



CAPE BIRD CLUB : KAAPSE VOELWAARNEMERSKLUB

NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

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FOREWORD.

This is a somewhat different NEWSLETTER from what we have been receiving and the reason for it is that Rudolph Schmidt is away for six months and has asked me to take it over whilst he is away. Naturally a different article has taken shape!

Those who were present at the SAOS Annual Dinner on May 18 will recall what Richard Liversidge said about the importance he attached to the NEWSLETTER in fostering enthusiasm and esprit de corps among members. For this reason, if for no other, I have sent this issue out, even though there is a sad lack of contributions from members.

Getting members to send in contributions has, I am told, always been a difficult task for editors. But if you look forward to the arrival of these reports as much as I do...perhaps the verb is now "did" since I have to fill them...the way to receive them often is to write to the editor. It doesn't matter whether you know a lot about birds or not. It isn't a matter of seeing rare birds or those not listed for any particular locality; sometimes WHERE you see a common bird is interesting and even valuable. An example of this happened to me the other day when I saw three Redbill Teal perched on a small boulder in the sea at Olifants Bay in the Cape Point Reserve. Lake duck in the sea! As Dr Winterbottom remarked, they obviously hadn't read ROBERTS and so didn't know they were freshwater animals. And what about feeding? All information about what birds eat is useful and we can't have too much of it. And behaviour? ...and arrivals and departures of migrants? And anything else.

PHILIP TONGUE

CLUB EVENTS

The year got off to a good start on February 16th when Mr. J. Cooper, who has been making a study of Penguins, gave a most interesting talk about his researches on Dassen Island, and, further to arouse the envy of those not able to get onto our offshore islands, added some information and photographs of one or two of the others. Dassen Island is particularly frustrating to landbound people, especially when seen towards evening from Ysterfontein when it always looks especially inviting. One by-product of Mr. Cooper's talk was to send the writer to the Library for a copy of Cherry Kearton's ISLAND OF PENGUINS which, in the light of today's ornithological writing seems, however interesting its factual material, to be a lesson in how NOT to write about birds.

EDITOR • R. K. SCHMIDT "STRIEGAU" LYMPLEIGH RD PLUMSTEAD CAPE
REDAKTEUR • LYMPLEIGHWEG PLUMSTEAD KAAP

It is a pity that the Easter weekend camp at Bottelary on Langebaan Lagoon had to be cancelled, however good the official reasons, for this is an ideal spot to learn about waders...last year members had the opportunity of watching a ringing team at work...and the warm bathing is a welcome bonus. As has been mentioned in a recent circular, the International Council for Bird Preservation has asked for information to enable the matter of its protection to be taken up with the government. ANYONE who is concerned not only about the future of Langebaan but of all our diminishing wetlands would be helping enormously by writing to the Secretary about this.

On April 13 we had another full house for Prof. C.J. Uys who has a richly deserved reputation as a bird photographer. I have to confess that I find his superb slides most discouraging to my own efforts...only one who tries his hand at this craft can fully appreciate the excellence of Prof. Uys's work. Not only must you have the technical stuff right, but you also have to have your bird AND have it properly lighted...and this never seems to happen for me!

Annual Dinner: On Friday May 18, it being the 25th anniversary of the Club, the SAOS Annual Dinner took place in co-operation with the CBC at St. James Hotel. A record number of 87 diners was present and there is no doubt that the traditional good time was had by all. The hotel provided an excellent meal and subsequent protest by l'Union Francaise des Compositeurs de Menus (menu writers) has been ignored by the organisers. En passant it might be mentioned that the PRINIA WINTERBOTTOMII was nothing like so basically frigid as might have been expected.

Richard Liversidge, the Club's first secretary, recalled the founding and early days of the then 60-strong Club; the first local branch of the SAOS and the forerunner of the five other local branches now providing strong support for the Society. He stressed that club members, despite their not being professional ornithologists, could and did make a valuable contribution to the Science...something that members should keep in mind. He also suggested that the binding force of the NEWSLETTER was vitally important in the club set-up. This is something that coincides with the views of the present writer and which he will keep in mind too.

The 25th anniversary of the Club is also the 25th year of Gerry Broekhuysen's Chairmanship...one can scarcely imagine any other...and to commemorate so pleasant an occasion, Mr. Morgan put into a neat speech (reported to have been the longest ever heard from him) the feelings of all of us and presented him with a John Perry painting of a Steppe Buzzard...very much Professor Broekhuysen's bird, being one which he has spent much time studying. We all made quite clear the position he holds in our respect and affections.

The success of the evening was further evidenced by the reluctance everyone showed in returning to their homes.

On Sunday the 20th May there was a special excursion to the Somerset West Nature Reserve brought forward from May 27th to enable delegates to the SAOS Annual General Meeting to participate. At this time of the year Helderberg Reserve is a Sugarbird reserve and members had their fill of these Western Cape specialities. Although it is a little early for nests at least one was found and members were able to see a 7-day old chick as well as the rather untidy nest deep in a protea bush. There were many other birds there including the Orange-breasted Sunbird, as well as various seedeaters and small bush birds. A few duck were on the ponds, though the open pond, where at one time there was a small collection of duck, has now been fenced and held only a pair of Yellowbill and two tame Spurwing Geese, one of which obligingly exposed the spur for all to see.

CONSERVATION

There are indications that some people are thinking about conservation with birds in view rather than in general. The acting editor certainly feels very strongly that in our country most official glances are towards mammals: he also feels that the existence of the great game reserves tends to generate the official feeling that all is being done that should be done.

Indeed at the second World Wildlife Congress in London in 1971 the Director of National Parks, when the reduction in numbers of the big birds of prey through hydrocarbon insecticides was under discussion, told the meeting that in South Africa this question did not arise. That this is not so should be obvious to any member of the Club who travels with his eyes open; indeed I scarcely ever go anywhere without noticing something being done to some sort of habitat that is not likely to cause the birds to rejoice.

That we have adequate laws is unquestionable. I have read through the appropriate Ordinances of the five provinces...perhaps I should write FOUR provinces and S.W. Africa...and on the whole, if the authorities chose to enforce them, the laws are adequate. But when does one read of anyone being prosecuted for shooting protected birds? Or taking wild birds for aviaries? Or, for that matter, for keeping any bird in an aviary without permit? Or using pellet guns in town?

In England it has been, and is still, an uphill struggle to educate magistrates in their duties in this respect, and it is only very recently that penalties, in some cases appropriate to the offence, have been imposed. The usual outcome of a prosecution by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (one of whose objects is the prosecution of those who break the protection laws) has been the imposition of a derisory fine of a couple of pounds or so, but of late some swingeing penalties have been imposed... I read of a man who stole three eggs of the Red Kilt from its Welsh reserve earlier this year, being fined £225, which indicates that the message is getting through at last. How long will it take here?

But shooting, egg-stealing, poaching and trapping birds is probably the least harmful of the anti-bird activities of earth's most dangerous animal (us)...what really gives them no joy at all is habitat destruction. This, which mechanical means have now turned into a world activity of the first order, is the most harmful and the least reparable thing we can do in our efforts to abolish birds.

Here, I think, is something that any member can do for our birds, for by keeping an eye open, and reporting any and everything likely to be detrimental to them, it ought to be possible to...at least make an attempt to... bring public opinion to bear on the authorities. Remember that no one can really set about wrecking the countryside without permission from SOME AUTHORITY...and it is up to us bird people to wage a guerilla war, having in mind that old adage about dripping water.

I hope to return to this topic in another issue.

As a footnote to this and as a measure of the feelings of the English public about their birds, the current issue of BIRDS...the magazine of the ROYAL Society for the Protection of Birds...carries a photograph of a rural letter box on the front of which is a handwritten notice "BIRD NESTING WITHIN BOX OUT OF USE TILL FURTHER NOTICE...APPROX 4 WEEKS".

MEMBERS' NOTES

Dr J.M. Winterbottom writes "During the Cape Natural History Club's excursion to the Paarl Sewage Works on 29 April two unusual birds, both unfortunately probably escapes from captivity, were seen by the writer and by several other observers. They were a Long-tailed Widowbird and a Hottentot Teal. The latter might possibly be a genuine record but if so it is the first in the South Western Cape since the days of Andrew Smith."

It has rained in the Karroo

It had rained in the Laingsburg-Leeu Gamka areas of the Karroo and this made us decide to go and see what the birds were doing. Us were John and Elsie Martin and Mariette and Gerry Broekhuysen. It was Friday the 6th of April and Van Riebeeck Day. There is evidence that in usually dry areas like the Karroo breeding rhythms in birds are controlled by the occurrence of rain more so than by seasons. As usual we were on the look out for migrants and birds of prey and about nine kilometres before Touwsrivier we saw a group of 14 European Swallows sitting on the telephone wires on the

side of the road. This was at 11.40 and most probably these were on their way to eastern Europe and were just resting. Ten miles before Laingsburg, on the right hand side of the road, is "The Monument", a cemetery on the foot of kranzes and a place where we usually stop. We parked the cars under the tall trees and started to make a list of the birds. We got to 19 species and noted that some White-throated Seed-eaters were in full song. A pair of soaring Black Eagles were a magnificent sight. We proceeded towards Laingsburg and then went on to the Floriskraal Dam, behind the town. We stopped alongside the dry river bed and compiled another list. The bushes were green and flowers were starting to appear. Fourteen species were seen. The Karroo Scrub Robin was everywhere and seemed to be in pairs and were very vocal, behaving as preparing for nesting. Mariette found a pair of White-throated Seed-eaters building their nest which was about one third built. John thought that he saw a Cape Bunting carry. The Dam contained quite a bit of water but was certainly not full. Somewhere in the centre, low above the water, was a dense flock of tern obviously harassing a shoal of fish. They were far off but we thought they were White-winged Black Terns. There must have been at least 200. We also saw two Greater Striped Swallows. On our way back to Laingsburg we stopped alongside the road where there was a small temporary vlei. We noted three Blacksmith Plovers one of which settled down in a newly made scrape and later showed mating behaviour. Then there was a pair of Shelduck, a pair of Redbill Teal and a pair of Cape Wigeon. It certainly looked as if these birds would soon have nests. It was now late in the afternoon and there were large very spectacular white cloud formations. This, together with the green, almost waterlogged, Karroo veld was really superb and we absorbed it to the full.

The next day we planned to explore the surroundings of Leeu-Gamka and Merweville. When we started the cars in front of the hotel at Laingsburg, we noticed a pair of Rock Martins just starting to build their nest. About ten miles beyond Laingsburg is the Geelbek Blockhut picnic spot. John, at several previous occasions, had seen here a chat which looked like the Familiar Chat but had a conspicuous white rump when it flew. In fact he, that is John, was convinced that this bird was what used to be called the Schlegel's Chat by Austin Roberts in the first edition of his book but which has now been merged and lumped with the Karroo Chat. We of course stopped and were lucky enough to see this particular bird and a typical Karroo Chat so that we could compare. The bird was certainly very different from the Karroo Chat. May be that after all Austin Roberts was right and the lumpers rather rash. While looking for these chats we noticed strong building activity in the Cape Mossies of which we found nine occupied nests. It certainly did not look as if these were the so called winter "shelter nests". The Masked Weavers were also building and at 9.23 we saw three European Swallows pass in that characteristic, low, direct migratory flight. They were flying north. Rock Martins and Little Swifts were together with two European Swallows and one Greater Striped Swallow circling around catching insects. They were later joined by a pair of Cape Wagtails, rather an unusual thing to do for a wagtail.

About 36 miles before we crossed the Dwyka River we saw another two European Swallows and we noticed that Little Swifts were attending to nests under the bridge. From the Dwyka to Leeu-Gamka the veld looked as if indeed a lot of rain had fallen not so long ago. At Leeu-Gamka we saw six European Swallows. While on the road to Merweville we saw and heard a Long-billed Lark going straight up in the sky and calling as they do during nesting. We also saw a Karroo Lark fluttering high up and calling. We searched for their nests but could not find them but this is no proof that they were not there. May be we were just a bit too early? Merweville is a quaint little village on a rather wide river. There were signs of recent strong flow but it had all disappeared. Just beyond Merweville we could just not believe our eyes. The veld was all yellow, masses of a yellow composite flower, sheets of it. It was magnificent. A bit further we watched a rather tame Karroo Lark, noting its characteristic striping, eye-stripe and dark patch on the ear-coverts. We were very surprised to see this bird eat red berries.

The next day we left Laingsburg for home via the Moordenaars Karroo and Sutherland area. We stopped at several river crossings and found more evidence of Cape Mossies building and Masked Weavers having constructed new green nests. We also thought that the Common Waxbills were paired. At one of these crossings we saw two birds we did not know. Consulting the book we thought they could only be Great Sparrow but then the Great Sparrow has not been recorded in the Cape Province! Were we seeing things? May be we did, may be we did not. It was at the crossing over the Buffels River in case somebody else likes to see things. Further on I watched a pair of Lesser Double-collared Sunbirds also in a dry riverbed. The male showed the interesting "vent pecking" behaviour described by Jack Skead in his book on the sunbirds. The male was perched underneath the female and swayed its head and neck, each time at the end of a sway pecking at the female's vent.

What had this three day trip taught us? In the first place that the Karroo can be beautiful and certainly is not the monotonous and uninteresting landscape which so many of us make it. Secondly we obtained a strong impression that the rain had triggered off nesting behaviour in the birds but we were probably a bit too early. Two weeks later would probably have given us more positive evidence.

The acting editor would like to mention that there seem to be more Orange-throated Longclaws than usual at Cape Point this season. He saw four, at separate points between the entrance gate and Olifantsbos about a month ago, and on a later visit two in the vicinity of the cafe.

When Alan Morris was in Etosha the week before Easter he saw hundreds of European Swallows feeding and in the evening they came in to a roost next to the fort at Namutoni. No doubt, he writes, these birds were on their way back to Europe.

The following letter from Mr. F.J. van der Merwe of Stellenbosch is printed, as received, in the other official language, and although all good South-Africans speak both, some of us are not that good so I append a translation, kindly made for me by my friend, Mr. L.A. Sanderson, which I trust will not contain any serious misrepresentations!

"Graag stuur ek aan u die volgende waarnemings vir moontlike insluiting in die Nuusbrief van die klub. Alhoewel wetenskaplike name gewoonlik nie in die Nuusbrief gebruik word nie, sluit ek dit tog in vir duidelikeheid i.v.m. die Afrikaanse name wat gebruik word.

"In 'n onlangse Nuusbrief (no 99) is melding gemaak van die moontlike voorkoms van die Hadede-Ibis in die omgewing van Somerset-wes. Op die 30ste September 1972 is ten minste twee van hierdie voëls hoor roep oor Fleurbaix, sowat twee kilometer suidwes van Stellenbosch. Ongelukkig was ek op daardie stadium in 'n voëlhutjie tussen riete en kon dit nie verlaat nie. Afgelei van die groep, het die Ibis aangevlieg gekom uit die rigting van die Strand en toe 'n draai gemaak en terug gevlieg in min of meer dieselfde rigting.

"Op die 2de November 1972 is ook te Fleurbaix, 'n Klein Rietreier (*Ixobrychus minutus*) uit die riete opgejaag. 'n Tweede poging om hom uit die riete op te jaag was onsuksesvol.

"Volgens die plaaslike Checklist (1963) is die Huisswael (*Delichon urbica*) 'n skaars en ongereelde besoeker aan die Suidwes-Kaap. 'n Groep van ongeveer 25 is op die 17de November 1971 op 'n gebou van Paul Roos Gimnasium, Stellenbosch, opgemerk. Die meeste het op 'n lys bo teen 'n gewel gesit. Sedertdien was Huisswaels teenwoordig gedurende die 1971-72 seisoen en ook 'n deel van die 1972-73 seisoen. Die voorkoms was egter ongereeld en dit skyn asof weerstoestande 'n rol kon gespeel het.

"In die 1971-72 seisoen is Huisswaels vir die laaste keer op die 19de Februarie gesien. Die grootste groep het uit by die 30 voëls bestaan.

"Die 1972-73 seisoen was suksesvoller in die sin dat die swaels gereelder en ook in groter getalle gesien is. Hulle is vir die eerste keer op die 19de Oktober gesien en was daarna gereeld teenwoordig tot op die 4de Desember. Die grootste groep is op die 27ste Oktober opgemerk toe 60 voëls getel is. 'n Paar dae later was daar 52 teenwoordig. 'n Aantal gedragswaarnemings is ook gemaak. Voëls is enige tyd van die dag gesien, besig om te rus op

lyste en die skuins dakke van geboue. Wat jag betref verskil Huiswaels van ander swaels in dat hulle 'n hoër luggebied eksploiteer, amper saam met die windswaels."

(Translation) I would like to send you the following observations for possible inclusion in the Newsletter of the Club. Although scientific names are not usually employed in the Newsletter, I include them for the sake of clarity in connection with the Afrikaans names that are used. In a recent Newsletter (No. 99) enquiries were made about the possible appearance of the Hadede Ibis in the vicinity of Somerset West. On the 30th September, 1972, at least two of these birds were heard calling over Fleurbaix, about two kilometers south west of Stellenbosch. I was at that time unfortunately in a hide among the reeds and could not leave it. Judging from the cry the Ibises must have come flying from the direction of the Strand and then made a turn and flown back more or less in the same direction. A Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*) was disturbed from the reeds also at Fleurbaix on the 2nd November, 1972. A second attempt to make him rise from the reeds was unsuccessful. According to the local Checklist (1963) the House Martin (*Delichon urbica*) is a rare and irregular visitor to the South West Cape. A group of about 25 was noted on the 17th November 1971 on a building of the Paul Roos Gymnasium, Stellenbosch. The majority sat on a moulding against a gable. Since then, House Martins were present during the 1971-72 season and also part of the 1972-73 season. The occurrence was, however, irregular and it appears as though weather conditions played a part. In the 1971-72 season House Martins were seen for the last time on 19th February. The largest group consisted of about 30 birds. The 1972-73 season was successful in the sense that the Martins were seen more regularly and in greater numbers. They were seen for the first time on 19th October and were present regularly thereafter until 4th December. The largest group was noted on 27th October when 60 birds were counted. A few days later 52 were present. A number of behaviour observations were also made. Birds were seen at any time of the day resting on cornices and the sloping roofs of buildings. When disturbed, House Martins differ from other swallows in using higher reaches of the air, almost as much as Swifts.

BIRDING PLACES IN THE CAPE AREA.

Although many of our best bird sites have gone under the bulldozer... I think of Rietvlei, those little pools on the Coast Road, between Paarden Island and Milnerton, and that once wonderful salt pan at Noordhoek where the Club, many years ago, saw Black Storks, among many other fine birds... there are still four places to go to, all within an easy half day...two of them as good as anywhere in S. Africa. Here follow a few notes, chiefly orientated to newcomers to the Club, but perhaps it may spur the blasé old hands to have another look at one or more of them.

NEULANDS FOREST. There is a path from the main road, about 200 yards on the Cape Town side of Paradise Road lights, that leads to a sort of picnic site by one of the big pine plantations. Various forest roads are found here; the one to the left takes you into quite a fair sized patch of indigenous forest; up the hill to the right there is a nice valley with oaks and indigenous trees. There is a surprising number and variety of birds here. In the course of 75 regular visits in 1968/69, when I lived close by, I logged over 40 including Klaas's Cuckoo, Black Duck and Saw Wing Swallows. This is always worth a visit, though at this time of the year, it gets cold and dark early.

CAPE POINT. Admission is 20 cents a person. On driving to the lighthouse one tends to gain the impression that there aren't many birds here. This is far from the truth, though they do have to be looked for at times. Those who wish for a sybarite day may spend part of it at the café as there is a good variety just across the road, by the ornamental pond. The birds to be seen on the False Bay side seem to the writer to be somewhat different from those on the Atlantic coast; certainly I rarely see Swift Terns at Olifantsbos, whereas there are nearly always some at Buffels Bay. I have perflustrated the Olifants Bay area for many years and there is always something worth seeing; two years ago I found a pair of Pied Barbets in the wattles, birds not recorded in any of the lists published so far. By the way, there is a perpetual mention of a pair of Black Eagles on Paulsberg (one of the east side hills), though I have not seen any sign of any eagle other than the Fish Eagle. If any member has seen them here is an opportunity to write something for publication!

TAMATIE VLEI. Of course everyone knows Tamatie Vlei, but it is surprising how rarely one meets birdwatchers there. I have heard it said by a much travelled ornithologist that it beats the famous Coto Donana in Andalusia and I am disposed to agree. The flamingoes are famous and one can usually see the local Pelican flock somewhere about. If they aren't at Tamatie Vlei they will be at either Zeekoe or Ronde-. You can get in either at the gate close to the Strandfontein Road (quite a way along, there is a sign ZEEKOE VLEI and just beyond the turnoff a gated track to the left) or you can go on to Zeekoe- and continue to the end of the road, where there is a brick building and another gate.

You have to buy a permit (R2.00 for a year) or 20c a day. These have to be obtained BEFORE 12.30 at the Chemical Engineering Branch's office on the 13th floor at City Park, on Bree Street. If you go after that time they plead that the cash box is locked and they can't accept money. And remember that even when it is warm in town, it can be pretty chilly at Tamatie Vlei.

RONDEVLEI. This famous sanctuary is, at the time of writing, practically dry and I assume that the birds have moved for the time being to Tamatie Vlei. The recent fire has damaged a lot of the indigenous bush at the Southern end but ought not to affect the water birds. And the speciality here is the Purple Gallinule which can usually be seen from the viewing site on the Zeekoe- side.

Rondevlei is open, free of charge, every Saturday and Sunday as follows:

1 January to 31 March	10.00 to 6.30
1 April to 31 July	10.00 to 5.00

It is closed to the public from August 1 to November 30 but serious ornithologists/bird watchers may apply to the Secretarial Department, Divisional Council of the Cape, 44 Wale Street, for a permit.

When the Sanctuary is closed the watching site on the road to the Yacht Club, on the far side of the Vlei, is always available and well worth a visit at any time.

There is an excellent bird museum in the Sanctuary.

A check list of the birds of Rondevlei can be found in the annual reports published by the Nature Conservation Department, now in Carinus House, Queen Victoria Street. Ernest Middlemiss has published a check list of the Birds of the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve, obtainable from the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute for 50c. Both these publications are worth having.