

News Letter No. 41.
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In News Letter No. 34 (March/
April, 1956) the editors "felt sure
that all members would like to help to
build up a record of Bird Behaviour in
our area". The response to this has
so far been rather disappointing as only
three members have sent in such records.
As the breeding season is now practically
over and, for a time, hardly any Nest
Record Cards need be filled in, the Asst.
Editor (elected as recorder) would be
very pleased to receive short notes about
bird behaviour and food taken by the

various species. Please dig in your note books and help build up this
record.

On January 5th Mrs. Taylor saw a flock of 42 Flamingo at the
small vleei between Paarden Island and Milnerton; and also towards
Milnerton two nests of the Kittlitz Sandplover each containing 2 eggs;
also one pair of Crowned Plover with one very small chick, and on the
Common two pairs of Crowned Plover each with three fairly large chicks.
Mrs. Taylor found another pair on the Common earlier with three young,
one parent being an albino.

A Treble-banded Sandplover's nest was found by Anthony Eaton
in a quarry at Melkbosch on 7th October. The nest, a little scrape of
fine gravel amid coarse gravel about ten yards from a small pool,
contained one egg. On the 13th the nest was empty and there was no
sign of egg shell or birds. As far as he could ascertain they were the
only pair of Treble-banded in that vicinity.

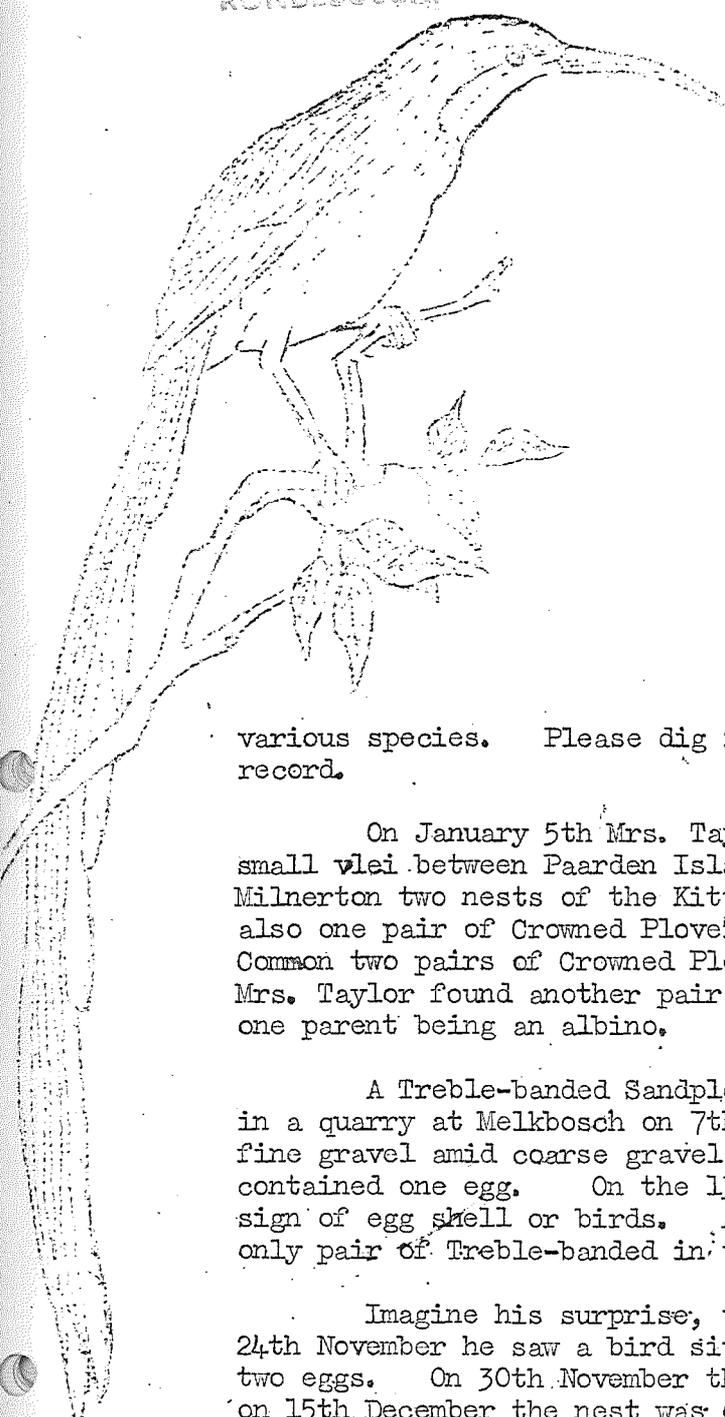
Imagine his surprise, therefore, when passing the same spot on
24th November he saw a bird sitting on the old nest which then contained
two eggs. On 30th November the eggs were still being incubated, but
on 15th December the nest was empty, and neither egg shells nor birds
were seen.

Are there any other members who have records of the Treble-banded
Sandplover using the same scrape twice?

The following observations from Dr. Broekhuysen I am quoting in
full :-

On 28th December, 1956, we motored out to the Bee-eaters'
colony in a quarry on the Geelbek Road to check up whether the birds were
still there. On our way a careful count of all migratory species was kept
as usual. Between Wissershok and Ysterfontein 11 Steppe Buzzards were
recorded and in three of the cases the bird was seen to "hover" as Rock
Kestrels and Black-shouldered Kites do. This seems to be a very unusual
performance for our Steppe Buzzards and I suggest that members keep an eye
open for this and record any cases of "hovering". The European Buzzard
(very much related to the Steppe Buzzard which winters with us) is recorded
to hover occasionally. At the time that we made the observation there was
a fresh N. W. wind.

/On the same



On the same day, while passing through Darling, we saw 3 Cape Little Swifts together with 2 White-rumped Swifts. Has anybody else recorded this species from Darling? If so please speak up.

When we arrived at the quarry on the Geelbek Road we found Bee-eaters still attending to nests. In two cases we saw a practically fledged young coming to the entrance of the burrow. They both had the yellow chin of the adult. While watching these birds a Swift species came over and seemed interested in the site. Its slightly forked tail, very large and conspicuous white rump and the fact that it occurred near the quarry made me think that it was a Horus Swift. I did not feel happy about its size and the record should first be confirmed before we get excited about it.

The Ysterfontein quarries which had always been used by breeding European Bee-eaters have been abandoned by the species and are only occupied by Banded Martins. Is Ysterfontein getting too domesticated for the Bee-eaters' liking?

On 24th December, 1956, I found a Turtle Dove in my garden which had taken possession of an abandoned Cape Thrush nest. It sat on 2 eggs. No material was added to the Thrush's nest. Does anyone else know of a similar case?

Dr. Winterbottom sends the following :-

From time to time I produce analyses of the Field Cards, partly to show members that they are being used; partly to show them the kind of data which can be extracted from the cards if they are properly filled in; and partly for the sake of the results themselves. I have just been analysing the cards for those habitats for which there are 30 or more cards. I regret to have to say that these amount to 11 habitats only, 8 on the Club's classification and 3 on the classification of indigenous vegetation employed by Acocks. They are as follows:

| | | |
|--------|-----|---|
| | A1. | Seashore, Sand, 31 cards. |
| | B1. | Permanent vleis, 171 cards. |
| | B2. | Temporary vleis, 166 cards. |
| | C4. | Indigenous bush on mountains, 97 cards. |
| | C5. | Indigenous bush on flats, 126 cards. |
| | D4. | Wattles, 78 cards. |
| | E2. | Pastures, 54 cards. |
| | E7. | Gardens, 120 cards. |
| Acocks | 34. | Strandveld, 31 cards. |
| Acocks | 47. | Coastal Macchia, 107 cards. |
| Acocks | 69. | Macchia, 82 cards. |

As previously pointed out, there is a rough correspondence between C4 and Acocks' 69 and between C5 and Acocks's 47, though they are not identical and almost every card in Acocks' 34 also falls into C5.

Taking as "characteristic" species those which occur in 40% or more of the cards, we find that the total number of species which so occur in one or more habitat is only 58. Those of the sandy shore are the Cape Cormorant, White-fronted Plover, Black-backed and Hartlaub's Gulls and the Cape Wagtail.

Characteristic of both sorts of vlei are:- Dabchick, Reed Cormorant, Grey Heron, Cattle Egret, Shoveller, Yellowbill, Marsh Harrier, Coot, Stilt, Black-backed Gull and Cape Wagtail; but the Cormorant and the ducks are significantly (9-17%) more frequent on temporary than on permanent vleis.

/Characteristic of

Characteristic of permanent vleis, but much less conspicuous (as shown by the percentage figures in brackets) on temporary vleis are the White-breasted Cormorant (58-29) and Wigeon (54-37). On the other-hand, the Little Egret (31-54), Yellow-billed Egret (27-55), Red-bill Teal (36-50), Little Stint (31-47), Greenshank (24-41) and Hartlaub's Gull (28-45) are all much more prominent on temporary than on permanent vleis. The same applies, within their more restricted occurrences, to the Shelduck (2-21) and to all the other migrant waders. In the case of the Flamingoes, the Greater definitely prefers temporary vleis (27% temporary, 4% permanent, whereas the Lesser has no preference (8% in each case).

Turning now to indigenous bush, characteristic of such terrain as a whole are :- Cape Turtle Dove (except Macchia, 37%), Cape Robin, Karoo Prinia and Cape Bunting (especially Strandveld, 83%). It will be simpler to take the other species one by one to show their preferences.

The Black-shouldered Kite is a bird of the flats (52%, C5; 33%, 47); and so are the Cape Francolin (48%, C5; 39%, 47) and Black Korhaan (41%, C5; 36%, 34; 23%, 47). The Namaqua Dove is pre-eminently a bird of the Strandveld (46%) and so is the Cape Coly (50%); and the Pied Crow is more frequent there too (50%).

The European Swallow prefers the flats (52%, C5; 46%, 34), as do the Stonechat (45%, C5), Karoo Robin 72%, C5; 90%, 34; 50%, 47), Dancing Cisticola (71%, C5; 80%, 34; 48%, 47), Fiscal (71%, C5; 70%, 34; 54%, 47) and Bokmakierie (81%, C5; 93%, 34; 56%, 47 - but 39%, C4, and 45%, 69, show that it can cope with mountains too).

Of the Starlings, the Redwing is a mountain bird (69%, C4; 75%, 69) and the Pied prefers the flatter country (50%, C5 and 34). The Sugarbird is a Macchia form (43%, C4; 50%, 69) and so is the Orange-breasted Sunbird (70 and 71% respectively). By contrast the Lesser Double-collared Sunbird prefers the flats (58%, C5; 70%, 34; 59%, 47), while the Malachite is most at home in Macchia (42%) and least in Coastal Macchia (19%). The White-eye prefers the mountains (42%, C4), especially Macchia (44%, 69), but, as we saw in the Report on the Garden Birds Enquiry, is even more at home in that artificial environment, and also (see below) in wattles.

The Cape Sparrow, Cape Weaver, Cape Bishop and Yellow Canary are all flats birds (C5, 46%, 46%, 40%, and 55% respectively). The Sparrow (63%) and Canary (73%) are at their maximum in the Strandveld, the Weaver (41%) and the Bishop (35%) in Coastal Macchia. The characteristic thick-billed bird of the mountains is the Cape Canary, though it only reaches the 40% level in Macchia (35%, C4).

The often despised Wattle has a list of ten characteristic birds - the Turtle Dove (89%), Laughing Dove (48%), Bulbul (76%), Cape Robin (79%), Prinia (85%), Bokmakierie (70%), European Starling (58%), White-eye (53%), and Sparrow (41%). Almost as frequently encountered are the Malachite Sunbird (37%), Lesser Double-collared Sunbird and Cape Weaver (39% each).

Only half that number of birds reach 40% in the Pastures list. They are :- The Red-capped Lark (64%), Wagtail (48%), Tawny Pipit (52%), Fiscal (46%) and Cape Sparrow (46%). Next come the Crowned Plover (38%), European Starling (36%), Cattle Egret and Capped Wheatear (34% each).

Garden birds were the subject of a special Club enquiry, so I do not propose to say much about them here. I will mention only that it is the sole environment in which the Red-chested Cuckoo (43% - next highest, C5, 25%) and Olive Thrush (53% - next, Wattles, 19%) reach the 40% level.

/Mrs. Taylor

Mrs. Taylor spent Christmas, 1956, camping underneath some oaks on the farm "Goede Hoop", somewhere between Swellendam and Heidelberg. It was particularly noticeable that the bird life round about our camp was very much the same as that which the Club had encountered at Oak Valley, Elgin, last year.

Paradise Flycatchers had a nest in an oak just beyond our camp - it was about 15 ft. above the ground on one of the lower branches. On Christmas morning, shortly after 9 a.m. we saw one of the young leave the nest. It settled on a nearby branch, and not long afterwards two other young were seen nestling together on the branch alongside their nest. Later that morning all the young were in low bush just beyond the oak tree in which the nest was situated. The parent birds called constantly and we could hear the young "chip-chipping" whenever we passed by on our way to the river. Two pigs appeared and were immediately attacked by the adult Flycatchers. They actually touched the pigs' backs as they flew back and forth. One pig beat a hasty retreat.

Towards the end of the day we heard the parent birds calling anxiously, and found one young sitting low down in a bush, and another on the ground. The one in the bush let us come up to within a few feet without attempting to move, and the one on the ground was found to have an injured leg, (It could't hold on to the bush when we tried to place it out of harm's way). These young birds seemed very small and we wondered whether Paradise Flycatchers usually left the nest at such an apparently early age. They were fully feathered, of course, but the tails seemed just about non-existent, and the heads were still slightly downy. Next day the young were still "chip-chipping" in the same area, but we didn't interfere too much as the parent birds were obviously very distressed when we came near the young.

On Christmas afternoon Mrs. Alais' daughter came upon a Fork-tailed Drongo hovering over a snake. Two Drongos made repeated attacks at this snake, and I was very sorry that I wasn't on the spot at the time. When I arrived the snake had just disappeared, but not long afterwards we glimpsed it slithering towards a rotting log.

Soon after the snake disappeared we heard a Woodpecker tapping and saw it on an oak branch beside a Fork-tailed Drongo. Suddenly we heard White-eyes, Paradise Flycatchers and Drongos calling loudly in a nearby oak. In my ignorance of the ways of Drongos, I ran up thinking they were attacking the smaller birds. We looked up into the tree and saw a boomslang moving along the lower branches. The middle of its back was swollen and marked and we felt sure it was the snake which the Drongos had attacked.

Mr. MacLeod reports the following incident :-

In Picnic Bush on the afternoon of the 2nd December my attention was drawn to the excited calling of a pair of Robins. Hurring over in their direction I saw that they were being worried by a five foot Boomslang.

The snake, when I first saw it, was on the ground and, as I watched, it moved higher up the hill in the shelter of the trees and then

/glided up

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glided up on to a branch about six feet from the ground. The Robins were now almost frantic and approached very close to the snake which made a dart at one of them, lost its balance and fell to the ground. In an instant it was up in the tree again and in the time it took me to stoop down and pick up four stones it had slithered to the end of the branch and had its head in a cavity in a dead, barkless, tree and appeared to be swallowing something. Its body was in a double curve and seemed to be wedged in the cavity.

My first three stones missed the snake but although two of them hit the tree near the reptile it took not the slightest notice. My fourth was better aimed and although it struck the snake too far back to damage it the force of the blow spun it from its hold and it fell to the ground and glided off downhill at express speed.

When I examined the cavity I found a Robin's nest empty except for a fresh faeces and other indications that there had been a young bird in it.

From the time I hurled the first stone until I hit the snake at my fourth attempt the time lapse could not have been more than twelve seconds.

On January 5th, Mr. Birnbaum and Mr. Schmidt saw a Peregrine Falcon with prey in its talons alighting on a nearby pole at Zoutendals Vlei near Cape Agulhas.

On our last visit to Cape Agulhas three birds not previously recorded in this area were seen. At Zoutendals Vlei on January 12th a Black-crested Cuckoo was seen by Dr. Broekhuysen and on 14th January we all saw a Spotted Crake and within about five minutes a Cape Rail appeared almost at the same spot. These were seen at a temporary vlei next to the road about 5 miles from Cape Agulhas.

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