

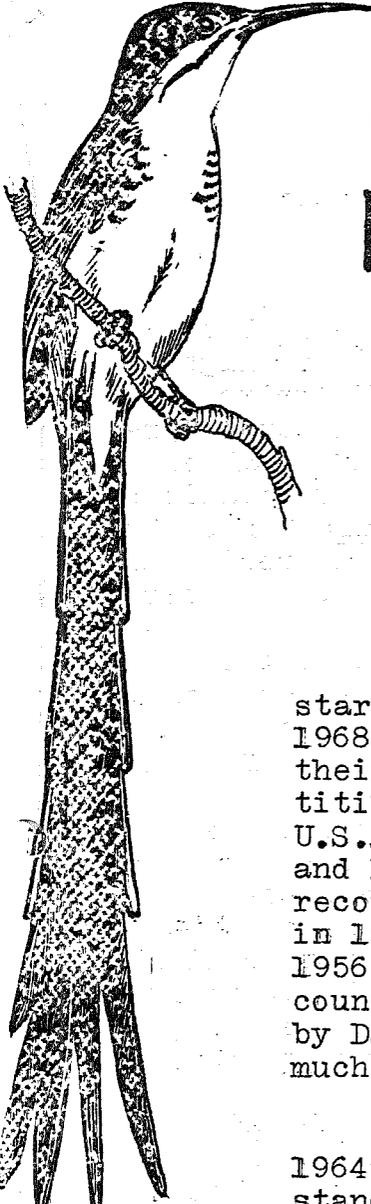
CAPE BIRD CLUB : KAAPSE VOËLWAARNEMERSKLUB

NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

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The beginning of a new year is the right time to start an annual birdlist. In Newsletter 87 (April 1968) Mr. P. Tongue asked members to report about their totals for 1967 and mentioned that this competitive game is very popular among birdwatchers in the U.S.A. From the book: The World of Birds by J. Fisher and R.T. Peterson I gather that the North American year record of species seen or heard belonged to Guy Emerson in 1939 (497), to R.T. Peterson in 1953 (572), and since 1956 has belonged to Stuart Keith (594). A single day's count of 230 species was set up by a party led by L. Irby Davis in Mexico in 1950. In Europe Big Days with much over 100 are rare.

In 1963 Professor Winterbottom recorded 418 and in 1964 at least 468 in Southern Africa which was an outstanding achievement (cf. Newsletter 76 Dec. 1964). But the habit of keeping an annual list does not seem to have caught on with members of the Cape Bird Club as I received only one list for 1967 from Miss N. Williams and Miss Allin. In that year they visited the Bundu Inn, Kruger Park, Ndumu Game Reserve, Golden Gate and Lake Pleasant, and saw the impressive number of 273 species. This includes such a rare bird as the Nerina Trogon which one cannot see near Cape Town. I am sure it gave them a lot of pleasure to build up this total and I hope it will be an incentive to many members and make them compile their own lists this year.

Do not aim at once for the 400 mark which a professional ornithologist can achieve in a favourable year. Try to increase your local list by learning where to find a special bird regularly and learn to identify the non-descript "little brown birds" which will give you great joy. Some birds missing on the list of 273 can easily be seen near Cape Town, e.g. the Gannet which I often watch, using binoculars, from Muizenberg Beach, or the Black Saw-wing Swallow around the trees at Kirstenbosch, or the African Marsh Warbler and the Grey-backed Cisticola, both common on the Cape Flats, which will teach you the value of learning to recognize their song. When going to such a spot, the Skeleton Gorge Stream at Kirstenbosch, on 7 January 1969, I could even add a new bird to my Life-list: the Cinnamon Dove which had until then eluded me in more than 25 years of birdwatching in South Africa.

Your chance of adding a rare bird to your list:

The Knysna Scrub Warbler

Visit Mr. P. Tongue's hunting ground in the Newlands Forest (west of Union Avenue just above the traffic lights) from where he had the pleasure of seeing one. He writes:

Newlands Forest has a fair number of Knysna Scrub Warblers; indeed wherever there is a good tangle of brambles one may usually hear their delightful song ... so reminiscent of the European Wood Warbler (Phylloscopus sibilatrix). In addition to the warbling song, they indulge in a great deal of "chrrp"-ing it is usually by that sound that their presence is made known.

At 5 p.m. on January 27, at the Lower part of the main stream one came into an open patch in the indigenous bush ... not brambles on this occasion ... where the vegetation was less tangled, and it gave me a clear view for about five minutes.

He is larger than the illustration in "Roberts" led me to believe; larger than a White-eye ... and, in the rather subdued light in the bush, under a tree canopy, he appeared to be a chocolate-brown all over. The bill, rather long and pointed, is darker than the body, and the legs rather lighter. The tail, viewed from the front, i.e. over the head, is rather broad and very slightly fan-shaped; viewed from the side it has the appearance of four separate feather lengths on top of each other.

He was walking up and down a short branch, about three or four steps each way, uttering the chrrp chrrp chrrp call; at each call he raised his head a little. Several times he lifted his shoulder and preened momentarily.

After some time he flew off to a stouter branch of a low tree and continued the short up and down pacing. Finally he turned towards myself, raised his head and broke into the well-known trilling song, and after singing it once, skipped out of sight into the depths of the bush.

As a matter of interest, there are seven places where I have heard them singing between June and January, which presumably means at least seven breeding pairs?

Where did these Flamingos breed?

Professor Broekhuysen reports: At Rondevlei on 1st Nov. 1968 from one of the towers I watched a flock of flamingos standing in shallow water on one of the islands. They were mostly Greater Flamingos but some Lesser as well.

To my great surprise I noticed about 13 Lesser and at least 27 Greater Flamingos which were distinctly immature. These birds were at the most one year old.

The question arises: Where were the eggs laid from which they hatched? Only in the years 1960, 61 and 62 were Greater Flamingos found to breed here and this was in the Bredasdorp District. Although Lesser have been seen to sit on nests in the new artificial lakes of the gold mines in the Orange Free State, the contents of the nests, however, were never checked.

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There is therefore officially no genuine breeding record of the Lesser Flamingo in the Republic!

The immature birds at Rondevlei seem to indicate that both species did breed unnoticed last year.

Ringling of European Swallows in the Western Cape.

Mr. J. MacLeod gives a summary of the activities of the Somerset-West Ringing Group:

The year 1968 has been the most successful we have had. In January we ringed 1321 European Swallows, in February 738 and in March 202, all in this latter month at Bredasdorp.

During the year 13 of our birds were recaptured at Firgrove; one had been ringed 5 years before, two four years earlier, one 3 years, two 2 years and seven the previous year. We also received news of six of our birds recovered in Russia, six in Britain and much more important, three recoveries in Africa, one from the western shore of Lake Victoria and two from Rhodesia. These three are our first African recoveries and they were all on their way out of the republic. We also controlled ten British ringed birds and had a Polish recovery.

The 1968/69 season started on 17 November when we ringed 91 birds, the total for the month was 318, which included 3 British ringed birds. To the 19th December we have ringed a further 773 birds with two more British recoveries.

Our chief catchers Nico and Johan Myburgh went away on holiday in the middle of December, but we have had valuable assistance from Geoff Wilson, an experienced British ringer, who very quickly became proficient in the torch and hand net technique, which was new to him.

Long-lived Swallow.

Major and Mrs. Roberts of Twist Cottage, Firgrave, have a pair of Larger Striped Swallows nesting on their stoep. On 27 November 1968, Messrs. J. MacLeod and John Martin caught a ringed bird there and were surprised to find that it was one they had ringed on 20 November 1963, five years earlier at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Lynham on Helena Heights about 2 miles east as the swallow flies. This bird is now one of the parents of a brood of four.

Unusual Records

Mr. Lockhart, Somerset West, observed a breeding colony of about 50 Bank Cormorants not far from the Hangklip Lighthouse on 30 October 1968. Not one of these birds had a white rump, all were sooty black with no traces of white at all. Fifteen nests were counted and adult birds were seen on some of the nests sitting on eggs or young.

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While trapping Steppe Buzzards, Mr. Siegfried saw a Greater Kestrel 6 miles south of Paarl on 22 November 1968 at 5.45 a.m. There was no doubt about identification as he had the bird under close observation for at least 10 minutes.

Reverend D.M. Low and Dr. C.J.B. Hundleby saw a Brown-hooded Kingfisher at a stream almost in the town of Bredasdorp on 29 October 1968. This is the third time that Rev. Low has seen a Brown-hooded Kingfisher in the Bredasdorp District.

He and Dr. Hundleby also saw a Green Sandpiper on de Hoop Vlei on 31 October. Both these sight records supplement information in the Check List.

Mr. G. Wright, the warden of the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve, reports the Namaqua Dove as a new "first record" for the reserve in October 1968.

For some time Mr. Wright has had a tame Pied Crow. Recently he obtained three young birds from Tygerberg. The original bird has adopted the young and taken over the feeding of them.

During the year 1968 the Cape Bird Club has arranged a series of stimulating lectures and film shows which closed in November with Prof. Winterbottom's slide-illustrated talk "The Birds of the Aughrabies Falls", for which all members are very grateful.

The "Code for the Bird Watcher" is issued by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds on behalf of birds in Britain, is copied below for the information of our members as its rules are also applicable in South Africa.

CODE FOR THE BIRDWATCHER

1. GENERAL. The welfare of the bird and its nest should be your first consideration. Do not let your own pleasure or curiosity interfere with this.
2. NESTS. During the breeding season listen intently for warning notes and be sure you do not stay in the vicinity of a nest long enough for the eggs or young to be chilled. Be careful in choosing a place to watch or eat, or you may be keeping a bird from its nest. If you watch nests do so from a distance with binoculars; if you visit nests be careful to replace herbage and foliage around them.
3. BREEDING COLONIES. Do not walk over shingle or places where ground-nesting birds breed in colonies. You cannot be sure that you will not endanger eggs or young, not only by treading on them, but by frightening chicks and exposing eggs so that they become easy prey to predators.

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4. FIRES. Heath fires are easily started and have disastrous effects on the bird population and their nests, so be careful with those matches and cigarette ends.
5. DOGS. If you take a dog with you, always keep it to heel or on a lead; an undisciplined dog can create havoc in the breeding season.
6. LITTER. Bird-watchers are increasing, so too is litter all over the countryside. Please help in the anti-litter campaign and see that your birding haunts are kept tidy.
7. SECURITY! Do not advertise the breeding haunts of rare species. Egg collectors are always seeking for information and many a rarity has been betrayed to them in this way.
8. COURTESY. Always get the permission of the land owner or occupier before entering on private property. Please keep to the paths in woodland or farmland during the nesting season and also ensure that gates are properly closed behind you.
9. FINALLY. At all times make as little noise and disturbance as you can. You'll see more birds and frighten them much less.

I wish to thank all those who contributed to the Newsletter in 1968 as well as those who helped with its distribution and I wish all members many hours of happy bird-watching in 1969.