

NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

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Fighting for a Swallow nest.

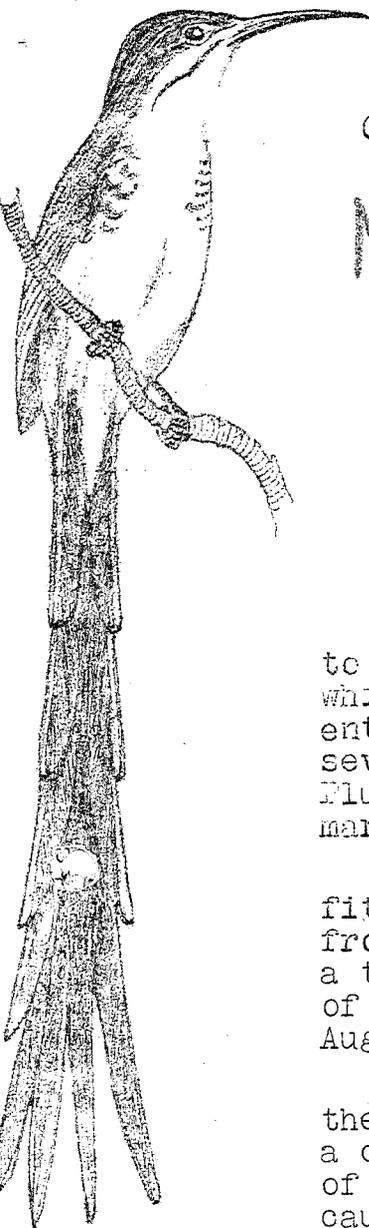
Any nest of the Greater Striped Swallow is prone to be robbed by White-rumped Swifts. Only nests which do not allow the Swifts to dive straight into the entrance hole, remain occupied by the Swallows for several seasons. Since 1953 sixteen Swallow nests at Plumstead have, to my knowledge, been usurped by these marauders.

In the spring of 1970 I had two Swallow nests fitted with observation holes, which seemed to be safe from attack. The one on a stoep had been screened by a trellis, which was, however, removed before the return of the pair. They occupied the nest again on 28th August.

Owing to the absence of the protecting trellis they seemed to be harassed by Swifts and did not start a clutch in September as usual. On 5th October a pair of White-rumped Swifts had occupied the nest. I caught one at night, banded it with a plastic ring and released it at Wynberg the following afternoon. On 11th October it was back in the Plumstead nest with a partner. Again caught and released at Wynberg on 12th October, it had returned to the nest the same night. A third removal to Wynberg was necessary to make it give up the nest.

The Swallows returned to their nest and had a clutch of three eggs on 1st November which they incubated until 15th November. When trouble started again. On 16th only egg which was pecked from the outside, was in the nest which the Swallows still entered although they appeared to be frightened. The owner of the house asked me to prevent Swifts from breeding there as he would not put up with the mess caused by the droppings of their chicks. The Swallows meticulously carry away all the droppings of their chicks. Their friendly twitter and their comparative tameness are further reasons why people become so attached to them.

On 21st November a newly arrived Swift was caught in the nest and released at Rondebosch. The next morning it was back with a partner. These two were released at Bains Kloof Pass (about 80 km away as the crow flies). Even from there one of them returned and occupied the nest again with a new partner. Both were released at Strand (about 30 km distant) on 6th December from where the Bains Kloof bird again returned to Plumstead. After being caught again in the nest on 17th December and released at Bishopscourt, it at last gave up the nest. Or was it perhaps snatched up there by an attractive mate? The return to the nest is the more remarkable because these Swifts did not have eggs and can have known the site for only a few days.



The Swallows had lost their first clutch and were not given a chance to lay a second one, but they still showed attachment to their nest. In January the Swifts were all busy with their second brood and there were apparently none looking for nests anymore. On 20th January the Swallows occupied their nest again, on 7th February they had completed a clutch of three, from which two chicks hatched and flew successfully.

Let us hope the trellis will be up again for the next season.

Extension of Cape Bird Club Area.

A long time ago Prof. Winterbottom had already suggested a change of the official "area" of the C.B.C. which is defined in the 1963 Check List as "south and west of the Olifants and Breede rivers"; his main reasons were that rivers are hardly boundaries for birds and that towns like Clanwilliam, Worcester and Robertson are just outside the area. With the approval of the S.A.C.S. the Committee of the C.B.C. now defines the official "area" as follows:

Boundaries of Cape Bird Club Area

From the Olifants River mouth along the northern bank of this river (not more than 1 kilometre from the water's edge) to Klaver (including this town), from there due east to the crest of the Bokkeveldberge. Thence south-eastwards along the crest of the mountain ranges (connecting trigonometric beacons by straight lines) to the east and north of the Olifants and Breede Rivers to Swellendam (including this town). From there south to the Breede River and along its eastern bank (not more than 1 km from the water's edge) to the Breede River mouth.

The kloof leading east- or northwards into the mountain ranges, up to a distance of approx. 1 km from the foot of the mountains, are included in the area. (e.g. Cogman's Kloof as far as the rock archway on the National Road to Montagu).

Apalis as Cuckoo Host

On 9th January 1971 Miss N. Williams and Miss A. Allin saw a pair of Bar-throated Apalis feed a Red-chested Cuckoo chick, which was fully fledged. They watched these birds for a whole afternoon. Mrs. R. Bisset, who was observing this with them, had seen the adult Cuckoos around this area at Onrust for several days.

The Apalis is not mentioned as a host of the Red-chested Cuckoo in Jensen: Cuckoo Breeding Biology (Ostrich December 1969).

Observations at Alderman's Dam and Paarde Vlei (Faure)

Mr. Lockhart reports: A pair of Fish Eagles perched on a dead tree on 6th January.

Four single Willow Warblers were feeding in tall flowering trees and singing their rather attractive little song. Also seen were a pair of Paradise Flycatchers, the male in breeding plumage, and two single Spotted Flycatchers. I also had a brief sighting of a European Golden Oriole and in the vlei itself, swimming near the side, a Black-necked or Eared Grebe in typical non-breeding plumage.

Moulting and Breeding

At Philippi, on 31st December 1970, I observed a male Paradise Flycatcher with a magnificent tail, starting a new nest in a Port Jackson plantation; the female took hardly any share in the building. It must have been the nest for a second brood as both these birds had been seen feeding a fledged chick at the end of November. Building continued until 3rd January; at my next visit on 7th January the nest was found destroyed.

On 14th January I was extremely lucky in catching this male Paradise Flycatcher in a mist net set up for European Swallows on a pig farm adjacent to the a/m Port Jackson plantation. I can hardly describe my surprise on finding that the bird was moulting. The first (innermost) primary was a new feather nearly full grown, and the second primary was 2/3 grown in both wings. The two central tail feathers were very long.

If the a/m nest had not been destroyed, this bird would have been breeding, i.e. moulting and breeding would have coincided. When I discussed this with Mr. Nico Myburgh he mentioned his experience as a bird photographer with Paradise Flycatchers. He said that whenever he selected an especially long-tailed male for a series of photos, this male would often lose his tail-feathers while nesting was in progress, i.e. come into moult. It would be interesting to know whether S.A.O.S. members in other areas have made similar observations.

Two pairs of my White-rumped Swifts had very late second broods, the chicks hatching only about 24th February; normally these chicks hatch in the second half of January. In order to raise their young these pairs stayed here longer than usual.

This gave me a chance to examine these swifts for moult. One pair, still having an unfledged chick, and a second pair, whose chicks had flown already, were examined by Mr. Pringle and me on 12th April. All four adult birds showed wing moult, all had the first primary new, the second was either in pin or nearly full grown, the third either missing or in pin or old. The tail showed no moult. That seems to indicate that the White-rumped Swifts normally start moulting on migration or on arrival in their winter quarters.

Camp at Bottelary Langebaan Lagoon 27/28 March.

This was a great success, and we wish to thank Dr. de Hahn for allowing us to be there. While we were still pitching tents or having lunch early on Saturday afternoon, there was a special surprise: 3 White Storks were flying low over us in a northerly direction (is that perhaps migration along the west coast?). Mr. Lockhart reported seeing a flock of 12 White Storks flying over farmland between Kersefontein and Velddrift on the Berg River Station road on 30 March 1971.

The highlight among the waders observed was certainly a group of 6 Great Sandpipers (*Charadrius leschenaulti*), these birds must have been "lifers" for many of those lucky enough to see them either on Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning. There were about 200 Knot, some of them changing into breeding plumage, 150 Sanderling, 20 Bartailed Godwit, Whimbrel as well as the other more commonly seen Palaearctic waders.

The ringers were busy with their mist nets catching 4 Green-shank, 7 Curlew Sandpiper and 20 little Stints, live specimens of which were shown to the campers by Mr. Geoff Wilson. While the

ringers were wading in the cold water, the rest of the campers were treated to a show of excellent colour slides by Prof. Uys.

To sum up, I can only advise every member: Don't miss the next camp.

Messrs. Waltner and Wilson went again to Bottelary over Easter and netted 68 Curlew Sandpiper, 11 Knot, 6 Sanderling, 6 Little Stint, 2 Whimbrel, 1 Grey Plover and 1 Turnstone.

Helpers for Dassen Island

Mr. John Cooper, who is making a population dynamics study of the Jackass Penguin on Dassen Island, needs "unpaid assistants". Assistance is mainly to help with ringing en masse at night and during the day, but will also include census counts. Any energetic person is welcome.

Transport to Dassen Island is free as is accommodation, bring own rations and bedding. No boat on Saturday, Sunday or public holidays. Friday - Monday long week-end trips can be arranged.

Prof. Westphal, P.O.Box 17, Rondebosch (SANCCOB Foundation) is Mr. Cooper's contact concerning this and he will arrange landing permits etc.

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