

THE CAPE BIRD CLUB.

News Letter No. 58.

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Editor: R.K.Schmidt,  
Striegau,  
54, Lympleigh Rd.  
Plumstead.

Several members of our club have recently made very interesting observations and report as follows:

Mr. J. Martin: "On the afternoon of 11 July my son Robert and I were at the vleis between Sheik Joseph's Tomb and the Eerste River at Faure when we saw a Lily Trotter, the African Jacana - *Actophilornis africanus* - running on the Water Uintjies (*Aponogeton distachyus*). The bird was first seen on our left and ran on top of these flowers, apparently feeding or pecking at something in the water. It passed in front of us about a hundred yards away, flew across a short stretch of open water and then continued running and pecking. After we had watched it for about 4 minutes, it took off in the direction of Cape Town, but settled on another small vlei. When we reached this vlei, it had gone. The flight of this bird reminded me of that of the Coot except that its long legs stuck out quite far behind it.

Miss Maidie van Deventer writes: Mrs. Taylor and I had an interesting time birdwatching at the Milnerton Lagoon on 23 July when we saw seven Spoonbills. Three were seen between the bridge and the sea, while the other four were on the lagoon on the golf course side.

Dr. Winterbottom reports that he and his wife saw the Spoonbills there as well on 24 July, but did not see them when they visited the lagoon again on 27 July.

Mr. J. McLeod saw a Marabou Stork 7 miles from Somerset West on the Stellenbosch Road in the morning of 7 August.

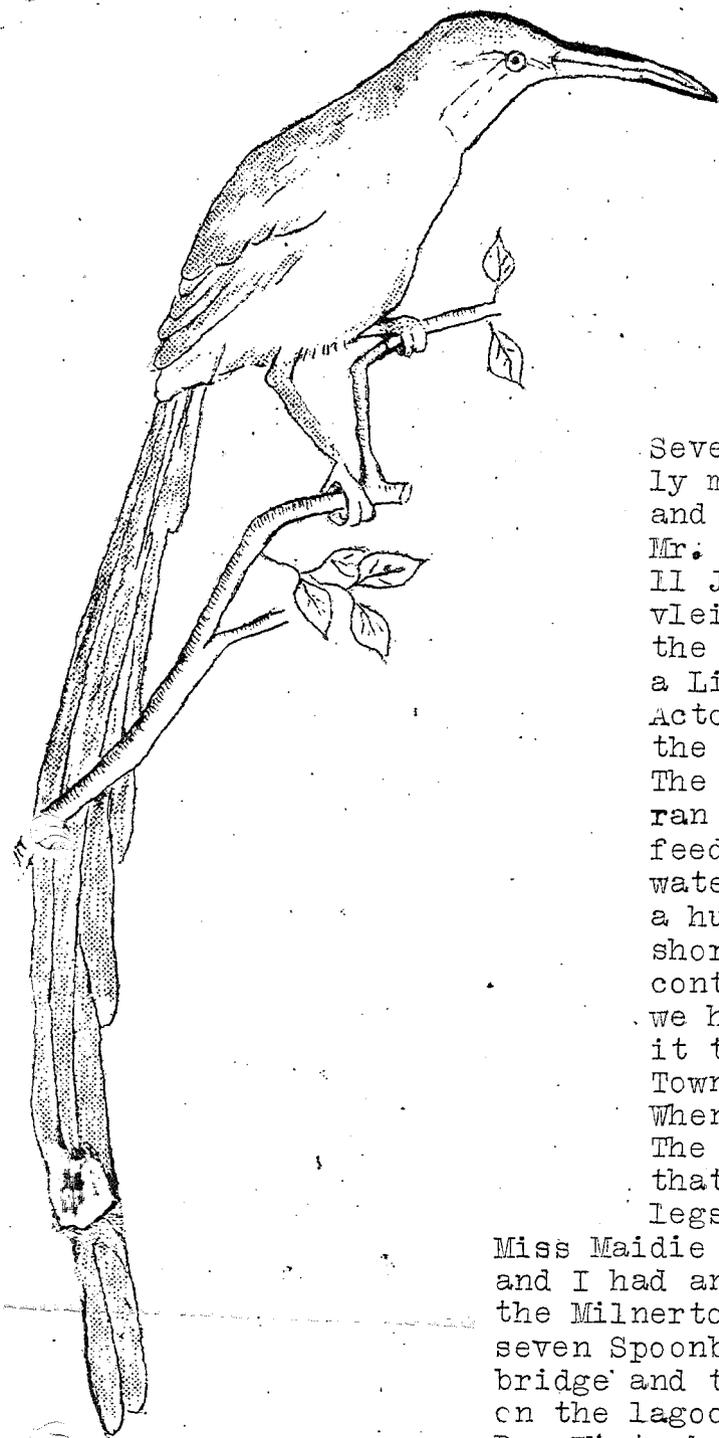
Mr. A. R. Brown reports the following sight records: 30 June at Athlone: 1 African Sand Martin - completely brown.

9 July at Tamatievlei: 1 male Red-chested Flufftail.

11 July at Westlake Mountain (Lower wooded slopes): 1 Piet my vrou.

23 July at Strandfontein Sewage Farm: a single Grey-headed Gull was seen by Messrs. Stanford, Steyn and myself.

The outing to Spieka, Klipheuvell, on 7 August, was well attended. Everybody enjoyed the beautiful weather and the flowers. Although it seemed to be a bit early for the breeding season, altogether 13 nests were found. A Pied Barbet had just started excavating its nesthole (it was about 2" deep) in a dead tree. A female Malachite Sunbird was so busy building that she tried to collect as lining material for her nest some threads of the cotton marker put there by a member to mark the place of the nest.



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Mr. J. Martin has suggested a task for some really keen members: He writes as follows: "In Roberts' Birds of South Africa the Egyptian Goose - *Alopochen aegyptiacus* - is stated to nest in various situations including 'on top of Hamerkop nests'. But much more frequently this species actually nests inside the Hamerkop nest. Usually the goose makes its way into this big structure by enlarging the rather narrow and low-situated entrance by tearing out the side of the entrance until the opening is big enough to admit the goose. Even when the opening has been enlarged, one can hardly believe that a bird of the size and weight of this species is able to get in. But Mr. Nico Myburgh of Klavervlei, Faure, tells me that the goose enters as easily as a swallow. At present Mr. Myburgh has a nest of this type with more than 10 eggs in it on his farm. The nest is in an oak tree and almost overhangs the Eerste River. Nico, a very tall young man, standing on tip-toe on a fairly thick branch, 20 ft above the ground, could feel at least 10 eggs in a mass of down, but is convinced that there are more eggs beyond his reach.

When climbing to the nest, Nico banged the side with his hand and out flew the goose with a lot of frantic flapping to prevent it from diving into the river. Feeling into the nest Nico pulled out the dried carcass of a barn owl - a species well-known for using Hamerkop nests for their own - but in this case apparently coming off second best in the encounter with the geese.

I mentioned that the goose usually makes its way into the nest by enlarging the original hole, but it has been known to make another entrance, often at the back of the structure, by pulling and tugging at the sticks and dropping them to the ground until a passage is made. Of the last 5 goose-occupied Hamerkop nests at Klavervlei, in four the original nestholes had been enlarged, but the entrance had been made by the back in the fifth. Over the last 10 years not a single pair of Egyptian Geese was known to make their nest on the top of the Hamerkop nest.

There is a second Hamerkop nest at Klavervlei, on which the geese have been working, and here again the original nest-hole is being enlarged. Whether the geese have already effected entrance to this one, I am not able to say as the geese flew from the nest area at our approach and as we could not reach the entrance, we were unable to verify.

Going back to Roberts, this text book says 'Chicks are taken down from high nests in the bill'. While not doubting this statement, Mr. Myburgh says, however, that from his experience and from that of Mr. Brodie, his neighbour, who has had geese nesting in Hamerkop nests on his farm for a number of years, the young clamber down part of the way and then fall.

Now here is something members of the Cape Bird Club could investigate. Members could organise a team to keep watch on the nest until the goslings emerged and then would be able to report on how that particular brood reached the ground. Any volunteers?"

Dr. Winterbottom examined the skins of the Steppe Buzzard in the S.A. Museum and noticed two interesting points. The first is that, although the others are all attributable to the Siberian race, *Buteo buteo vulpinus*, there is one undated specimen from Oudekraal, Cape Peninsula, which belongs to the Caucasus race, *B. b. menetriesi*, which was not previously recorded from so far south. The other point concerns the sex. Of the 13 sexed examples, no less than 11 are females; there are 2 males and one unsexed bird. It looks as if females of this species migrate further south than males.

The Committee of the Cape Bird Club wishes to thank all those members who declared their willingness to serve on the Records Subcommittee (cf. Newsletter No. 56). This committee consists of the following members: Dr. Broekhuysen, Mr. Brown, Mr. Clarke, Mr. Ferguson, Lt. Col. Hallack, Mr. Hofmeyr, Miss Johns, Mrs. Knipe, Mr. J. MacLeod, Mr. Martin, Mr. Rand, Miss C. Robinson, Miss J. Robinson,

Mr. Morgan, Mrs. Rowan, Mr. Schmidt, Mr. Stanford, Mr. Steyn, Mrs. Taylor, Dr. Uys, Dr. Winterbottom.

Mr. John Perry, the well-known bird-painter, has made a most generous offer to the Cape Bird Club. In order to stimulate activity among members he will present one of his paintings as a prize for the most successful contributor to one of the various schemes undertaken by the Club. He will give the painting at the end of the 1960/61 Bird Club Year, and he may do so for another or more years to come.

There are 6 schemes, viz.:

- 1) Bird Ringing;
- 2) Observation of migratory species;
- 3) Nesting records;
- 4) Distribution of species in different habitats;
- 5) Investigation of Red Bishop Bird colonies;
- 6) Bird road casualties.

The competition will be open only for amateur ornithologists and birdwatchers, the professionals will not compete. At the end of the Club year a panel will decide to whom the prize should be awarded.

The Committee is very grateful for this offer and hopes for a good response among members.

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