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CAPE BIRD CLUB — KAAPSE VOËLWAARNEMERSKLUB
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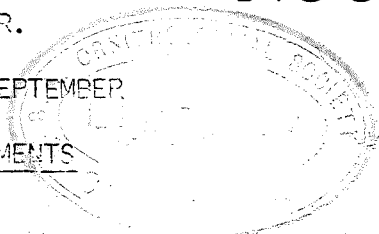
NEWSLETTER

NUUSBRIEF

NO. 118 NR.

SEPTEMBER 1975 SEPTEMBER

NOTES AND COMMENTS



ERNEST MIDDLEMISS

At the end of June Ernest Middlemiss retired from a long held post as Warden of the Rondevlei Bird Sanctuary, a post he has filled with great distinction and has many years' work to look back on with pride. Ernest's motto has always been a totally uncompromising Rondevlei for BIRDS not people and the Sanctuary has prospered under his wise management. Quite aside from the actual vlei itself which is what the general public sees, a vast amount of valuable research has taken place, and Rondevlei has filled an important place in South African ornithology. We members of the Cape Bird Club would like him to know how much his work has been appreciated by us, and to wish him many years of enjoyment and pleasure.

THE SLIDE LIBRARY

After the conclusion of Mrs Rowan's talk on Friday August 22, she made a request to some members of the Committee that urgent steps should be taken to build up the Club's Slide Library, which, she said, could provide a useful aid to lecturers, not only to the Club, but in all cases where illustrations were desired.

Len Hicks, the custodian of the collection has long had plans for just that but as always institutions such as ours, where officials spend most of their lives doing other things, opportunity and time are both in short supply.

Anyone who has good slides that might be donated to the collection will be doing a service to it and is earnestly recommended to phone Len, after business hours at his home in Newlands C-3470 and let's strive for a picture (to begin with) of every bird on the C B C Check List.

A SLIDE SHOW

Plans are now well in hand for a public slide show on December 15, this is to be presented as a fund-raising effort and the help of all members in publicising it and selling tickets will be very welcome.

OH SHAME

I suppose that the hazards of preparing these newsletters contain the seeds of items calculated to make the editors blush, and No. 117 was no exception: readers will have noticed that the very last item on the last page began with the words FIRST, HOWEVER Bearing in mind that qui s'excuse s'accuse, we shall say nothing.

and a Correction

The list of the Club's Officers in that issue omitted the name of Mr. L.R. Hicks and included that of Mr. T.D. Longrigg, who, when it was printed had been asked to join the Committee as a co-opted member, but who was unable to accept. We are, I am glad to say, assured of his valuable assistance when it is necessary. Editorial apologies to both of these gentlemen.

BEGINNERS' WALKS

At the last evening meeting Mr. R.K. Schmidt, who takes a walk along the Pipe Track on Saturday mornings about 9 o'clock, offered to take with him any absolute novices who are keen to get to know birds. Will anyone who feel themselves in that2/

category please telephone Mr. Schmidt at 41-2045 or just turn up.

Concerning the first excursion, which took place on Saturday August 23, he writes

"Although we were only five altogether, our walk was a success. We saw 14 species, observed the difference between male and female Eutcher Bird (707), watched a pair of Orange-breasted Sunbirds (753) feeding two fledged chicks and attached a building Prinia to its nest. The highlight was a pair of European Chaffinches (870) which really posed for us.

NEW MEMBERS

Since the last list was printed, the following wise folk have joined the Cape Bird Club. Not only do we wish them much pleasure from their birding, but thank them for the support their membership gives to protection and conservation.

Dr. A.F. Boshoff (Stellenbosch), Lynton Burger Jun. (Stellenbosch), Mr. M. & Mrs. K. Eve (Claremont), Mrs. A. Kihn (Kommetjie), Charles Lancaster (Jun.) (Robben Island) Reneé Pfister Jun (Plumstead), Jonathon Steytler Jun. (Constantia), Mr. M.J. Schlosz (Claremont), Mrs. S.M. Theron (Rondebosch) and Mr. A.J. Williams, PFIAO.

CORRESPONDENCE

We like receiving letters from members, not only do we like to hear of their birding adventures, but it is good for our joint ego people don't write if they don't read the NEWSLETTER. But space is so scarce, and it just isn't possible to print all we receive, nor is it possible to acknowledge each letter separately. So may we thank Messrs. H.A. Noble, and Mr. Leary for their letters. We have passed Mr. Noble's note about Flamingoes to the appropriate place the Flamingo Enquiry.

EMPLOYMENT OFFERED

DYE-MARKED WADERS

The Western Cape Wader Study Group is carrying out a dye-marking programme on the Knot (254), Curlew Sandpiper (251) and Sanderling (255) at Langebaan Lagoon. We appeal to all bird-watchers to look out for these birds. If you do see a marked bird, which should be especially obvious in flight, please contact one of the following,

Dr. R. Summers or Mr. J. Cooper at the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute 69-5612 OR Mr. S. Pringle at the Physics Department of the University of Cape Town 69-8538 giving as many details as possible, including colour of the dye and its position on the bird.

HARTLAUBS GULL ENQUIRY

Members are likely to be anywhere where Hartlaubs Gull (289) occur (and there seem to be few places in the Peninsula where they don't) can do a very useful job by reporting them preferably on the Report Forms prepared for the enquiry. The man to get in touch with is Mr. G.D. Underhill, at 12 Roseberry Road, MOWBRAY. 65-5698. What has to be looked for is primarily blue or blue and black plastic rings, with approximate numbers so equipped. NIL reports are equally useful, and it is desirable to give an approximate count of the flock in which they are, or are not, seen.

HELP FOR THE HABITAT

Mr. Harry Green appeals for anyone with an interest in conservation to go to the Pipe Track about 8.45 on the third Sunday of each month, where a gang of public-spirited people is attacking alien vegetation. This is being done in co-operation with the Municipality and tools are supplied ... though anyone bringing his own chopper will not be turned away. The present hack is taking place at the first valley along the Track, and latecomers will easily see those already started.

If alien vegetation seems to some members to have little to do with a Bird Club it must be mentioned that habitat is the very basis of bird life; restore the native birds. If you want confirmation of this, walk along any path (try Newlands Forest) with alternations of plantation and indigenous trees, and the number of birds in the latter as compared with the former will surprise, and, we hope delight, you.

THE NEST RECORD PROJECT OF THE CAPE BIRD CLUB.

Organisers report for 1974. Mr. G.D. Underhill, 12 Roseberry Road, MOWBRAY. 65-5698.

In order to keep the following report within reasonable dimensions,3/

no contributors have been mentioned by name, although 1151 cards and 10 colonial cards were completed by 50 members, whose contribution varied from 1 to 125 cards. Every one of these fifty unnamed people is thanked most sincerely for the work they have done, which is greatly appreciated. It is realised that the gathering of the data shown on the cards involves many miles of travelling and many hours of work in the veld; may it be mentioned here, that the value of a card is enormously enhanced if the ultimate fate of the clutch is recorded. I must, therefore, appeal to members, if it is at all possible, to visit nests at intervals, and to record their observations each time.

More than 10 cards were received in respect of 36 species, though not a single card for a Nightjar (373), Pied Barbet (432) or Tit-babbler (658); some other common species fared nearly as poorly, there being but one card each for the Black-shouldered Kite (130), Speckled Coly (390), Sombre Bulbul (551), Familiar Chat (570), Crombec (621) and Red-winged Starling (745). There were two for the Cape Bishop (810), three for the European Starling (733) and a mere five for the Cape Canary (857). Surely more nests than those were found?

On the other hand we had a Peregrine Falcon (113) nest with three eggs in the Bredasdorp district ... the first record during my 11 years as organiser, a Black Cuckoo (344) parasiting the Bokmakierie (721) at Somerset West.

The usual one or two cards for the Avocet (269) rose to 15, the Black Oystercatcher's (231) total was 31, and there were 13 cards for the Black-winged Stilt (270). Between 1964 and 1973 only four cards came in for the Chestnut-banded Plover (236), but this year we had 3; again there were no Whiskered Tern's (305) nests in 1973, whereas this year we had 3. The White-rumped Swift (383) has been under observation for some years, and the 12 cards added this year brings the 11 years total to 158.

G.D. UNDERHILL. MOWBRAY.

REPORTS AND OBSERVATIONS

(a) Sightings.

GLOSSY IBIS (83) With reference to Miss Vane's report in NEWSLETTER 117, of Glossy Ibises at Strandfontein, my wife and I saw six there on August 7, so the birds were, presumably, making quite a stay.

J.M. WINTERBOTTOM, CAPE TOWN.

BLACK EAGLE (133) On the morning of 20 August, after watching a Rock Kestrel (123) a female judging by its size, I was rewarded by seeing a magnificent adult Black Eagle sweeping low over the Helderberg Nature Reserve. It flew into one of the Pine plantations for a rest, but about 20 minutes later was wheeling over the reserve. As it flew higher, it was joined by another, smaller Black Eagle presumably the male bird. Together, they spiralled over the Helderberg, and great was my joy when they were joined by yet another Black Eagle. The three birds circled over the mountain for a few minutes, and finally disappeared, over the mountain together.

PAT LOCKHART SOMERSET WEST.

BLACK HARRIER (169) On my way to the Lambert's Bay weekend, on August 30, a Black Harrier was seen quartering a grassy field, about 5 km north of Piketberg. This was a splendid sight, the black and white tail being strongly marked, and very distinctive. The Checklist (1963) describes the bird as being "decidedly local" but recorded in many districts in recent years. Winterbottom's Check List of the Birds of South Africa, 1969, states "increasing". This is a bird that is always a delight to see.

PHILIP TONGUE CAPE TOWN.

TRISTAN TERN (292) Small parties of this attractive tern have been present along the Atlantic coastline of the Peninsula since late May. John Cooper first pointed out a flock of 10 of these "lifers" to me during a beach walk near Gifkommetjie, in the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve on 1 June this year. Since then John & I have regularly sighted groups of up to 25 birds at several points along this coast, the most recent being at Kommetjie on Aug. 17.

On Dassen Island during 1971-72, John recorded Tristan Terns as a winter visitor, and Karl Edwards informs me that during his stay there, between 28 June and July 6, 1971, approx. 450 birds were present. Further east Karl has records of Tristan Terns off Bird Island, Port Elizabeth on 31 May '72 and at Cape

Recife (also Port Elizabeth) on 22 July (2) and 23 September (1) 1971, and 3 August, 1974 (12). All sightings have been made during the period from late May to early September (c.f. Roberts: 'present July-September').

The bird is well-described in Roberts, its main identification features being the dove-grey underparts, which are especially noticeable in flight, the blood-red bill, and the white line beneath the black cap. Unlike the more abundant Common, Arctic and Sandwich Terns, which are summer migrants from the north, the Tristan Tern is a winter migrant from the south. According to Mackworth-Praed & Grant who call it the Antarctic Tern, it breeds mainly on Tristan da Cunha and Gough Island, with another race occurring on Marion and Kerguelen Islands. STEPHEN PRINGLE. PLUM-
stead.

CLUB ACTIVITIES

There have been two evening meetings and two Field Excursions during July and August that to Arieskraal having been washed out. Mr. R. Geldenhuys's lecture on July 18 broke new ground in that its concern was mainly the misuse of the environment and the problems being created thereby, problems whose solution was vital for the future well-being, not only of the birds and the beasts, but for ourselves. These problems are apt to be thought about and then dismissed, because their remedies appear to be beyond us as individuals, and it is here that membership of the Club is valuable, for, as has been said many times in this broadsheet (and will no doubt be reiterated over and over again) the collective feelings and beliefs of us all, make a louder sound than those of each of us individually and everyone may depend on the Committee to express these feelings at every opportunity.

Mrs. Rowan's talk brought us back to the world of birds, and, further, to the commonest birds in the area, the Doves and Pigeons. As Mrs. Rowan said, it is surprising how little we know about these ubiquitous birds; whose success as a species has been achieved despite a small clutch, by almost continuous breeding. However, I think that she would agree with me, that we must not be complacent even about the common doves, for was not the sky of the United States so full of Passenger Pigeons at times, that the sun was obscured? And, where is the Passenger Pigeon today? Mrs. Rowan is a splendid speaker, and this talk, like all talks she has given to us, was full of interest, and for one listener at least, reminded him that we birdwatchers are so unobservant and don't link what we do observe into a meaningful whole. Mrs. Rowan isn't the one, and does the other, so to say P.T.

THE FIELD EXCURSION TO Nooitgedacht on August 17 was blessed with one of the best days for a long time, which enticed a considerable number of members away from their gardens. This is demonstrated a good place for birds, and at least 57 species were seen. Pat Lockhart kept a master list and whilst few people will have seen the lot, many will have seen some of the highlights. These included 12 White Pelican (43)... seen not actually at the farm, but flying overhead in the vicinity and one Spoonbill (85). There seem to be two pairs of Spotted Eagle Owls (368) resident there, all four being seen, as well as at least 5 Pied Barbets (432) whose tin-trumpettings sounded all day. Unusual sightings were a Namaqua Sandgrouse (307) a pair of Ant-eating Chats (575) and 4 Crombecs (621)... this last, I suppose, not being a familiar bird to many of us. All in all, this was a memorable day, and our thanks are due to Mnr. Dempers for allowing us to visit his farm and to trample on the flowers that clothed the river banks so thickly.

We hand over this NEWSLETTER for stencil-cutting just after the Settlers Day weekend at Lambert's Bay, which was attended by a disappointingly small number of birdwatchers; those that did come were rewarded by a highly satisfactory three days' birding, with some remarkably chilly nights included, especially for the two parties who camped.

A total of 70 birds were reported for the "official" tally, though the object of the trip, which was to see the gannets, cormorants and Penguins on Bird Island, was enough to make the journey (and the cold nights) worth while. There were about 2000 gannets: nest-building is just beginning, and most of the birds looked somewhat grimy from the mud left after the recent rain. The four marine Cormorant species were seen, including a handful of the rare crested Cormorant (51), noted in the current Roberts as a sub-species; though in the original editions, shown as a separate species, which, having regard to the great difference of the young bird from that of no 50, the Reed Cormorant, it might well be.) These birds already had young, the only cormorants to have them. The Penguins, of which, many more were seen than on some previous visits, have taken very kindly to the5/

lengths of piping, provided by John Cooper, and any visitor may safely count on seeing these popular birds.

An interesting by-product of the visit was meeting a French television team, in a Kombi bearing a badge of the World Wildlife Fund, making films for the S.A. Wildlife Foundation, its South African equivalent. My co-editor, Rudolph Schmidt was able to provide the cameramen with information concerning the birds being filmed.

The Club's descriptive notice board looks well, and attracted a lot of notice from the stream of visitors on their way to see birds. However, from a little eavesdropping on conversations, grave doubts creep in as to whether anyone reads the text, or, having done so, whether all understand it. Of the value of the board though, there can be no question and Club members may congratulate themselves on a valuable educational job.

THE MARINA DA GAMA COUNTS

Since the last NEWSLETTER there have been two further counts, on July 14 and August 11. The number of individuals although not of species has been falling with the coming of winter, totals for the two counts being 2075 and 1478 respectively, the number of species was 71 on each occasion.

We have had a request from a member for more information about the results of these counts, but George Begg says that no valuable information information from which any conclusions may be drawn.... ought to be published until a full year has run its course. So, a report will appear in the January issue.

A great deal of development...for people, not for birds,...has taken place recently in the North-eastern quadrant and will probably surprise anyone who has not seen the Marina lately. This is going to have a considerable effect on the bird numbers there, which will disclose itself in the September count.

One interesting fact has emerged from one of the editors own summary of the species seen..... that although the maximum number of birds on any one count was 84, the TOTAL number of species seen since we started in December 1974, is 124.

How these Sunday mornings must have polished up knowledge of the birds for some of us.

BIRDING WITH AN AMERICAN

On 21 and 22 June I had the pleasure of showing around an American Ornithologist who had applied to the C.B.C. for a guide. He belonged to the American Bird-watchers Association whose members aim at seeing as many different species as possible. They publish a journal giving names and addresses of their members as well as the species of birds these will be able to show to visitors. The Chairman of this association is said to have seen more than 5000 of the 8500 species of birds in the world.

My visitor had already accumulated a list of more than 2000 species in America, Europe and Africa. After several days spent in the Kruger Park he came to the Cape especially for birds of three families new to him, Sugarbird, Albatross and Penguin.

He had hired a car and on the first day which luckily was fair, we set out for Lambert's Bay Bird Island, a sure place to see penguins and cormorants. During the trip I realised that these "listers" really work for their records. He had a clear mental picture of every plate in Roberts, and while driving he spotted three Namaqua Sandgrouse sitting on the ground and a group of Grey-backed Finch Larks in flight. We stopped with a lot of braking and were able to verify the correctness of his observations. We walked about a favourable places and I showed him Black Kerkraan, Pied Barbet, Cape Bunting, Ant-eating Chat, etc.,. Soon we had increased his list by about 30. Near Lambert's Bay a biggish bird sitting on the fence stumped my friend in spite of his excellent knowledge of Roberts. I was not surprised, because the bird, a Chat Flycatcher, which was soon joined by his mate, looks like the female of many species. Lambert's Bay although in dense fog, gave us Penguin, Bank Cormorant, Black Oystercatcher, Layard's Tit-babbler and Barthroated Apalis.

On the second day it was pouring. We saw the Cape Sugarbird, but had to cancel a trip to Sir Lowry's Pass where we had hoped to see the Rockjumper.6/

As he was still keen on an Albatross and as a NW gale was blowing, I suggested Mouille Point. Our luck was in, a trawler was fishing close inshore, and we could hardly believe our eyes... three albatross were circling the boat. That was the climax; in his excitement he slammed both doors of the car with the key inside, and there we stood outside in the rain.

In the early afternoon we searched the patch of indigenous forest at Kirstenbosch and, in spite of the dripping-wet trees succeeded in finding the Cape Batis. I was quite proud of having been able to show him 46 new species for his list, although an apparently easy one, the Red-winged Starling, failed to appear. Personally I prefer watching a few birds intensively to building up a list of species sometimes observed only for a fleeting moment, but for Mr. Kestner, who is a buyer for a spice firm and can stay only briefly at most places, such listing is all he can do on his trips. I gathered, however, that he knows the birds of his home state Maryland as well as we know ours here.

R.K. SCHMIDT

THE WANKIE SYMPOSIUM

The symposium on migration and movements of South African birds organised by the R.O.S. at Wankie National Park, 15 - 19 July, 1975, was a great success. Credit for this is due to the National Parks Board of Rhodesia, who made accommodation available at the Main Camp and arranged the catering, and the R.O.S. and, in particular, to their Chairman Peter Steyn, whose genial efficiency resulted in the smooth running of the whole programme.

There were three sessions daily and a total of 16 papers were presented. The standard was high and a gratifying feature was the number of young ornithologists who contributed. The scope was wide, ranging from penguins to flycatchers; and the discussions were lively, stimulating and good humoured.

It would be impossible to summarise individual papers and invidious to pick out one or two for comment. The general conclusions emerging, however, were:

- (i) that the subject is one of great complexity and we know far too little about it;
- (ii) that far more species of birds move about than had previously been thought;
- (iii) that it is very difficult to disentangle true migration (i.e. movements from a breeding to an off-season area and back), which is genetic, from forced movements due to weather and weather induced habitat changes, which do not occur unless or until the bird is forced to move and stop as seen as it has reached a favourable locality;
- (iv) that a hitherto unsuspected amount of movement is on an east-west axis and not on a north-south one.

Capetonians supported the symposium well - Dr. Bührmann, John Cooper, Jane Dowle, Stephen Pringle, Dr. & Mrs. Rauch, Professor and Mrs. Robertson, Mr. & Mrs. Tongue, Carl Vernon, Mr. Waltner, and Dr. and Mrs. Winterbottom. Accident prevent Dr. & Mrs. Summers from swell the total; and transfer does not allow us to count Dr. and Mrs. Jarvis but we did our stuff! Cooper, Pringle, Vernon and Waltner presented papers - one-quarter of the programme.

The discussion "Whither the S.A.O.S.?", for which the Chairman was Ken Newman, produced a few useful suggestions, much argument and the general conclusion that there were wasn't much wrong with the Society and little need for any drastic change except a considerable improvement in our public relations to bring about a marked increase in membership.

J.M. WINTERBOTTOM

PROGRAMME.

KEEP THIS PAGE FOR REFERENCE

EVENING MEETINGS.

Friday September 19.

Dr. B. Rauch STALKING BIRDS.

Friday October 17

ACTIVITIES OF THE WADER GROUP

Speakers from the group.

Friday November 21

Mr. Stafford Smith THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS PART 2.

Please remember that the doors of the Zoology Department are LOCKED at 8.30 and it is regretted that late-comers will not be able to get in.

FIELD EXCURSIONS

SATURDAY September 20

MARINA DA GAMA

This excursion has been arranged so that members who have not been to the Sunday counts, may have an opportunity of seeing the wealth of birds there. This is an excellent place for beginners because there are always many of the commoner species to be seen, and since there will be many people here familiar with the area, expert advice will abound.

Leaders: Members of the Monthly counts.

Meet at the VISITOR CENTRE: Eastlake Village, About 3 km. north of Muizenberg on Prince George Drive. 2.00 p.m.

SUNDAY October 5th

CAPE COLOURED CORPS TRAINING CENTRE FAURE

For our first visit to this part of the Cape Flats we are hoping to see many water birds as well as birds of the bush.

Leader: Mr. T.D. Longrigg.

Meet at the entrance to the centre, on the Old Main Road near Faure at 9.30a.m.

Go along the N 2 past roads leading to the Airport and Nyanga, and take the SWARTKLIP - KUILS RIVER turn-off, and cross the freeway, then turn right along the old main road. About 6 km along it, you will see a notice board naming the Centre, near the crossroads.

Lansdowne-Phillippi road to reach the Swartklip- Kuils River Bridge.

SUNDAY November 16

BOT RIVER LAGOON

A second visit to this extensive area which was last visited on February 22.

Leader: Mr. A. Gregory.

Take the N 2 over Sir Lowry Pass, and continue to the Hermanus turnoff, there take the Hermanus road. After crossing the iron bridge over a stream, go further 5,6 km. At a bend in the road, near a farm dam, you will see the CBC notice board on the right. From here you will be directed along a farm road to the lagoon, about 2 km further. Allow 2 hours from Cape Town. Meet 10.15 a.m. 15 minutes allowed for latecomers!