

# NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

No

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I was very pleased to receive the following report from our former, well-known member, Mr. G. Lestrangle, who now lives near George. Although the observations were made outside our area, they are most interesting, and some of our members, when visiting the Kruger Park, might go to Olifants Camp and have a chance to watch these kites in action.

## YELLOW-BILLED KITES AS FOOD-SNATCHERS

These kites, six in number, daily fly about the Olifants Camp, soaring on the thermal currents in search of scraps of food which appear to be their only diet. These birds were a source of great interest to us as we watched the clever manipulation of tail-feathers to guide them wherever they wished to go.

Our real surprise came when I was sitting on the rondavel verandah with my elbow on the parapet and my hand holding a piece of cold boerewors which I was about to put in my mouth. There was a "swoosh" and one of the kites had dived out of the sky and cleanly taken the meat from my fingers. The speed with which this was done was amazing.

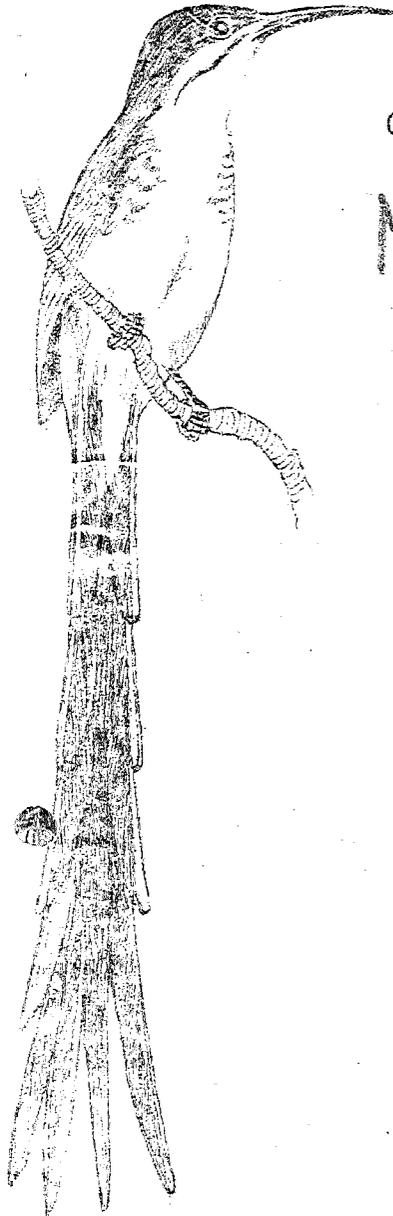
Thereafter we held chop bones in our fingers, and in every instance a kite would swoop down and take it with one claw. Soon we were unable to leave any meat foodstuffs on the verandah as the kites removed them.

After taking meat, these birds would glide about in the air, feeding on the wing. In no case did we ever see one of them perch and tear the meat hawk fashion.

## OBSERVATIONS FROM STRANDFONTEIN BEACH

Mr. Clive Elliot writes: During an attempt to show some of the birds of the Cape to Prof. Voous and Mrs. Voous from Holland during appalling weather on September 6th, 1969, we made the following observations on the shore at Strandfontein.

Mixed flocks of sea-birds were pursuing presumably shoals of fish about half a mile off-shore. The bulk of the flock was made up of Cormorants (100 or so) and they were chasing the fish rather like fox-hounds.



They flew along the surface until amongst the shoal, when the front-flying ones would flop into the water and dive immediately. The ones behind would fly over their heads until they too flopped down and dived, by which time the first birds would have re-appeared, taken to the air and continued the chase in a continuous stream of movement. Sometimes they would apparently lose the "scent" when all the birds would be in the water, looking this way and that for further signs of the shoal, until one bird would find them and off they would all go again. Also joining in the feast were Gannets, Black-backed Gulls, Swift Terns, a few Sandwich Terns and a single Common Tern. In the vicinity we saw two species of Skua, one Great Skua (Catharacta antarctica) floating in the sea, and a single dark-phase Pomarine Skua (Stercorarius pomarinus).

#### SWALLOW RINGING AT SOMERSET WEST

In Newsletter 92 Mr. Jack MacLeod reported about ringing problems of his group and was doubtful whether they would be able to ring many swallows. On 17 April 1970 he sent me his shortest, but most amazing report: "The Somerset West Ringing Group has had its most successful season with 4,950 swallows ringed and eighteen British birds controlled."

In order to give our readers an idea of the valuable information which the Somerset West Ringing Group is collecting, I have to quote from the Witwatersrand Bird Club News Sheet. In No. 68, December 1969, Mr. Durward Slight gives a chart showing recoveries of European Swallows north of the equator. These were birds ringed in the W.B.C. area or with W.B.C. rings up to the end of the South African summer of 1969. Total recoveries 98. This chart shows no recoveries between longitude 60 and 80 of the 50 to 60 latitude belt (which area is east of the Ural in Siberia, around the town Omsk), whereas there are many recoveries in this latitude belt from 10 West to 60 East and three from 80 to 100 East.

Below the chart it says: "The intervening gap between longitude 60 and 80 might be accounted for by the lack of suitable nesting sites, the unavailability of insects for food or to the fact that this region is only sparsely populated by man and therefore little in the way of reported information is to be anticipated."

In W.B.C. News Sheet No. 69 Mr. MacLeod, Somerset West, gives the following comment to this:

"Durward Slight's remarks about lack of W.B.C. swallow recoveries between longitude 60 and 80 and the reasons for this are interesting because of 27 Russian recoveries of birds ringed in the Western Cape by G.R. Brown and ourselves 9 or one-third were from the area shown as blank on his chart, also where he shows only 3 recoveries from East of 60 we have recovered 15 of our 27 birds from this area. In the Transvaal at least five times as many swallows have been ringed as in the Western Cape, so our figures

would seem to have some significance. The figures seem to suggest that the further south and west that Russian birds come to winter, the further east they go to nest."

Another note from Mr. MacLeod: It may be of interest to record that a Cape White-eye ringed at Klaver Vlei, Faure, on 22nd February, 1964, was recaptured at the same place by Geoff Wilson and George Underhill on 12th April 1970, more than six years later.

#### BOOTED EAGLES IN OUR AREA

(cf Newsletter 92)

Mr. Peter Steyn would like to put on record a possible individual of this species seen on several occasions on the farm Lyon at Niewoudtville between 6th and 14th October, 1965. "This bird, too, was a pale phase specimen and I had a good view of it and, as far as a sight record may be relied upon, I am certain that it was a Booted Eagle.

May I, while we are on eagles, appeal for any information on eagles, even if it is only an unusual locality record. I am still gathering information on eagles and hope soon to start on the formidable task of producing a book on them. I am quite sure that many members of the Cape Bird Club have valuable information tucked away in their note books which they may be good enough to cull out for me."

Please send such information to: Peter Steyn,  
P.O. Box 9199,  
Hillside, Bulawayo,  
Rhodesia.

#### AFRICAN PIED WAGTAIL AT GORDON'S BAY

Prof. Winterbottom reports: On 5 March, 1970, I saw an African Pied Wagtail crossing the road at Gordon's Bay. My companion in the car, Mr. G.B. Thompson, a local resident, told me he had seen it several times; and Mr. John Martin tells me he has a number of reports about it, but whenever he and his fellow Somerset Westers went over, the bird eluded them. This would appear to be the third definite record from our area and the second from Gordon's Bay.

#### CAPE WAGTAIL NEST ON LORRY

Mr. M. Waltner reports: A wagtail nest was found on the undercarriage of a lorry which was used daily, except on weekends. The nest was positioned near the left rear-wheel and this must have been a noisy, dusty and windy place. No wonder the nest was abandoned after the first egg. Unfortunately I could not ascertain whether the birds went for a cheap ride or preferred to wait for the return of the lorry. No harm came to the birds, however, as they still walked around the parking place after this incident.

RED-CAPPED LARK:

TIME GAP BETWEEN TWO BROODS

Also from Mr. Waltner: In the middle of November 1969 three red-capped larks left the nest. 17 days later one of the parents was building again, while the second adult bird assisted the two remaining young in filling their little stomachs. Four days later the first egg was in the nest. This gives a period of 3 weeks between fledging of the first brood and the start of the second clutch.

WANTED: Assistant Secretary/Treasurer for the South African Ornithological Society.

The S.A.O.S. requires an assistant secretary/Treasurer. The work is fairly straightforward and involves mainly secretarial duties and some typing. The amount of work is about eight hours per week, and the pay is R25 per month. Interested parties should get in touch with Prof. Winterbottom at the FitzPatrick Institute (Phone 69-5612). The successful applicant will be expected to commence duties as soon as possible.