

CAPE BIRD CLUB : KAAPSE VOËLWAARNEMERSKLUB

# NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

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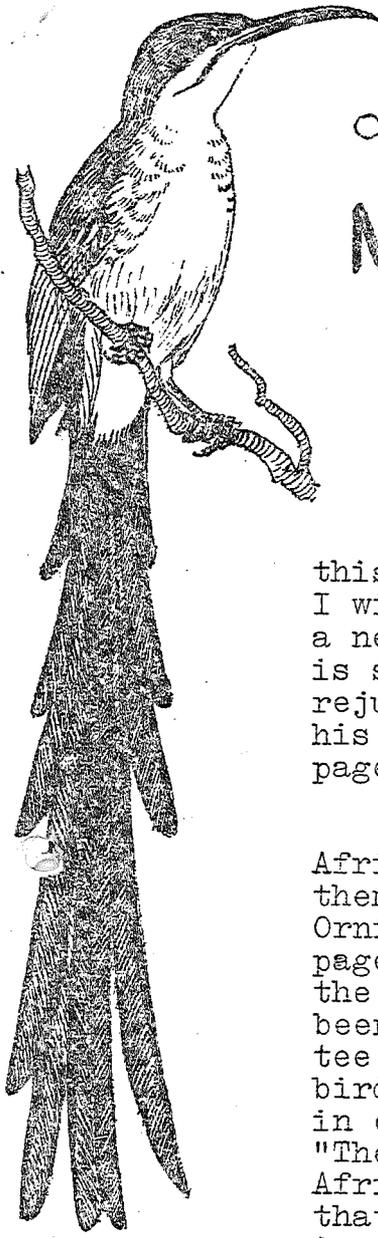
You may not recognize it at first glance, but this is our Newsletter which has received a face-lift. I wish to thank Mr. Perry very much for designing a new title-page. Our old friend, the Cape Sugarbird, is still with us and has certainly gained by this rejuvenation. I also wish to thank Mr. Morgan for his help in preparing the stencil for the new title-page.

As a campaign has been started to interest more Afrikaans-speaking people in ornithology and enlist them as members of the branches of the South African Ornithological Society, the wording of the title-page is now in both official languages. Up to now the members of the various bird-clubs seem to have been concentrated in the big cities. This may guarantee a certain peaceful existence to many platteland birds, but this fact may also account for many gaps in our knowledge of some very common species. When "The Canaries, Seed eaters and Buntings of Southern Africa" by C.J. Skead was published, it struck me that the statement "No data" appeared ever so often in the description of the breeding behaviour of the White-throated Seed eater as well as the Cape Bunting. These two birds may breed at many a farmer's doorstep and the gaps in our knowledge of their breeding biology might easily be filled by a farmer who becomes interested in watching birds. For this reason we should all help in recruiting farmers of whom many are Afrikaans-speaking, for the S.A.O.S.

En ek sê „dankie by voorbaat" aan al die lede wat waarnemings in Afrikaans vir die Nuusbrieff sal instuur.

Three of our recent outings were marred by bad weather, at least for Cape Town members it did not look worthwhile to go. Mr. Martin informed, however, that the August outing to Spieka (where 24 nests were found) and the first September outing to Kramat Vlei (substituted for Aldermans Vlei) were really successful. At Kramat Vlei 15 nests were found and 53 species of birds seen; members present were pleased to see Mr. Jack MacLeod in the field again. After those reports I decided to go to the Mud River outing, no matter what the weather forecast would say, but unfortunately Mud River was a complete wash-out.

Dr. Winterbottom asks the help of members to solve some Duck problems, he writes: Having been struck by the frequency with which broods of Cape Wigeon seemed to be accompanied by both parents and knowing that Holarctic ducks have to do the whole job of looking after the family by themselves, without assistance from the males, I began to wonder what the position was. On looking the matter up in Delacour's Waterfowl of the World, vol. 2, I found



this:

"Contrary to the Swans, Geese and Shelducks, in which pairs are formed for life as a rule, the male staying with the female throughout the year, guarding the nest and helping in the rearing of the brood, the majority of Dabbling Ducks take a different mate each season. The drake abandons his consort soon after she has begun to sit, leaves the breeding territory and joins other males .... There are, however, exceptions to this rule ....

"A number of tropical and southern species, however, have different habits .... The male stays with the female and helps in rearing the brood. It is interesting to note that South American representatives of the northern Pintails, Wigeons and Green-winged Teal, for example, behave in a way so drastically different from that of their close relatives."

Examination of the text, species by species, gave eight species of Anas recorded by Delacour as helping to care for the brood, six of them habitually, one "often" and the other "sometimes", this last being the northern Wigeon, A. penelope. No African species is mentioned as doing so, but besides the Wigeon, there is evidence that the Yellowbill and the Shoveller do too. How many do? Members may like to record this whenever they see it, as a useful contribution to our knowledge. Information to African Wildfowl Enquiry, c/o Percy FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town.

Mr. Maurice Chaundy reports interesting behaviour of two Black Duck seen at the Jonkershoek Reserve on 4 August. They unhurriedly left the water and walked up a bank, then deliberately faced each other and, putting their heads together, furiously beat their wings, pushing against each other. After some seconds of this they broke apart and appeared to rest. The performance was repeated twice more (the beating of wings lasting 18 and 16 seconds respectively). Although they appeared to be pushing, the only point where they made contact with each other were the left sides of their heads. They were silent all the time. They then went slowly back into the water, without any appearance of victor or vanquished. Mr. Chaundy has no clue as to the sex of the two birds, but would like to know whether this was love or hate, or if anybody else has seen a similar performance.

On 25 August, Dr. Broekhuysen and his wife went up the Elandskloof-Pass from Citrusdal. At a beautiful picnic spot there they saw a White-winged Seedeater perched on a protea. The species has been recorded from the Cedarberg, but apparently not yet from the near vicinity of Citrusdal.

Mrs. Broekhuysen reports that during a visit to the farm Van der Stel Kraal in the Bredasdorp district on 2 September, she distinctly heard "cuckoo - cuckoo" several times, but none of the party saw the European Cuckoo there. Has anybody else heard or seen it in this area?

Mr. Martin wrote that the Helderberg Nature Reserve at Somerset West will be open to the public until the end of November. The reserve is still in a state of development, but a large variety of wild flowers has been planted. There are also quite a number of birds; in this area the rare White-winged Seedeater was found nesting.

The Committee wants to inform members of the Cape Bird Club that they will be allowed to enter the South African Museum in Cape Town free of charge on producing their S.A.O.S. membership card.

Van Mnr. Morgan kom die volgende waarneming: Aan die hange van Leeukop bokant Clifton is daar 'n dig begroeide stroompie. Hier het ek op 26 Augustus die Knysna-Ruigtesanger (Bradypterus sylvaticus) vir die eerste keer gewaar. Ek vermoed dat daar 'n paar is. Ofskoon hul gesang baie duidelik is, is die sien maar van die vlugtigste. Mnr. Pat Wheeler laat weet dat hy hulle op twee latere geleenthede nog daar gevind het.

Mr. A.J. Tree, of Northern Rhodesia, reports that on 30 October, 1958 he noticed 5 Arctic Skuas and a European House Martin at Three Anchor Bay, and 2 more House Martins at Rietvlei on 3 November.

Dr. Winterbottom spent the long week-end 1 - 3 September at Clanwilliam with excursions into the surrounding country. Some very interesting observations were made (White-winged Seedeater in the Pakhuis Pass where Mr. Clancey had already found it earlier in the year; an Ant-eating Chat and a Rufous-eared Warbler near Graafwater), but the most startling was on the way home, when a call for petrol at Piquetberg revealed the presence there of the European House Sparrow. Mr. Maclean found it at Vanrhynsdorp in December last year, but this jump of about 100 miles in nine months can only be described as sinister! As the bird has reached Touws River, members are urged to keep a keen watch for it in order to track its progress into Cape Town.

I saw a pair of European Sparrows at Vredendal, which is just inside the Cape Bird Club area, on 4 October.

The following appeal by Dr. Winterbottom urges all members to return as many nest record cards as possible, especially of the most common birds. He writes:

People, even experience bird-watchers, sometimes say to me: "But you don't want any more nest cards of that, do you?" - "that" being some very common bird with easily-found nests, like the Coot or the Mossie. This suggests that most of our members are not really aware of all that can be got out of Nest Record Cards if there are enough of them. To take one example, in a recent "Ostrich", I showed that there are definite differences in the breeding season of the Sugarbird between the Cape Peninsula and the Hottentots Holland area; and I have since found that the same applies to several other species too. This was only possible because we had a good many cards of these birds from each area. We can't extend it to other species, because we haven't enough cards to be sure that our results are valid.

Then, while birds in the South West Cape breed at roughly the same time every year, how exact are they? And can these changes from year to year, if they occur at all, be tied up with weather conditions? Several ornithologists have said to me, at one time or another, "the breeding season is early this year;" but that is just a subjective impression. We want evidence to see if seasons do vary from year to year. I am trying to see if this is so at the moment, by using the combined results for 37 common species, analysing each year by year over the period 1951-61.

I haven't nearly finished yet but I have been struck by the apparent variations in some of the species - and by the impossibility of being sure whether this variation is purely by chance or has a real meaning, because there are too few cards. Let me give one or two examples.

The general picture for the Stilt is that the maximum month for clutches to be completed is August; but in 1954, 1955, 1958 and 1960, it appears to have been September; and in 1951, 30 out of 44 cards show clutch-completion in June, a month for which there are no cards whatever in any subsequent year. Why is this? Was 1951 a peculiar year or has nobody looked for Stilt's nests in June since then?

Kittlitz's Plover usually breeds from August to January and February, with a few odd clutches in March and April. But in 1961, there are two records for July; and the maxima vary disconcertingly. It is most often a double one, in October and in January; but in 1951-52, there were no October records at all and the maximum was in February. There were no October records in 1955 either; and in 1959-60, the second maximum was again in February, for which month there are no records at all in 1955, 1957 and 1961. Then the numbers of cards vary from 13 in the summer of 1955-56 and 14 in that of 1956-57 to 54 in 1957-58 and 56 in 1958-59. Does this mean that 1955-56 and 1956-57 were especially bad years for the Kittlitz and 1957-58 and 1958-59 good ones? Or does it mean (as I suspect it does) that one or more workers were specially interested in the Kittlitz in those summers (and in 1952-53, for which there are 52 cards) and that nobody was so interested in the "bad" years? We don't know. And we can't find out when we have only 50 cards or less to work with.

Then there is the Coot. We have less than 20 cards for any single year before 1959. But for 1959, we have 55; for 1960, 42; and for 1961, no less than 96. They show a marked maximum in September in 1959; and in August in the other two years, though in 1961, but not in 1960, many clutches were not completed until September. The percentage figures for the three months August-October, are:

	August	September	October
1959	7	49	27
1960	60	7	12
1961	46	33	18

It may be possible to do something with these.

I have mentioned just a few of the problems that could be solved for some of our very common species if we get enough cards. Last year's total was a record. Let's make this year's another! And common species are even more important than rare ones, because it is only for them that we can hope to get enough to solve some of our most interesting problems.

Dr. Winterbottom sent me a list containing the numbers of Nest Record Cards available for the more common species.

I have just been incorporating the 1961 Cape Bird Club collection of Nest Record Cards into the general collection. Much information about breeding seasons, clutch-size, nesting success, etc., can be gained by analysis of these cards and for the benefit of anybody prepared to work on them, here is the list of species of which we have 100 or more cards from the south-western Cape. I have noted, too, where there is fairly substantial material from one or more other areas; but it must be remembered that the Rhodesian Ornithological Society collection has not yet been received and nor has that from the Eastern Cape Wild Bird Society.

In species marked # the cards have either been already analysed or are being used for a study at present in progress.

# Yellow-billed Duck	106
# Cape Shoveller	175
Cape Dikkop	135
Red-knobbed Coot	257
Black-winged Stilt	295
White-fronted Plover	272 (also 85 from Natal)
Kittlitz's Plover	393 (also 86 from Natal)
Crowned Plover	229
(Blacksmith Plover	99 )
Cape Turtle Dove	382 (also 48 from Southern Rhodesia)
Laughing Dove	106 (also 35 from Transvaal)
# Red-capped Lark	125
# Cape Wagtail	301 (also 49 from Transvaal)
Cape Bulbul	105
Olive Thrush	128
(Stonechat	96)
Cape Robin	362 (also 42 from Transvaal)
Karoo Robin	160
# Grey-backed Cisticola	149
Levaillant's Cisticola	212
# Karoo Prinia	393
Fiscal	238 (also 37 from E. Cape & 37 from Transvaal)
Bokmakierie	203
# (Cape White-eye	97)
Malachite Sunbird	156
# Orange-breasted Sunbird	228
# Lesser Double-collared Sunbird	106
# Cape Sugarbird	398
(Cape Weaver	89 and 4 colonial cards)
Yellow Bishop	124
Mossie	213 (also 77 from Transvaal)
Yellow Canary	115

A full analysis of the White-fronted and Kittlitz's Plovers, as a supplement to Professor Hall's studies of behaviour, would be a useful task.

The following is an appeal from Mr. Skead, 4, Maitland Road, King William's Town. He wants information about how Sunbirds, and especially the Malachite and Lesser Double-collared, feed on Proteas of various kinds. He finds that the Orange-breasted Sunbird pushes its beak in through the side bracts whereas the Sugarbird leans over the edge and slides its beak in between the bracts at a sharp angle but he was not able to observe either of the other two sunbirds on Proteas. He also would like to know, particularly, if any of these four species cope with Protea cynaroides.