

CAPE BIRD CLUB : KAAPSE VOËLWAARNEMERSKLUB

# NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

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December 1962 Desember

This year ends on a very high note: Mr. Lestrangle found a nest which had not been described before. He sent me a most interesting report:

Sunday afternoon 25th November was quite a momentous one for me when wandering in the precincts of Klaver Vlei, looking for nothing in particular but secretly hoping to find a Black Crake's nest, my eyes were drawn to a tussock of sword grass and marsh weed and you can imagine my delight and excitement when, on parting the grass, a nest containing three white, though slightly mud-stained, eggs was revealed. My mind immediately flew to Flufftail, for what other marsh bird lays white eggs?

Red-chested Flufftail are known to inhabit the area but, as is so well known, are seldom ever seen.

Mr. Nico Myburgh passed word of the find on to Mr. John Martin who lost no time in coming from Somerset West and confirmed the nest as the hitherto undiscovered one of the Red-chested Flufftail.

Mr. Myburgh reports the laying of two more eggs on succeeding days and on one occasion witnessed the hen come off the nest while he was a few feet distant. On Thursday Mrs. Myburgh saw the cock bird in the immediate precincts of the nest, but did not see it actually come off it.

The nest is cup-shaped and located at ground level. It is made of grassfronds and lined with rootlets and the stems of grass. The three eggs present at the the time of discovery measure -

28.1 x 21.5    27.4 x 21.7    28.1 x 20.9

I have succeeded in taking two good colour photographs of the cock bird approaching the nest through a small clearing. On 8 December the cock had become remarkably bold and vacated the nest only when the grass above was parted. The escape route is invariably via a mouse tunnel through the tangled weeds which it enters without so much as touching the sides.

The bird is certainly a lot smaller than I suspected and, after seeing it on some 30 occasions, I would be surprised if it measures more than 4 inches in length. How the hen carries 5 eggs averaging 28 x 21 within her body completely mystifies me.

The hen has only been observed on one occasion and one is led to surmise that the cock incubates during daylight and the hen by night. Neither bird incubates during the afternoon and it would seem that the warmth of the sun is sufficient for the purpose.

Photography proved to be extremely difficult, for the bird emerges from the mouse tunnel and loses no time in traversing the 15 inches of open territory between the tunnel and nest. I found that by focusing on the anticipated path of the bird and using a high shutter speed to stop movement, it was possible to obtain a photograph. The appearance of the bird's beak at the



tunnel entrance gives warning of the impending dash across, and if you are quick enough it is possible to get results. Of the 20 pictures taken 18 were failures. The bird never stayed away from the nest longer than 5 minutes after having been flushed.

On 11 December the eggs had disappeared. Incubation has lasted 13 days and it is possible that the young have hatched and left the nest at once. There is no sign of eggshell to suggest destruction by predators or of hatching.

#### Spoonbills at Kersefontein (Berg River mouth).

At the beginning of October, one of our junior members, Beaumont Rowlands, made an extensive check of the heronry at Kersefontein which the Club once visited during an outing. He recorded 38 Spoonbill nests and 33 Sacred Ibis nests both containing eggs as well as young. In the colony there were also over 1,000 nests of the Cattle Egret, 28 of the Little and 24 of the Yellow-billed Egret, 16 of the Reed Cormorant, 5 of the Grey and 8 of the Black-headed Heron.

In an isolated gum-tree on the Berg River bank he found 13 nests of the Darter and 12 of the White-breasted Cormorant. In another grove of trees there were 5 nests of the Yellow-billed Kite. A Fish Eagle's nest with one big young which flew on the day of Beaumont's arrival, was occupied by a Spurwing Goose 4 days later, he says the goose had even begun to lay eggs.

#### Yellow-billed Kite at Rietvlei.

Dr. Winterbottom writes that the Yellow-billed Kite is not common near Cape Town. So it is worth noting that he saw one over Rietvlei on 25 October when doing a census with Mr. Morgan. It was hotly assaulted by Stilts and disappeared in the direction of Milnerton.

#### Snake in Sand Martin nesting-hole.

Mrs. Rowan reports: On 25 October, while Dr. Winterbottom and I were counting waterfowl at Strandfontein Sewage Farm, we noticed that numerous Sand Martins were entering and leaving holes - and thus presumably nesting - in the low sand banks surrounding Pond No. 9. Two or three Pied Starlings were making a nuisance of themselves in the same area. However, as our business was mainly with the Eared Grebes, Avocet, Stilt and numerous Wigeon on the water, we trained our glasses on them, until an excited twittering from the Martins, accompanied by hoarse screeches from the Starlings, attracted our attention once again.

About 40 or 50 birds were fluttering agitatedly round one small section of the bank and the Pied Starlings seemed to be striking at something with their feet. Moving our position slightly to bring this part of the bank into view, we saw a long slender green and yellow snake trying to come out of one of the holes in the bank. About half its length was exposed, and as it twisted this way and that, the starling jumped at it and pecked at it, swearing loudly all the time. Eventually the birds' attack proved too much for the snake, and it withdrew within the hole once more. Although we watched the excited gathering for several more minutes, it did not reappear.

The count yielded several interesting observations, including a remarkably large number of Wigeon (about 500), 2 Little Swifts hawking over Pond No. 11, and a Whimbrel feeding among other waders in Tamatie Vlei.

Verskil in die roep van die Willie (Sombre Bulbul).

Dr. J.E. Nel het opgemerk dat die skree van die Willie in die Gansbaai gebied opmerklik verskil van dié van die Ladismith omgewing.

Gansbaai gebied:- Kweet --- turr-turr-wheeo, eindigende in 'n skaars hoorbare pheet-a-pheeeoo.

Ladismith gebied (Klein Swartbergreeks):- Kweet---chirr-whit-chit-chit-whee, gevolg deur 'n sag-, uitgerekte tuueeo.

Hier is 'n taak vir lede wat 'n bandopnametoestel het; in Europa is al baie sogenaamde „dialekte" van dieselfde soort voël in verskillende gebiede beskryf.

In die Klein Swartberg het Dr. Nel onder 'n oorhangende rots 'n swawlnes (halfmaanvorm) met twee spierwit leë eierdoppies gevind. Dit was seker die nessie van 'n Pêrelbors-swaweltjie; dit sal baie interessant wees as lede elke swawelnes rapporteer wat nie aan 'n huis of onder 'n brug, maar aan 'n natuurlike plek gebou is. Ek het sover sulke neste net eenkeer gevind: op 'n plaas naby Oos-Londen was 5 of 6 neste van die Klein Streepswawel onder oorhangende rotse langs 'n droë riviertjie.

Fiscal Shrike impaling egg.

Mr. Martin reports: Near Leipoldtville in early August my wife saw a Fiscal Shrike carry something into a bush. On inspecting we found that it was a fresh Fiscal Shrike egg - not necessarily but probably its own - neatly impaled on a thorn. The thorn had pierced both sides of the shell and protruded about half-an-inch. Apart from the two neat holes made in the shell by the thorn and a further slight crack the egg was undamaged.

Saving a swallow's nest.

Mr. Martin reports: Mr. Nico Myburgh of Klavervlei showed me a nest of Pearl-breasted Swallows with four young. This is last year's nest which had fallen down from a beam in the tobacco-drying room. Nico had put the nest back in place with three nails and a piece of wire, after the nest had been lying on a pile of reeds for months.

Little Swifts back at the Strand.

Mr. Underhill informs me that the Little Swifts have returned to their nests under the eaves of the Traffic Department building (Strand end of Hofmeyr Street). A local resident told him that the birds have been nesting at this site for about 15 years. When the nests were destroyed because the building was repainted, they were promptly rebuilt.

Report on Field Card Scheme.

Since it is some years since a comprehensive report on the Field Cards was made, this report reviews the present position in some detail.

The total number of completed cards in the files is now 2,839. Omitting from consideration those whose sole contribution to the scheme was their participation in the Garden Birds Enquiry and whose contribution was fully acknowledged in the Report, 72 persons have contributed over the years. Apart from the Organiser,

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those who have submitted ten cards or more, with the number submitted in the past year, are listed below; but to avoid either having to work in fractions or giving an inflated idea of the general response of members to the scheme, which, with the exception of Misses J, C. and E. Robinson and, more recently, one or two others, has been generally poor, only the first name on joint reports has been counted (e.g. a card labelled "Smith and Van der Merwe" is credited only to Smith). The list is:

	<u>Total</u>	<u>1961</u>
Miss J. Robinson /	263	26
R. Liversidge	56	0
J. Martin	49	22
Dr. G.J. Broekhuysen	41	(Not listed)
Mrs. M.K. Rowan	39	(Not listed)
Miss E. Robinson /	36	0
W.T. Ferguson	35	0
A.H. Wilson	30	0
Miss J. Ethelston	29	24
Mrs. I. Taylor	26	7
H.K. Morgan	24	15
J. Cartwright	23	0
Mrs. M. Broekhuysen	20	8
J.R. Grindley	19	0
Mrs. Chaundy	18	6
Mrs. E. Martin	18	16
S.W. Clarke	17	0
J.M. Feely	17	0
Miss C. Robinson	15	9
R.K. Schmidt	12	1
Miss D. Clarke	11	1
J.G.R. MacLeod	11	0
Miss H. Troughton	11	0
E. Ashforth	10	1
A. Morris	10	1

Other contributors during 1961 were:

H.J. v.d. H. Barry	4	3
P. Tongue	4	3
G.L. Maclean	3	3
Dr. J.E. Nel	1	1

/ Mostly in collaboration with Miss C. Robinson.

The geographical spread of the cards is very uneven, as can be seen from the following:

Bellville	108	Peninsula	1207
Bredasdorp	482	Piquetberg	78
Caledon	160	Robertson	25
Ceres	22	Swellendam	65
Clanwilliam	86	Tulbagh	18
Hopefield	99	Vanrhynsdorp	24
Hottentots Holland	161	Wellington	21
Malmesbury	89	Worcester	76
Paarl	51		

The remaining cards were either extra-limital or refer to several Districts on the same card. Human nature comes out in these cards; e.g., virtually none of the 161 cards from Hottentots Holland come from residents in that area, whose contributions are cards for Bredasdorp, Piquetberg and similar distant Districts!

The ecological spread is equally, or even more, uneven. Only seven of the 43 habitats are represented by more than 100 cards, as follows:

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Indigenous Bush on Flats	337
Permanent Vleis	330
Temporary Vleis	327
Gardens & Parks	196
Indigenous Bush on Mountains	148
Wattles	145
Pastures and Commons	141

Next in order are Lagoons (72), Sandy Seashores (72) and Offshore (71). Precipices and Hakea Bush are not represented at all. Now that work is being put in hand for a new Check List, may I appeal to members to give more whole-hearted support to this scheme than they have done in the past? Of the 2,839 cards, roughly 1,900 have been completed by the Organiser, about 950 by another 71 people and none by the other 200 or so members. No. 3 on the list of contributors is still Mr. Liveridge, who left the area several years ago.

J.M. Winterbottom  
ORGANISER

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I wish to thank all those members who contributed to the Newsletter during the past year. Compliments of the season and happy birding in 1963 to all members.

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