGHING TO TURTLE DOVES.

Miss E.M. Darling, Molteno Road, Oranjezicht, reports: "Over the last six or seven years our garden has been visited regularly by 30 - 40 Laughing Doves for whom seed is provided. Never have we seen a Turtle Dove, and from observations in nearby De Waal Park six Turtle Doves at any time would be a crowd. What has happened to them? When I was a youngster, it was the Laughing Dove that was the rarity - this was also true of the Redwing Starling. Then a few years ago the Redwing Starling seemed to have almost replaced the European Starling (no doubt disturbed as the trees came down). Now around here the numbers seem fairly evenly distributed."

(At my feeding station at Plumstead I regularly see Laughing Doves as well as Turtle Doves, and in Wynberg the Turtle Doves seem to be more common. Editor.)

Miss Darling would also like to know whether there is any significance in her observations that the Hartlaub Gulls seem to be considerably replaced by the Black-backed Gulls northward of the Paardeneiland Industrial Area, and that few of the latter appear to frequent Mouille Point and Sea Point.

The question of a shift in the status of our two common doves was discussed by Mrs. Rowan in Newsletter 74, May 1964, who then asked for information from anyone who has any pertinent observations on this question.

GREY OR RED-NECKED PHALAROPE AT STRANDFONTEIN?

In Newsletter 77 Mr. A. Morris and in Newsletter 80 Mr. D. Pelteret reported seeing a Grey Phalarope at Strandfontein Sewage Farm in March 1965 and January 1966 respectively.

On 27 December 1966 Mr. Pelteret observed a pair of Phalarope at the Sewage Farm, these birds had been seen earlier in the morning by Mr. Brown. On the basis of the drawing and field notes he made and which he compared with Peterson's book on the birds of Europe, Mr. Pelteret can only conclude that they were Red-necked Phalarope. He writes:

"These two birds were evidently a pair. They were observed for about 20 minutes, first swimming close together in circles and later sunning themselves on a sand-bar, at a distance of not more than 40 feet through 10 X 50 binocs. The one was in non-breeding plumage. It was the other bird which seems to definitely indicate the species. It had a dark brown mark over the crown, extending to the bill and then through the eye.

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The ear coverts were orange brown and the throat white. The wings appeared to be brown-grey, with white streaks, and a few russet-coloured feathers showed when the light was on them. A little bit of grey showed below the curve of the wing. The birds did not have bi-coloured bills which are a characteristic of the Grey Phalarope.

JACANA BREEDING AT PAARL SEWAGE FARM?

Somebody promised to send me a note about this, but I have not received it yet. Such a rare, although long expected, record should definitely be reported. Thank you, dear member, in anticipation.

DONATION TO THE CLUB.

Mr. Sam Butler has this year again been so kind as to donate one of his paintings to the Cape Bird Club.

Last year, the painting was raffled at the occasion of the Annual Dinner. The disadvantage was that only members, attending the dinner, could participate.

This year another procedure will be followed: Any member of the Cape Bird Club is invited to buy one or more tickets @25 cents at the Club's next Evening Meeting on June 10th, when the painting will be raffled. Mr. Butler will exhibit a number of paintings, from which the lucky winner may choose one. Many thanks to Mr. Sam Butler for his kind gesture, which is very much appreciated.