

CAPE BIRD CLUB  
NEWS SHEET

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Editor: Mrs M.K. Rowan.

Tierbos, Hout Bay.

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Sixteen months ago, in the introduction to our first number, the following passage occurred;

"The success or failure of the News Sheet will depend largely on the response and interest shown by readers. Without their active co-operation it is bound to be a dull affair. Your notes, enquiries and special problems are needed to make it the lively and encouraging link between members that we hope it will become".

These words apply with equal truth today, and I would appeal once again to all readers to supply the contributions without which the News Sheet cannot continue. In the past four months only two numbers have been issued, because there has been insufficient material to warrant the production of any more.

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NOTES AND RECORDS,

A most interesting item has been contributed by Mrs Sawkins, who writes as follows: "On Thursday 22 January, we were motoring along the old road from Somerset West. About two miles out we noted something unusual, and so we stopped and backed the car to a good vantage point. We were surprised and pleased to see a European Roller perched on a telegraph wire some fifty yards from the road. While my husband returned to Somerset West to inform other members, I watched the bird, which made many excursions into the vines after insects, returning each time to different parts of the wire. Later in the day about six other members were able to see the bird, which was still hunting in approximately the same place. Mr MacLeod tells me that he saw a European Roller about five or six years ago, very near the point at which the present one was seen".

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In the middle of February Mr & Mrs Thesen and Mr & Mrs Liversidge spent a weekend at Langebaan. They report that bird life along the edges of the lagoon and on the central sandbanks was less varied and not as abundant as usual. On the sandbanks 15 different kinds of waders were noted, but none was represented by more than 200 individuals. The party tried night-netting, but the tides were not helpful and they enjoyed little success. However, 5 White-fronted and 3 Kittlitz Sandplovers were ringed, and two nests of each were discovered. Of particular interest was one of the nesting Kittlitz Plovers. This bird had a scrape containing one egg, which it covered with wet sand, and which was obviously at a lower level than high water of spring tide. Near this was a second empty scrape, and about three feet from the first egg there was another, lying amongst the Salicornia. The bird did not incubate peacefully, but ran restlessly backwards and forwards between the three positions. The following day, after another high spring tide, the egg in the Salicornia had disappeared, but the original scrape was found to contain two eggs. Mr Liversidge writes: "We felt that the bird could not have got the egg out of the Salicornia on its own, and we were sorry that we had not seen what had happened".

Here is a field for speculation! Were the eggs washed about by the tide, and indeed, how long could the bird's urge to incubate persist in the face of periodic swamping of its nest? For those who like to theorise about inherited characters and the survival or extinction of the race there is also a nice point in the bird's choice of a nesting site below the level of high water of spring tide.

The weekend party also found many cormorant corpses which they examined (in vain) for rings. They learnt from Sgt. Basson of the S.A.P. that hundreds of these birds had come ashore in December, and made their way inland to die. It appears that similar thing occurred at Oranjemund



and it is reported that all the dying cormorants were heavily infested with bird lice.

The Langobaan account ends with a distressing description of the ruin of Schapen Island, on which rabbits have been reintroduced. It appears that the rabbits have bred up to such large numbers that they have destroyed most of the vegetation, with the result that they themselves are dying of starvation. Mr Liversidge prophesies that rain and wind will soon complete the processes of erosion, thus begun, and Schapen Island will be reduced to another unattractive rocky outcrop.

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Also in February, at Schryvershoek on the southern corner of the Langobaan lagoon, thirty members had an excellent outing. The incoming tide provided them with the magnificent sight of thousands of waders concentrated on a small area of exposed mud. Amongst Curlew, Whimbrel, Greenshank, Grey Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Ringed Plover, Turnstone, Little Stint, Sanderling and Marsh Sandpiper, a new bird to many was the Terek Sandpiper, of which 8 were seen. There was a large flock of Flamingos and one or two Sacred Ibis. In the scrub Yellow Seedeaters, Ground Robins, Cape Buntings, Crembecs and a Grey Tit were seen.

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Miss Joan Robinson has some interesting observations made at L'Agulhas during January. She and her sister had a "first record" in two Knots seen on the saltpan at Springfield amongst flocks of other commoner waders. "Another bird seen for the first time in this district was the White Stork. We counted 40 in the Bontebok Park, and there were others in neighbouring ploughed lands and pastures. Fielduck in numbers were seen on the two salt-pans, and these too were new to us in this part of the country. There were three to four hundred Flamingos again, and also Chestnut-banded Plover, Avocet and many other waders".

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Miss Claire Robinson mentions that she has not heard or seen a Chaffinch in Plumstead since 9 January, although they are usually noisy and conspicuous in her garden, early in the year. By contrast Dr Barnard reported that Chaffinches were still singing merrily in Oranjericht on 24 December, although "Piet the Cuckoo had gone silent". It may be of interest to add that in late November I heard and saw a Chaffinch in the oaks at Longkloof, Hout Bay. This is the first and only time I have recorded the bird on this side of the Peninsula.



I have often heard it said that there are no chats in the Peninsula proper, and until recently, my own observations here led me to accept this statement. However, towards the end of last year, on the Chapman's Peak Road, I twice glimpsed what was probably a Familiar Chat. Being doubtful, I made no positive record. Then, on 23 March I spent ten minutes watching a pair of Familiar Chats on the roadside between Llandudno and Oudekraal, and was able to satisfy myself that they really do occur here. Has anyone else records of this bird in the Peninsula?

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In January, Miss Kathleen Vos of Wynberg sent me the following story and asked for an explanation: "A pair of Black (European) Starlings built their nest in a hole in an oak tree near my bedroom window. A family was reared successfully and the young flew away. Then, when the second family was old enough to appear at the entrance to the hole, begging for food, two Grey Starlings appeared on the scene. They hovered about the young birds, but did not seem to attack them, and I thought that they fed them several times. However, whenever the Black Starlings came along, they chased the grey birds away. Eventually the Black Starlings always left one bird on guard at the nest, while the other went hunting, and this went on for some days, until the young of the second brood flew. The Black Starlings continued to use their nest-hole, and one bird often brought food. I think the female must have been sitting again. However, the Grey Starlings continued to intrude, often entering the hole, and there was much chasing and watching."

The key to mystery lies, of course, in the fact that young European Starlings in their first plumage are dark grey, and lack the spangled glossy appearance of the adult. It seems probable that Miss Vos's "Grey Starlings" were the young of the first brood. If this is so, it is interesting to note the persistence with which they returned to their nest, in the face of the adults' consistent chasing. Miss Vos's impression that the young of the first

brood (Presumed) fed the young of the second brood is also of considerable interest. There must be any number of opportunities for closer study of this abundant and aggressive exotic, but Miss Vos's story draws attention to how little we know of its life history and habits.

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#### RINGING:

The projected trip to Malagas Island had to be postponed, and is now tentatively planned for early April. Anyone seeking further information should apply to Mr Liversidge at the Zoology Department, U.C.T.

Recoveries from the work done on a previous trip to Malagas, when 2000 birds were ringed, are now coming in. In July, there were two returns from Benguella, both for young birds; adults were recovered in August at Cape Point, in January at Strahfontein, and (no date given) on the Pondoland coast. These returns, which amount to rather less than  $\frac{1}{2}\%$  recoveries up to date, show promise of interesting information regarding the movements of our gannets.

Other interesting returns are (1) Young Cattle Egret, ringed at Rondevlei, recovered and released again at Koelenberg, Cape. (2) A Cape Cormorant ringed at Marcus Island, recovered in Duncan Docks. (3) Another Cape Cormorant, ringed on 6 December at Dassen Island, recovered three weeks later at Orangemund.

Mr Rand (now on his way to study American methods of wild life management with particular reference to seals on the Pribilov Islands) has been flipper-banding Jackass Penguins on Dassen Island, in an effort to learn more about the coast-wise movements of these birds. A juvenile, just about ready to leave the island, was banded on 8 September 1952, and recovered dead, about a mile from the sea, at Orangemund two months later. The young bird had ranged nearly 300 miles, but it is something of a mystery as to how and why it covered the last mile of all.

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#### REQUESTS:

For the last count of Palearctic waders on local vleis, Dr Winterbottom suggests the date 19 April. Anyone willing to assist should get in touch with him as soon as possible.

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Apropos of Mr Higgo's discovery of a dead flamingo at Riet Vlei, Mr Middlemiss asks whether anyone making a similar find in future would be good enough to give him the corpse for examination. (Address: Rondevlei Bird Sanctuary).

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