

NEWS SHEET

NO.5

APRIL/MAY 1952.

EDITOR: Mrs. M.K. Rowan, Tierbos, Hout Bay.

This News Sheet must begin with an apology for issuing only one number in April and May, instead of two. There are several contributory causes, not the least of which was the resignation of Mr. Richard Liversidge as Hon. Secretary of the Cape Bird Club. Mr. Liversidge was largely responsible for initiating this News Sheet, and until March he played a major part in its production, providing many items of interest and undertaking the duplication and distribution of more than 130 copies every month.

Until Mr. Liversidge was obliged to relinquish the secretaryship on account of his studies, few of us realised what was owed him for his unobtrusive organisation and smooth running of the Club's affairs. He gave hours of his spare time and brought boundless enthusiasm to the task. At the meeting on 1 April, Dr. Broekhuysen spoke on behalf of all members of the Club in thanking Mr. Liversidge for his years of service. At the same time, another vote of thanks goes to Mr. J.G.R. MacLeod and Mr. C. D'J, Murray for jointly undertaking our secretarial work in future.

NOTES AND RECORDS.

Remarks in News Sheet No.4 about the aviaries in the Cape Town Gardens have brought an interesting letter from Mr. John Perry, an enthusiastic and experienced aviculturist. "Aviaries such as those in the Gardens (writes Mr. Perry) are enough to cause the public to condemn aviculture as a cruel past-time", while those at Groote Schuur are not much better.

The question of keeping wild creatures in captivity is one on which no two interested persons ever reach agreement. Mr. Perry quotes Dr. Bigalke as saying that birds and animals, given proper housing, can be happier in captivity than in the wild state. Whether you agree with him or not, you will concede that the important words in the statement are "given proper housing". This, according to Mr. Perry, is just what Cape Town's public aviaries lack. He has some constructive criticisms to offer, which may be of interest to readers.

While the Gardens aviaries are sufficiently spacious for a mixed collection, the cages containing budgerigars and pigeons are badly overcrowded. As Mr. Perry points out, it is difficult to understand why "fancy" pigeons and Turtle Doves are caged at all. They could be allowed the freedom of the Gardens, and the enclosure used for other birds of more interest to the general public. The budgerigars are not only overcrowded (Mr. Perry recommends limiting the number to ten pairs) but they are also without adequate nesting space. When budgies are kept on the "colony-system", aviculturists find it necessary to provide at least two nest-boxes for every pair, in order to reduce fighting, especially amongst the females.

The pebble floors, although they appear neat and clean, are unsatisfactory. Mr. Perry recommends a natural ground surface for the many birds which like to scratch and/or take dust-baths. More natural foliage, such as suitable growing shrubs and clumps of bamboo, is required to provide the birds with adequate shelter. Weavers especially require plants of reed-like habit, as experience has shown that they will not use the type of shelter provided for them in the Gardens aviary, and so must suffer a good deal during inclement weather. Another interesting point is that the large enclosure at Groote Schuur is much too high. On windy days birds trying to reach the highest perches (particularly long-tailed species) frequently get blown against the wire netting with force enough to injure them.

Mr. Perry's letter contains many other technical suggestions far too numerous to mention here. It amply demonstrates, not only the inadequacy of our public aviaries, but also the ease with which many faults and shortcomings could be set right. The suggested improvements need entail little or no extra expense as most of them are simply part of the ordinary routine of maintaining a public park.

On 26th March a single Namaqua or Long-tailed Dove was seen on Green Point Common. Mr. Darton, who identified it, states that he has seen it there once before, some years ago. Dr. Gill, in his "First Guide" says that there are a few Namaqua Doves about Cape Town, but there seems to be little precise information regarding its occurrence here. Are there any readers with records of this species in the Peninsula or vicinity, which we can add to our scant knowledge?

Mr. Liversidge has supplied four interesting items for this number:

(1) "Every winter we have a pair of Sugar-birds on the proteas next to the Zoology Department at the University. Three weeks ago (late March) one of the birds arrived, announcing its coming with its pretty, chatty song. A week later the second bird appeared. If they follow last year's pattern, they will leave here when nesting starts at Kirstenbosch. Does this behaviour tally with your Sugar-birds at Tokai?"

(2) "I was once told that storm petrels never rest on the sea, but on debris, boats, etc. On a recent trip on False Bay (12 April) we saw 7 or 8 of these little birds, hovering and tipping the water with their feet as they lowered their legs. (This is characteristic feeding behaviour, often described as "standing" to feed - Ed.) The day was choppy and windy, but I was fortunately able to retain my interest in the birds, despite the bad example of others in the boat! I was rewarded by seeing a storm petrel floating on the water for 2 to 4 minutes before we came up with it and frightened it to flight. Could you tell us something about this subject?"

On the same trip I noticed that all the Bank Cormorants we saw had white patches on their rumps, as in Roberts' illustration. However, on a recent trip to Seal Island we saw only two such birds, all other Bank Cormorants being completely black".

(3) "This year I am continuing with my Stilt-watching and recently visited the area for preliminary observations. There I noticed a number of Blacksmith Plovers, 18 in all, which congregate in a small area. Some, more solitary than others, seem to have a "selective" territory, that is they tolerate some members of the group, but chase others away. As there are only a small number of birds, and as they breed in a confined area, they offer an ideal opportunity for detailed study of their habits, behaviour and breeding cycle. I am unable to spare much attention from my Stilts, but I hope that someone else will undertake this promising research project. I might add that any interested person will be welcome to use the hide which I hope to build for watching the Stilts."

(4) "On 14 April I had a good look at a flock of 13 Flamingoes at Lakeside, which allowed an unusually close approach. The birds were all Greater Flamingoes. Less than 40% had dark pink legs, and only two had a suffused pink coloration, though all showed crimson flight feathers."

My reply to the question raised in Item (1) is that nowadays Sugarbirds are only occasional visitors to my area at Tokai. Their appearances are brief and unpredictable. The area has become a residential one, heavily cultivated with exotics - small vineyards, orchards, introduced trees and shrubs, and imported flowers. Like so many other species whose existence is bound up with our unique indigenous flora, the Sugarbird seems to be retreating before the advance of introduced, manmade environments. However, at my new home at Hout Bay, I am fortunate in having the run of one of the few untouched stretches of mountainside remaining in the Peninsula. Here Sugarbirds breed. The first to arrive this year was heard and seen on Leap Year's Day. It must have been an early-comer, however, and the bulk arrived about mid-March. They will remain with us now, throughout the winter, disappearing again as summer approaches. Where do they come from, and where do they go again, as the seasons change? No one knows. Many Sunbirds, too, appear and disappear in the same mysterious way, and so do tropical weavers belonging to the genus Ploceus. No one has yet succeeded in tracing and explaining these baffling movements.

Regarding Item (2), it is, of course, not true that storm petrels never rest on the surface of the water, but it seems that they do so very rarely. They are most often seen skimming in swallow-like, rather erratic flight, or skipping on the surface of the waves, but when they alight, they float bouyantly. It would be interesting to know what kind of storm petrel Mr. Liversidge saw in the deep sweep of False Bay, as these birds usually avoid inshore waters preferring the open ocean.

Mr. Stanford has lent me a whole sheaf of notes made on a recent (March)

trip to George, Wilderness and Oudtshoorn. There is so much interesting material that it is hard to choose an extract for the News Sheet. Unfortunately space does not allow of more than the following passage in this number :-

"At George on 18 March I saw an interesting incident. A pair of Olive Woodpeckers were feeding on some big oak trees. When they pecked for insects they frequently dislodged old bark, revealing quite a few insects, or so it seemed to me; for the woodpeckers were closely followed by a pair of Fork-tailed Drongos and a pair of lovely Black-Headed Orioles. They were waiting for the Woodpeckers to expose insects, for, as pieces of bark fell away, they darted in. Both pairs, while clearly being polite to the Woodpeckers (who took no notice of either), loudly scolded each other and shouldered one another out of choice positions. Every now and then a drongo darted at an oriole, and vice versa. They were well matched for both are much the same size, and considerably larger than the woodpeckers. It seemed to me that both drongos and orioles appreciated the moment when the woodpeckers got to dead branches where the bark might be expected to fall away, for then they closed in; otherwise they kept their distance, although at times one or other came right up to the feeding woodpeckers to snatch insects disturbed from live bark. This interesting behaviour continued until the woodpeckers had fed away out of sight amongst the trees."

RINGING:

Here is another recovery: A Yellow-billed Duck ringed at Hermanus on 2 January, 1951, by Junior member P. Steyn was found dead in February, 1952, near the national road outside Bot River. The ring was in good condition.

It is with much pleasure that the Committee thanks the following people for further generous donations to the Ringing Scheme:

Mrs. B.K. Knight
 Mr. J.G.R. MacLeod
 "Ship-a-Shore"
 Mr. R. Liversidge
 Miss O. Moller
 Dr. and Mrs. Broekhuysen.

Our ringing fund now totals £9:11: -d.

FINANCIAL REPORT OF THE CAPE BIRD CLUB

FOR 1951.

Balance 1950	£32:17: -d.	Paid to S.A.O.S.	£70: 5: -d.
Subscriptions 1951	99:15: -	Meetings	4: 3: -
Donations Ringing Scheme	2: 7: 6	Stationery and Stamps	7:15:10
Subscriptions 1952	7: -: -	Species Cards	16: 2: 6
Sale of rings	9: 7: 6	Ringing Scheme	12: 5: -
Sale of Species Cards	-:14: 3	Balance 1951	41: 9:11
	<u>£152: 1: 3d.</u>		<u>£152: 1: 3d.</u>

(Sgd.) M.H. Broekhuysen. Hon.Treasurer

(") J. Greef Hon.Auditor