

THE CAPE BIRD CLUB

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A very Happy Xmas to all our members and good bird-watching in 1956.

Recently during his examinations Mr. Liversidge had been taking short walks for fresh air near his home which is situated not far from the ruins of Lady Ann Barnard's cottage, heard for the first time this season, the beautiful call of a bird, he had tried hard last year to identify. The call is a chit-chit-chit-chit- tit-tit-tit, with a long pause between notes at first increasing in momento and finally ending up in a trill - usually 12-14 syllables.

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RONDEBOSCH,

During one of these walks he was fortunate to see this alluring songster - a dark brown bird, creeping in the dark tangle of rambles. The bird the size of a Sedge Warbler with the same heavy rounded tail, but its stance was nearly horizontal, so that it could creep through and between the thick growth. This is probably the illusive Knysna Scrub Warbler, and he hopes when he returns from Pretoria to re-establish contact with the bird and even find its nest next year. It is the last remaining bird to occur in the Cape, which has never had its nest described.

On 10th November he was surprised to hear the Paradise Flycatcher again in Newlands. At first he heard the bird only and when a Fiscal Shrike flew out from the bushes whence the voice came, he merely thought it was another mimic note to the repertoire of this shrike. He had however not walked more than five paces when across the open in his own garden flew a Paradise Flycatcher. I quote the following from Mr. Liversidge's letter. He says: "By the way, speaking to one of our prominent 'ornithologists' made me realise that it is not generally known in the Cape that the male Paradise Flycatcher may not necessarily have a long tail - short tail male birds also occur".

On his way north to Pretoria he noted Indian Swifts in Laingsberg, which is a new area to his knowledge. Also he saw Cliff Swallows 20 miles south of Richmond and wonders how long this species will take to come further south.

On the 25th November Mr. Liversidge and Dr. Scott went down to Kersfontein on the Berg River. They visited the Yellowbilled Kite nests where they were able to ring only two young birds. The numbers do not seem to be any less over the last few years, and the nests do appear at last, alas, to be placed in inaccessible situations - although Mr. Melck gives the birds full protection. This year for the first time, after some eight or nine visits to the area, he was physically attacked by the birds. They dived and came very close several times and on one occasion the bird's talons actually pulled through Mr. Liversidge's hair - what might

almost be literally a close shave.

On 4th December Dr. Winterbottom saw a white Stork in the Elgin District I did not have enough space last month to put in all Mrs. Rowan's interesting notes so I am continuing with them here:

"So much for the dam. On the other side of the road we watched a pair of Capped Wheatear perching on the fence not 10 feet from the car. They carried food in their bills and, after much display dived into a hole in the ground, returning soon, empty billed to display, hunt and display again. Plainly they had young in the rodent hole, which twisted a few inches from the surface, so that the chicks were invisible, though not always inaudible. It was, however, the display which fascinated me. Perched on the fence they bobbed up and down, tail over tip and back again, uttering little clicking notes with each bob. And then, as we bent to peer in the nest hole, one bird rose on the wing and hovered in one spot overhead, treating us to a ventriloquist concert of harsh notes and sweetest song, such as I have never heard from any other bird.

Our greatest excitement I think, was flushing a Banded Sandmartin from its nest in a hole in the bank of a shallow gully. Four of these birds circled overhead and perched nearby as we explored the nest. It was a long, very narrow tunnel, lined almost to the entrance with feathers. No eggs were visible, and the tunnel was too narrow to allow us to explore it by hand. Nearby was a Pied Starling's nest from which we flushed a bird, presumably incubating. Here again our torch did not reveal the contents of the nest chamber, but it showed once more that the tunnel was fully featherlined. As noted, there were four Banded Sandmartins. I wonder whether the Spreus had evicted one pair from their nest?

Karoo Larks were seen feeding their young; Yellow Seed-eaters were found building at Paternoster; Cape Weaver males were still weaving and the females were still lining their chosen nests - a late date for such activities. Sicklewinged Chats were feeding three blind young in a nest which was found empty two days later. A widowbird and his wives had taken up residence beside a fishing factory in a small grainfield. At another factory, Cape Sparrows had flying young which exercised their wings back and forth across the vast store-room while others built their nest above the fishmeal plant - A lovely week".

The week-end camp held at Elgin was most successful. The site under oaks with a stream running through into a small ? was an ideal one. On and near the site over 30 species of birds were seen, nests of the Cape Batis, Dusky and Paradise Flycatchers were found on the site, the latter was building and when he had left the nest a Cape Canary came and stole some of his building material from the nest. European Starlings and Cape Canaries were nesting there too, and on the edge of the camp Apalis was seen carrying food and some of our members spent some time trying to locate an Apalis nest in a thick tangle of brambles.

All the owls in Elgin must have congregated there that night judging by the noise. Spotted Eagle and Woodfords owls were heard and others unknown to our experts. I was awakened next morning by a Piet-myn-vrouwshouting in my ear, which he must have been doing for some time as I had been dreaming of Piet-myn-vrouws just before waking.

Most of us were up and about 5.30 a.m. looking for birds and nests beyond the confines of the camp, an unknown owl was flushed and in our efforts to see it properly climbed up a very loose, stony bank, however we had no luck and came down on our backs quicker than we went up. We wandered back to camp and breakfast, and out again until the morning began to get hot when we returned to the shade of our camp and lay watching the Cape Batis feeding their young in the tree above us, or the Paradise Flycatchers building their nest. A colony of Cape Weavers were found some little distance from camp with 130 nests. After lunch some of us took a walk along the side of the orchard and up the hill at the back of the camp during which we found a Dove's nest with two eggs. All too soon we had to strike camp and wend our way home after a delightful week-end.

Miss E. Robinson reports that a Spotted Flycatcher is on her farm at Kraaifontein. This bird which is a rare migrant was first seen on November 17th and apparently comes out every evening between 5.30 - 6.00 p.m. and remains around until dark. Messrs. MacLeod and Martin came all the way from Somerset West to verify the identification of this bird.

A solitary Lesser Flamingo was seen by my sister and myself at Jacob's Vlei, Phillippi on 2nd December. This is the first time we have ever seen Flamingo there.

Annual General Meeting. The Annual Meeting of the Club was held at the Zoology Dept., University of Cape Town on 25th November. The following nominations for office bearers had been received, Chairman, Dr. Broekhuysen, Vice-Chairman, Miss J. Robinson, Hon. Secretary: Mr. Liversidge Hon. Treasurer: Mrs. Broekhuysen. Committee Members: Messrs. Schmidt, Martin and MacLeod. There being no other nominations these were duly elected. The Chairman read his report and the Hon. Treasurer gave a brief resumé of the financial situation which is satisfactory.

#### Chairman's Report - Nov. 1955.

The past year has been an active one for the Cape Bird Club The Committee met five times. Among the more important topics discussed were:

- a) Publication of a Check for our Area;
- b) The printing of an Introduction-pamphlet to the Club;
- c) Control of the speedboat-menace at Zeekoevlei;
- d) The establishment of a field Study Centre;
- e) Amendment of part of the Constitution.

The Check List is now in its galley-proof stage and will appear in the next few weeks. This is an important contribution (~~will appear in the next few weeks and~~(it is the result of observations by our members).

During the year six excursions were held, and although the weather often was not very co-operative, the attendance was very satisfactory. In addition seven evening meetings were held, which also were very well attended.

MEMBERSHIP The membership now stands at 173 of which 2 are Hon. members, 6 Life Members, 3 Institutional Members, 18 Junior Members, 12 Family Members and 132 Ordinary Members. The membership at the end of 1954 was 148 and there has therefore been a very satisfactory increase.

Distribution Cards. During the course of the year 262 filled-in distribution cards were handed in to Dr. Winterbottom. These were divided over 20 different people. It is felt that this important part of the activities of the club should meet with more response and it is hoped that in the coming Club-year more members will participate.

INQUIRY INTO STATUS OF GARDEN BIRDS: The total number of filled in forms handed in is 80. 50 of these were by members and as many as 30 by non-members. It is felt that members have been put to shame and something should be done about this.

NEST RECORD CARDS: Since January 524 Nesting Record cards have been handed in to Mr. Liversidge, the recorder. The grand total of recorded nests now stands at 6,444. New nesting records are those of Whistling Duck, African Spotted Crane, Plain-backed Pippit and Woodford's Owl.

RINGING: During the past year a total of 5858 birds were ringed by Rondevlei Bird Sanctuary, which will be mentioned separately. The major part of the 5858 is made up by 5373 Gannets, which were ringed at Malagas Island in February. In total 43 different species of birds have been ringed. Some of the more important were:

13 European Swallows, 9 Greater Stripe-breasted Swallows, 9 White-throated Swallows, 75 Blackbrowed Albatrosses, 2 Shy- and 2 Wandering Albatross; 2 Woodford's Bush Owl young and 1 Kiasies Cuckoo nestling. In the Rondevlei Bird Sanctuary Mr. Middlemiss ringed 1897 birds during the past year, covering 58 species. Among those were 29 European Swallows, 57 Little Stints, 7 Avocets, 2 Curlew Sandpipers, 1 Ruff and 1 Common Sandpiper.

The grand total of Birds ringed by members of the Club during the year which lies behind us is therefore 7755. Reports on arrivals and departure of Migratory Species have been coming in rather slowly and members are urged to cooperate more enthusiastically.

NEWS SHEET: The News Sheet, edited by the Vice-Chairman, Miss J. Robinson has been appearing regularly and maintained its high standard. I would like to thank Miss Robinson for all the work she has been putting in. The work of the Editor will be made easier if members contribute by sending in copy.

FINANCIAL POSITION: The financial position of the Club is satisfactory as will appear later from the balance sheet.

I would like to end this report by expressing my warmest thanks to my fellow-committee-members who have worked hard for the club. In this respect I would like to mention especially our Secretary, Mr. Liversidge and our Treasurer Mr. Brecknussen.

Mr. Winterbottom I would like to thank for the large amount of work he has put into the compiling of the Check-list, Mrs. Winterbottom for so completely providing us all with tea during the evening meetings. Lastly those responsible for keeping the records of the different activities of the Club.

After the business of the evening was concluded Mr. Johanson showed his excellent film "Our Heritage", which everyone enjoyed.

Members will be pleased to hear that Dr. Gill who has been in hospital for some time is better.

We have to record with deep regret the death on December 13th of one of our esteemed and valued members Dr. T.B. Davie.