

THE CAPE BIRD CLUB.

News Letter No. 61.

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Mr. Peter Steyn has sent some more interesting observations: On October 22 I found the nest of a Buzzard in a forest in Constantia. It was in a pine tree about 50 ft up. The first attempt to reach the nest was prevented by wild bees living in that tree.

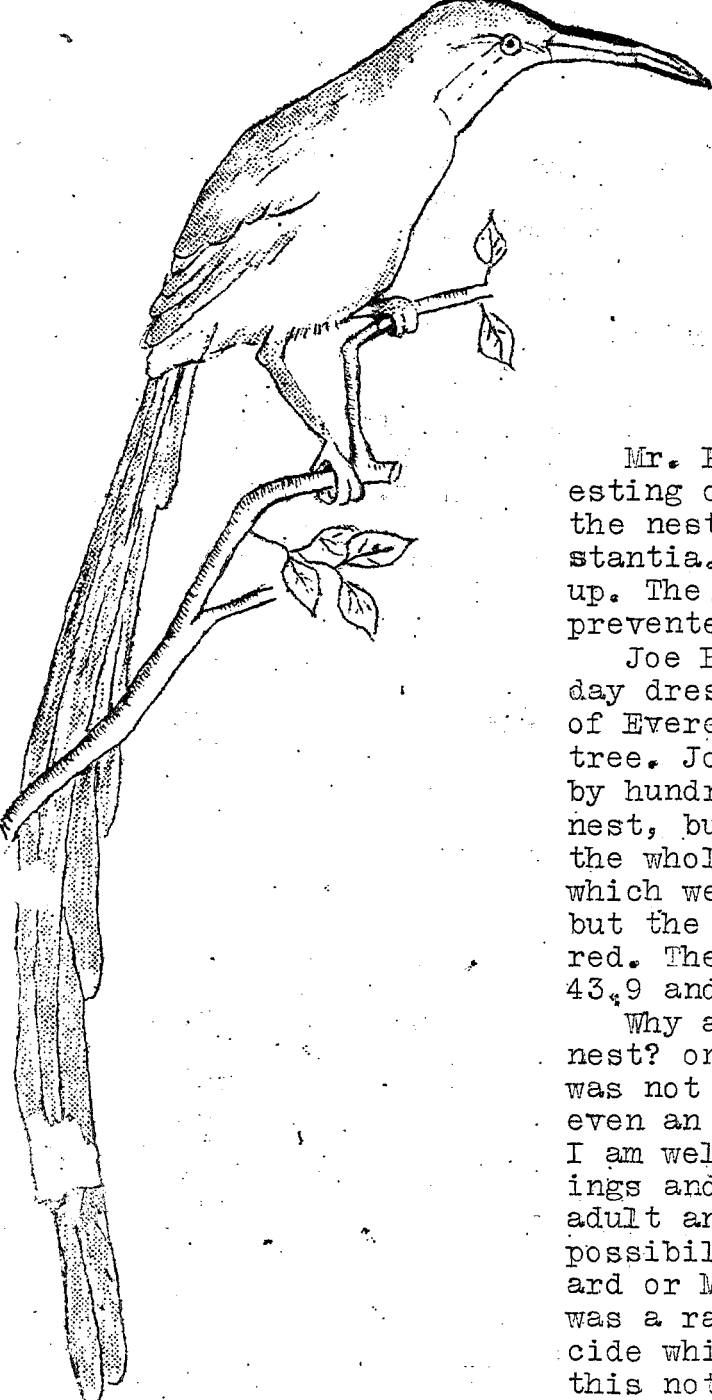
Joe Brookes and I returned the following day dressed more appropriately for an ascent of Everest than for an assault on a pine tree. Joe led the way and was soon covered by hundreds of bees. Somehow we reached the nest, but I must admit to being terrified the whole way. It contained 3 eggs, 2 of which were plain except for a few markings, but the third was well marked with rust-red. They measured 57.6 by 45.0, 56.0 by 43.9 and 58.2 by 44.6.

Why all this discomfort for a Buzzard nest? one may ask. Well, in this case it was not the nest of a Jackal Buzzard, or even an immature pair of this species, as I am well acquainted with the wing markings and field characteristics of both adult and juvenile. That left only two possibilities, it was either a Steppe Buzzard or Mountain Buzzard. In either case it was a rare find, but the problem was to decide which, and that is the reason why this note is not published in one of our regular journals. I took Dr. Winterbottom to the nest, but he got only a fleeting glimpse of one bird, as the nest had been deserted. It is possible that the female had been shot as I only saw a single bird in the area although I made frequent visits. To solve the problem we can only hope it will nest in the area again.

Mr. Steyn further reports: I was interested to note that it is the male Stonechat which selects the nest site. I observed a male fly into grass growing from the side of a ditch. He found a small hollow into which he squeezed his body and then rotated in it. The female watched from a nearby bush. In due course a nest was built in the cavity which the male had hollowed out, and eggs were laid in it.

At the nest of a Cape Sugarbird I observed behaviour which is not recorded in Dr. Broekhuysen's comprehensive study of the Sugarbird. On certain occasions of stress (hatching of the young, or when young flew from nest) the bird hovered about a foot above my head giving the ratchet-like alarm note, it then dropped into thick bracken very near me and hopped

mouse-like through it. This was done slowly enough, and with sufficient backward glances, to make it quite obvious that the bird was making a deliberate attempt to distract my attention from the nest. As a matter of interest I mention that the above nest was placed



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in the identical site of a nest found the previous year.

Mrs. I. Taylor was European Bee-eaters at Du Toit's Kloof whence according to Dr. Winterbottom they have never been recorded. On 5th February 1961 she first saw 3 in flight and 1 on a bush on the Paarl side of the tunnel on the right-hand side of the road above the first krantzies in a sort of amphitheatre. Later 5 flew across the road coming from the direction where they had been seen first. Mrs. Taylor has never seen or heard Bee-eaters there before although she traverses that area rather often.

Near Keurbooms River Mrs. Taylor watched a Grey Heron pick up a thin snake about 2 ft. long, on 2nd February 1961. It manoeuvred the snake until it was crosswise in its bill with head protruding slightly on one side and body dangling on the other. Soon afterwards it took the snake by the head and proceeded to gulp it down, regardless of the fact that the reptile's body was writhing and twisting. Within less than ten minutes the entire snake had disappeared. It was a revolting sight.

Mrs. Taylor's report in News Letter No. 60 stating that a Laughing Dove did not sit on the eggs during one night and that the eggs still hatched, is due to a misunderstanding. She had meant to say that the Dove did not cover the small young during one night.

Dr. Uys sent an interesting account of breeding behaviour in a pair of Cape Dikkop which are nesting (March 1961) in the two-acre garden of Mrs. K. Frater who lives in the built-up area of Rondebosch. The remarkable fact is that these birds first started nesting there in 1950 and have done so ever since. In fact, Mrs. Frater states, that even when not nesting they seldom leave the confines of her garden. On the whole they lay about 4 clutches a year, with May and June being the only months during which nesting has not been recorded. Unfortunately they have been successful in raising young on relatively few occasions as neighbours' cats and dogs take their toll of eggs and young, and small boys from a neighbouring school also collect the occasional clutch. Although they have become accustomed to human presence, the birds are quite wild in all other respects. An interesting feature of this pair is their ready and sustained display of the threat posture when one approaches the nest, more so if the individual is known to them or if accompanied by a dog. What a marvellous opportunity these Dikkop nesting in your backyard for 10 years, provide for recording the breeding biology of the species, which, I might add, Mrs. Frater has exploited to the full.

Members are reminded to send in late records of migratory birds for which Dr. Broekhuysen is waiting. On 4th April there were 10 European Swallows and 2 Pearl-breasted Swallows at Jacobs Vlei Philippi. 2 Pairs of Larger Striped Swallows are still feeding young (19 and 17 days old) in the nests at Plumstead on 6th April.

Early in February Mr. J.N. Wylie of Oxford Str., Durbanville, rescued an egret with a ring on its leg and reported this to Mr. Middlemiss. Mr. Middlemiss discovered that it was a cardboard ring, pale grey on the outside and bearing no number and no address. If any member could throw any light on who ringed the bird, where and when, it would be most interesting. The egret is now well on the road to recovery.

Will Members please remember to fill in the Nomination Forms for Committee Members, and send them to the Hon. Secretary at Downderry, Brent Rd, Plumstead.

INDEX TO C.B.C. NEWS SHEETS, 31-60

- Albatross, Black-browed - 32
- Albatross, Shy - 32
- Albatross, Wandering - 32, 47
- Albatross, Yellow-nosed - 35
- Apalis, Bar-throated - 32, 38,
40, 42, 43, 50, 52, 57
- Avocet - 32, 40, 47, 48, 54, 57
- Barbet, Pied - 40, 54, 58
- Batis, Cape - 32, 40, 46
- Batis, Pririt - 40, 43, 50
- Bee-eater, European - 31, 39,
40, 41, 46, 51, 54, 55, 57
- Bishop, Cape - 32, 40, 46
- Bishop, Red - 31, 40, 53, 54,
55, 57, 58, 59
- Bokmakierie - 35, 36, 37, 40,
50, 55, 57
- Boubou - 34, 38, 40, 53
- Bulbul, Cape - 34, 38, 39, 40,
41, 42, 52, 59
- Bulbul, Red-eyed - 40
- Bulbul, Sombre - 53
- Bunting, Cape - 38, 41, 42, 46
- Bunting, Gough Island - 35
- Bunting, Lark-like - 50, 52, 57
- Bustard, Kori - 40
- Buzzard, Augur - 34, 55
- Buzzard, Jackal - 35, 60
- Buzzard, Mountain - 47
- Buzzard, Steppe - 31, 41, 55,
58
- Canary, Black-headed - 47, 50
- Canary, Bully - 31, 40, 45, 59
- Canary, Cape - 32, 35, 36, 39,
41, 45, 47
- Canary, Yellow - 32, 33, 38,
40, 41, 42, 52, 59
- Chaffinch - 33, 45, 47
- Chat, Ant-eating - 39, 47
- Chat, Familiar - 34, 47
- Chat, Karoo - 39, 43, 47
- Chat, Mountain - 40
- Chat, Sickle-winged - 32, 39
- Cisticola, Cloudscraper - 52
- Cisticola, Fan-tailed - 39, 45,
52
- Cisticola, Grey-backed - 38, 41,
42
- Cisticola, Levallant's - 59
- Coly, Cape - 33, 36, 37, 41, 52
- Coly, Red-faced - 35
- Coly, Speckled - 35, 45, 47
- Coot, Red-knobbed - 40, 41, 44,
47, 49, 54, 58, 59, 60
- Coucal, White-browed - 38
- Courser, Burchell's - 47
- Courser, Double-banded - 39, 47,
52
- Cormorant, Cape - 41, 42, 47
- Cormorant, Reed - 31, 34, 39, 41
- Cormorant, White-breasted - 39,
41, 42, 43, 52
- Crake, African Spotted - 32, 41
- Crake, Baillon's - 31
- Crake, Black - 53
- Crane, Wattled - 40
- Crane, Stanley - 53
- Crombec, Long-billed - 47, 52
- Crow, Black - 38, 40, 51, 52
- Crow, Pied - 37, 39, 40, 41, 60
- Cuckoo, Black - 33
- Cuckoo, Black-crested - 47
- Cuckoo, Jacobin - 31, 41
- Cuckoo, Klaas's - 31, 32, 49

- Cuckoo, Red-chested - 32, 33, 34,
39, 41, 45, 46, 57, 58
- Curlew - 33, 34, 42, 49, 56
- Dabchick - 31, 38, 41
- Darter - 52
- Dikkop, Cape - 34, 36, 38, 45, 52
- Dikkop, Water - 57
- Dove, Cape Turtle - 31, 34, 36, 38,
39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 55, 57,
60
- Dove, Cinnamon - 40, 46
- Dove, Green-spotted Wood - 37
- Dove, Laughing - 33, 34, 36, 38,
39, 41, 45, 48, 52, 55, 60
- Dove, Namaqua - 31, 33, 39, 40, 41
- Dove, Red-eyed - 34, 44, 45
- Drongo, Fork-tailed - 31, 40, 41,
43
- Duck, Black - 57
- Duck, Maccoa - 55, 57
- Duck, Whistling - 32
- Duck, White-backed - 46
- Duck, Yellow-billed - 34, 38, 41,
44, 48, 49, 59
- Eagle, African Sea - 46, 47, 52
- Eagle, Black - 34, 39, 55
- Egret, Cattle - 31, 35, 40, 41, 50
- Egret, Great White - 55
- Egret, Little - 31, 41
- Egret, Yellow-billed - 31, 41, 44
- Eremomela, Yellow-bellied - 47
- Finch, Quail - 47
- Finfoot, Peter's - 36
- Fiscal - 31, 32, 34, 36, 37, 38,
39, 41, 42, 44, 51, 55
- Flamingo, Greater - 34, 37, 41, 42,
46, 48, 52, 55, 59
- Flamingo, Lesser - 32, 37, 41, 55
- Flufftail, Red-chested - 48, 58
- Flycatcher, Black - 40
- Flycatcher, Chat - 37, 39, 43, 52
- Flycatcher, Dusky - 32, 59
- Flycatcher, Fairy - 39, 40, 43
- Flycatcher, Fiscal - 38, 40
- Flycatcher, Paradise - 32, 33, 34,
41, 50, 59, 60
- Flycatcher, Spotted - 32, 47, 52
- Francolin, Cape - 41, 52
- Francolin, Grey-winged - 39
- Gallinule, Purple - 49, 57
- Gannet - 32, 34, 42, 47
- Godwit, Bar-tailed - 42, 50
- Goose, Egyptian - 31, 34, 52, 58
- Goshawk, Chanting - 40, 43
- Grebe, Black-necked - 40, 55, 57
- Grebe, Great Crested - 31, 34, 36
- Greenshank - 32, 34, 38, 40, 41,
42, 47, 49
- Gull, Black-headed - 47
- Gull, Grey-headed - 43, 57, 58
- Gull, Hartlaub's - 31, 37, 40, 41,
42, 45, 46, 47, 49, 52
- Gull, Lesser Blackbacked - 47
- Gull, Southern Black-backed - 41,
42, 45, 47
- Hamerkop - 49, 58
- Harrier, African Marsh - 41
- Harrier, Black - 39, 48, 49, 50
- Harrier-Hawk, Banded - 39
- Hawk, Bat - 52
- Hen, Cape - 47
- Heron, Black-headed - 38, 40
- Heron, Grey - 33, 41, 42
- Heron, Night - 31, 34, 38, 46, 48
- Honeyguide, Greater - 39, 40, 52
- Hoopoe - 38, 39, 44

- Hoopoe, Scimitar-billed - 59
- Ibis, Glossy - 50, 55
- Ibis, Sacred - 31, 39, 42, 45, 46, 48, 49, 50, 57
- Ibis, Wood - 34, 42, 54, 55
- Jacana, African - 58
- Kestrel, Lesser - 34, 55
- Kestrel, Rock - 41
- Kingfisher, Giant - 31, 33, 47
- Kingfisher, Malachite - 52
- Kite, Blackshouldered - 31, 34, 41
- Kite, Yellow-billed - 32, 33, 40, 46, 55
- Knot - 50
- Korhaan, Black - 38, 40, 41, 52
- Korhaan, Karroo - 40
- Lanner - 40, 52
- Lark, Clapper - 39, 43, 47, 50, 57
- Lark, Grey-backed Finch - 37, 57
- Lark, Karroo - 32, 43, 47, 50, 52
- Lark, Long-billed - 43, 47, 57
- Lark, Red-capped - 31, 38, 39, 40, 41, 45, 46, 47, 50
- Lark, Spike-heeled - 43, 47, 50
- Lark, Thick-billed - 38, 50, 52
- Longclaw, Orange-throated - 38
- Martin, African Sand - 37, 38, 40, 46, 52, 58
- Martin, Banded - 32, 40, 41, 44, 46, 54
- Martin, Rock - 35, 37, 38, 45
- Moorhen - 59
- Nightjar, Fiery-necked - 36, 38, 39
- Nightjar, Rufous-cheeked - 37
- Oriole, Black-headed - 40
- Oriole, European Golden - 47
- Ostrich - 54
- Owl, Barn - 45, 52, 58
- Owl, Grass - 44
- Owl, Spotted Eagle - 32, 36, 38, 50, 52, 55
- Owl, Wood - 32
- Oystercatcher, Black - 37, 42, 48, 49, 53, 55, 60
- Oystercatcher, European - 60
- Pelican, White - 31, 48, 52
- Penguin, Jackass - 34, 35, 37, 47
- Penguin, Rockhopper - 34, 38
- Peregrine - 34, 41
- Petrel, Giant - 50
- Petrel, Madeiran Storm - 47
- Petrel, Wilson's Storm - 47
- Pigeon, Rock - 34
- Pipit, Plain-backed - 32
- Pipit, Tawny - 31, 41, 45, 47
- Plover, Blacksmith - 36, 37, 38, 40, 42, 43, 49, 60
- Plover, Crowned - 31, 33, 34, 38, 41, 42, 45, 48, 52
- Plover, Grey - 33, 34, 42, 43, 49, 56
- Plover, Ringed - 33, 34, 42, 47, 49
- Pochard, Southern - 55
- Pratincole, Blackwinged - 47, 54, 55
- Prinia, Karroo - 31, 34, 38, 39, 41, 50, 52, 59
- Prinia, Namaqua - 40, 47, 50
- Prion, Dove - 54
- Rail, Cape - 41, 48
- Rail, Gough Island - 35
- Raven, White-necked - 40, 52, 60
- Robin, Cape - 31, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 46, 50, 54, 57, 59
- Robin, Karroo - 31, 38, 40, 46, 52
- Rockjumper, Orange-breasted - 31

Roller, European - 33
Ruff - 31, 34, 40, 50
Sanderling - 33, 34, 49
Sandgrouse, Namaqua - 36, 40, 50
Sandpiper, Common - 32, 34, 38,
40, 44
Sandpiper, Curlew - 32, 33, 34,
38, 39, 40, 42, 49, 50
Sandpiper, Marsh - 34, 50
Sandpiper, Terek - 33, 42, 49, 56
Sandpiper, Wood - 34
Sandplover, Chestnut-banded - 37
Sandplover, Great - 34, 47, 50
Sandplover, Kittlitz's - 31, 40,
41, 44, 45, 50, 51, 60
Sandplover, Three-banded - 38, 40,
41, 42, 50
Sandplover, White-fronted - 41, 42,
50, 53, 55, 60
Secretary-bird - 34, 35, 49, 60
Seed-eater, White-throated - 38, 51,
52, 59
Seed-eater, White-winged - 34, 37,
42, 48, 49, 53, 57
Shearwater, Mediterranean - 47
Shearwater, Sooty - 47
Shelduck, African - 40, 41, 49, 55
Shoveller, Cape - 31, 38, 41
Shrike, Red-backed - 43, 47
Siskin, Mountain - 43, 44
Skua, Antarctic - 35, 37
Sparrow, Cape - 31, 32, 36, 37, 38,
40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 47, 50, 51,
55, 59
Sparrowhawk, Little - 42
Sparrowhawk, Red-chested - 31
Sparrow, House - 51
Spoonbill, African - 31, 42, 43,
45, 46, 47, 49, 52, 53, 55,
57, 58
Starling, European - 31, 32, 36,
40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 47, 52, 55
Starling, Glossy - 40, 50
Starling, Pale-winged - 40, 50
Starling, Pied - 32, 34, 36, 40,
41, 45, 52
Starling, Redwinged - 34, 35, 36,
40, 41, 45
Starling, Wattled - 46, 52
Stilt, Black-winged - 31, 38, 41
Stint, Little - 32, 33, 34, 38,
40, 41, 42, 49, 59
Stonechat - 41, 44
Stork, Black - 34, 42, 48, 49, 55
Stork, Marabou - 58
Stork, White - 32, 33, 34, 40,
42, 45, 48, 49, 51, 52, 53,
55
Sugarbird, Long-tailed - 31, 34,
35, 38, 41, 43, 45, 48, 55,
57
Sunbird, Dusky - 40
Sunbird, Larger Double-collared -
43
Sunbird, Lesser Double-collared -
35, 36, 38, 40, 41, 42, 45,
50, 59
Sunbird, Malachite - 35, 36, 37,
39, 40, 41, 45, 50, 57, 58,
60
Sunbird, Marico - 40
Sunbird, Orange-breasted - 31, 34,
38, 41, 43, 45
Swallow, Black Sawwing - 33, 38
Swallow, Cliff - 32, 33
Swallow, European - 31, 32, 33,
34, 35, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42,
48, 50, 55, 57
Swallow, Larger Striped - 31, 32,
34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 44,
50, 55, 56, 57
Swallow, Lesser Striped - 42
Swallow, Pearl-breasted - 38, 50,
52, 54
Swallow, White-throated - 32, 38,
39, 50, 52, 54
Swift, Alpine - 35, 40

Swift, Black - 35, 37, 38, 45
 Swift, Horus - 41
 Swift, Little - 32, 33, 37, 41, 47,
 49
 Swift, White-rumped - 33, 37, 41, 54,
 56
 Tchagra - 31, 43
 Teal, Red-billed - 31, 34, 38, 41,
 44, 46, 54
 Tern, Caspian - 42, 49
 Tern, Common - 34
 Tern, Sandwich - 42, 49, 60
 Tern, Swift - 37, 42, 60
 Tern, Whiskered - 51, 55, 59, 60
 Tern, White-winged Black - 34, 43
 Thrush, Olive - 34, 36, 40, 41,
 42, 45, 47, 50
 Thrush, Sentinel Rock - 31, 55
 Tit-babbler - 38, 49, 52, 59
 Tit-babbler, Fairy - 37, 42, 44,
 47, 50
 Tit, Grey - 38, 39, 50
 Tit, Penduline - 33, 50
 Turnstone - 33, 37, 42, 46, 49, 56
 Vulture, Cape - 31
 Wagtail, Cape - 33, 36, 37, 41, 45,
 51, 52
 Wagtail, Pied - 40, 54
 Wagtail, Yellow - 57
 Warbler, African Marsh - 46
 Warbler, African Reed - 59
 Warbler, African Sedge - 31
 Warbler, Cinnamon-breasted - 50
 Warbler, Karoo Green - 43
 Warbler, Knysna Scrub - 32, 57
 Warbler, Rufous-eared - 34, 40, 43,
 47, 50
 Warbler, Victorin's - 42, 43
 Waxbill, Common - 39, 40, 43, 53
 Waxbill, Swee - 34, 43
 Weaver, Cape - 31, 32, 33, 36, 38,
 39, 40, 41, 50, 54
 Weaver, Masked - 31, 54
 Weaver, Social - 40
 Wheatear, Capped - 32, 41
 Whimbrel - 33, 42, 49, 56, 60
 White-eye, Cape - 31, 36, 37, 41,
 42, 45, 47
 Whydah, Pin-tailed - 32, 53
 Wigeon, Cape - 31, 38, 39, 44,
 48, 49, 55
 Woodpecker, Bearded - 40
 Woodpecker, Cardinal - 52
 Woodpecker, Ground - 40
 Woodpecker, Knysna - 59