

CAPE BIRD CLUB : KAAPSE VOËLWAARNEMERSKLUB

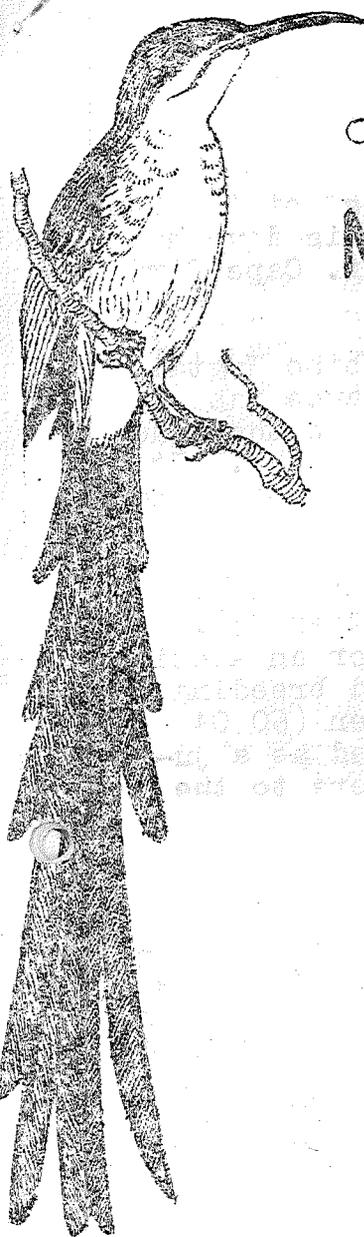
# NEWSLETTER

# NUUSBRIEF

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We seem to be in for another late winter. I more or less expected this when two pairs of Larger Striped Swallows started late broods, the one on 24 February and the other not before 7 March, as the first chick hatched only on 28 March. Both broods, each of three, flew successfully. Favoured by the warm autumn-weather five of the six young survived the first week after fledging and thus should be able to migrate.

The pair starting in March had raised a first brood in this nest, the young flew on 13 November 1963. On 27 November the nest was occupied by White-rumped Swifts which laid an egg on 15 December but never bred, the egg was thrown out on 19 December. The swifts were still using the nest on 4 January, but had left it on 30 January. Then the swallows, one of which is colour-ringed, returned to the nest.

I have always wondered whether the swallows have a premonition of a late winter or whether they are just taking a chance. In April 1960 I had four late broods under observation with a total of ten young of which only two survived owing to the early start of the winter rains.

After many years of ringing there has at last come a clue to the hitherto uncertain winter-quarters of the Larger Striped Swallows breeding in the South-western Cape. On 20 January 1960 Dr. Broekhuysen and Mr. John Martin ringed such an adult swallow which had been caught in a nest at Somerset West. This bird was recovered in April 1963 at Vudi, Congo (05° 55' S; 18° 56' E.).

Another late brood was reared by a pair of Wagtails at Plumstead. I found the nest with two feathered young only on 18 April and the young flew on 23 April. As the nestling period is given as 14 to 18 days, there must have been eggs in April which is one of the two months in which breeding of the Cape Wagtail, according to the Cape Bird Club Check List, has not yet been recorded. As the other month is May, members should watch the wagtails if the fine weather continues.

I wonder whether anybody found a late nest of the Cape Turtle Dove in April this year; breeding of this dove has been recorded for every month except April (cf. Cape Bird Club Check List).

Miss Edith Robinson reports seeing an albino Wagtail at Cape Agulhas in April. Its general appearance was creamy white, but there was a light grey wash on the head and mantle and also where normally the bib is black. It was obviously paired with a normally coloured wagtail and peeped and behaved in every way like its mate.

Information has been received concerning the tern found at Llandudno on 26 December (cf. Newsletter 73). It was either a Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) or an Arctic Tern (*Sterna macrura*), both species were found breeding in the same colony on the islet of Kytökärinen (60 04 N/24 43 E) in Finland where the bird was ringed as a juvenile on 20 June 1959. The distance from there to the Cape is 10,470 km.

#### Polygamy among Birds

Mr. Jack MacLeod collected some interesting information in connection with his intensive ringing. He writes: "Red Bishops. In a Colony of Cape Weavers at Klaver Vlei, Faure, there were a number of Red Bishops also nesting. As far as we could see there were only two males, although a third male was seen being driven off by the other two. In all we ringed 2 males and 12 females, an average of six hens to each cock.

Cape Weavers. At a small dam at Klaver Vlei, where I recently camped for three weeks, I caught 94 Cape Weavers in mist nets, of which 21 were males and 73 females. In this colony we counted over 140 nests, many of them abandoned. Not many birds remained unringed as the last six birds caught on the final day, were all retraps. I ringed all birds on the right leg, which was unfortunate, as birds perching on a reed in the colony invariably showed the left leg below and through binoculars the ring on the right leg was often obscured. The above figures show an average of more than three hens to each male."

He further reports: "During the period 8 February to 31 May 1963, I caught and ringed 76 Cape Robins at a small dam at Klaver Vlei, where they came to drink; at another spot on the farm I trapped 27 birds, making a total of 103. I would have thought I had ringed the entire Robin population of the area, but during a three weeks' camping holiday at Klaver Vlei, when I was out in the field every day, I never saw a ringed robin although I examined every one through binoculars. Mr. Myburgh also informs me that he has seen quite a number of robins feeding in the vineyard and not one had been ringed. I think the reason for this is that during the hot summer, when water is scarce, birds will come long distances to a favourite and safe drinking place.

### Pintailed Whydah versus Waxbill

Mr. John Martin writes: "During a visit to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Nico Myburgh were attracted to the front stoep of the homestead by several Common Waxbills apparently going berserk. They were surprised to find five or six "Rooibekkies" mobbing a female Whydah which was trying to get into the nest. Although attacked by the waxbills she took very little notice of them; she apparently had quite a struggle to get in as the entrance was rather too small for her. Eventually she managed to force her way in, but neither of the owners tried to follow her, although remaining near the nest entrance. After about two minutes the Pintail re-appeared and flew off with her mate which had been sitting on the creeper nearby. According to Mr. and Mrs. Myburgh senior this happened on three successive days, so there should be at least three Pintail eggs in this Waxbill nest.

Within a few paces of this Waxbill nest there was a Prinia nest in which two broods of young were successfully raised."

### Watch the Doves

Mrs. Rowan writes: "Over the past three or four years my notes have recorded the Red-eyed Dove calling regularly in and around my Claremont garden throughout the summer; but in the winter it either falls silent or leaves the area. On balance, I am inclined to think that it departs, since it occurs and is heard at all times of the year only 30 miles away, on the farms around Stellenbosch and in the town itself.

I had therefore begun to suspect the Red-eyed Dove of behaving as a migrant in the Peninsula, and was thinking of asking other observers whether they had any evidence to refute or confirm this idea. Then I noticed this summer that the bird had not begun to call as usual in our neighbourhood. All through October and November I listened for it, and now, at the end of December, I still have not heard its notes in Claremont once, although it is as vociferous as ever at Stellenbosch.

In an article in Bokmakierie in 1952, the late Dr. Gill pointed out that the Red-eyed Dove was one of several species which were formerly known no nearer than Swellendam, but which in the 1920's and 30's extended their range south and westwards through Stellenbosch and ultimately to Cape Town and the suburbs. Some of these then retreated again, an example being the Swee Waxbill, which occurred at Hout Bay and nested at Constantia in the 1930's, but now is seldom seen any nearer than Paarl (if one is lucky) or along the banks of the Hex River at Worcester.

It would be interesting to know whether the range of the Red-eyed Dove is following a similar pattern of expansion and contraction, and a collective effort to record its incidence in and about the Peninsula might well be rewarding.

I think too that the other two common doves in our area also merit watching. My impression is that, when I was a

child, the Cape Turtle Dove was the commoner in the suburbs, but today the Laughing Dove is well in the ascendency. This sort of shift in status is always of great interest in ecological and population studies, especially if well documented. And those who feed their garden birds might provide some valuable data simply by recording at intervals the approximate numbers of each species which come to the food table.

I would always be very glad to hear from anyone who has any pertinent observations on the questions above."

#### Sparrow Enquiry

Mrs. Rowan appeals to members who might be able to help her, she writes: "For several years I have had a pair of Cape Sparrows breeding in my garden. Unfortunately, the colour-ringed hen died a little while ago (succumbed in my neighbour's drive, cause unknown), and since then her trio of nests has been deserted. This leaves me without any conveniently placed nests at which to study such things as incubation behaviour, feeding rates etc., and I wondered whether there were Newsletter readers who have birds breeding in their gardens and who would not mind me coming to sit and watch them for an hour or two at a time. I would promise not to be a nuisance or to disturb household routines."

#### Mating of European Bee-eaters

Mrs. E. Chaundy made some interesting observations on October 30, 1963. While watching these bee-eaters from the car near a breeding colony along the Geelbek Road, she and her husband saw seven sitting on the telephone wires. One deliberately changed place by leap-frogging and then cuddled up to another, sitting close by for about two minutes before flying up for a second, returning, cuddling up again and then quickly mounting the one to which it had cuddled up. It then flew up, caught an insect, came back and fed the bird it had mounted. It cuddled up to it again, flew off, returned and fed it and cuddled up to it again. The second bird then flew off, but soon returned to her same position, whereupon the first cuddled up and after about a minute mounted the second bird again. Then both flew off.

#### Avifauna Puzzle

Dr. Winterbottom writes: "Although the distribution of each species is shown by districts in the Check List, it is not likely that any member has gone to the trouble of analysing this by districts; but if one does, the results are not without interest.

The total number of species recorded from each district varies from 113 for Wellington to 282 for the Peninsula. There is a belt of districts with over 200 species (all but Caledon, over 240) from Peninsula to Bredasdorp; and another in the north of Hopefield, Piquetberg and Clanwilliam.

There is a middle block of four districts (Tulbach, Wellington, Worcester and Paarl) in none of which does the species list reach 150; and this block is extended east and west by districts with between 157 and 188 species. Vanrhynsdorp, in the extreme north, has only 130 species recorded from it. So, taking 200 as the dividing line and ignoring the remote Vanrhynsdorp, the pattern is two blocks of districts with a rich avifauna, divided by a block with a less rich one. What we really need to know is: is this a true reflection of the state of affairs or is it just an artifact created by the imperfections of our records? Probably it is a bit of both; but until we have a lot more records, we can't be sure.

#### Colour-ringing of birds

At its meeting on the 13th of January, 1964, the Council of the South African Ornithological Society decided to ask everybody who is colour-ringing birds, to inform the Ringing Organiser, Museum, Humewood, Port Elizabeth, indicating what species they are ringing in this way. There is no intention on the part of either the Council or the Ringing Organiser to interfere in any way with this activity.

It is felt, however, that sight records of colour-ringed birds by non-members of the Society (and even by members) can easily be lost, unless there is a central register enabling the Ringing Organiser to pass on any such records that come in to the person most concerned.

And here are some tips given by Mrs. Rowan to active or prospective ringers:

For some years I have been trapping Mossies in my garden and fitting them with different combinations of coloured and SAOS rings so that each is individually recognizable. I lay "ground-bait" consistently, morning and evening, but only trap at intervals, so that birds coming regularly to feed grow quite tame, and it is easy to see which of my marked individuals persist in the population. Because I do not wish to upset the taming process, I try to avoid recapturing birds which are already ringed, but occasionally this happens. In fact today (20 April 1964) I took a little female which was first ringed just about 11 months ago; and this gave me my first opportunity for a long time to examine at close quarters the durability of the coloured celluloid rings which I am now using. It is pleasing to report that they were in perfect condition, firm and springy on the leg, with no detectable loss of colour when compared with stocks of unused rings.

The oldest colour-ringed bird now frequenting the garden was banded more than four years ago, and there are one or two others with records stretching over three-plus years. These rings thus seem to be more durable and of better quality than any I have previously used. They were supplied at fairly moderate cost (about 1½ cent each, if memory serves) by A.C. Hughes, 1 High Street, Hampton Hill, Middlesex, England.

If any members are interested, Hughes will send them a catalogue on request, and my experience has been that orders are always promptly filled, by airmail if required. The best colours for visibility in the field are red, yellow and (surprisingly) green, the latter being much better than blue.

### Programme of Witwatersrand Bird Club

Anyone who is going to Johannesburg and wants to know what is on up there in ornithology, can phone the Cape Bird Club Secretary, Mr. H.K. Morgan, 44-9359, for information.

### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

During the previous year the Committee met 11 times and the average attendance during these Meetings was 85 %. Once again, therefore, your Committee Members have been taking their duties seriously.

During these Meetings a large variety of items were discussed and minuted. The following are just some of them:

In May the Committee decided to ask Mr. John Perry to redesign the cover of the Revised Check List of the Birds from the area covered by the C.B.C., which was then in an advanced stage of preparation. In July this new Check List was published and 500 copies were produced. The Check List is now quite up to date and its contents have been enlarged by a section on the different habitats and their dominant species of birds. It is an important contribution to the ornithology of the Southern and South-Western Cape and can strongly be recommended to anyone interested in the bird life of that area.

In December your committee wholeheartedly gave its blessing to a suggestion by the Director of the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology to have in the Institute an up to date notification display of important local ornithological events and finds. Any member who finds something which could be of interest to other local birdwatchers is urged to inform the Director, Professor J.M. Winterbottom, so that the item can be advertised and made known to others.

In January 1964 the establishment of a "bird observatory" was discussed. Although most Members felt the establishment of such an observatory would be very desirable, it was generally felt that the commitments especially the financial ones, would be too much for the Club, and the matter was, therefore, not further pursued. In February the Hon. Secretary raised the question of publicising the Club's Meetings more. After some discussion it was agreed that the Secretary should contact the Cape Times and the Publicity Association and as a result these two organisations now publish the C.B.C. meetings.

### PROVINCIAL BIRD

After the Blue Crane or Stanley Crane had been proclaimed as our National Bird, it was felt by many that the

time had come for each Province to proclaim its Provincial Bird. Members of the C.B.C. were canvassed for their views. The project is still alive and awaits publication of an article by Professor J.M. Winterbottom in the Cape Argus.

#### EVENING MEETINGS

During the period under consideration eight Evening Meetings were held in the Department of Zoology at the University of Cape Town. Nearly all these Meetings were well attended by members and their guests.

At the first Evening Meeting Mr. G. Lestrangle showed an interesting collection of colour transparencies and his photographic skill and patience were much admired. The second evening was a Quizz Evening, with Mr. John Martin as Quizz Master. The small panel was bombarded with interesting questions. The success of the evening was in no small measure due to the Quizz Master. At the third meeting Mrs. M.K. Rowan talked on the Red-winged Starling, a species which she has studied intensively, and about which she published a paper in "The Ibis". On the fourth evening, Dr. G.J. Broekhuysen talked on "Bird Road Casualties" and gave the results of a two year enquiry into the matter. At the end of the talk there was an interesting discussion and some very valuable suggestions were made. On the fifth meeting Dr. S. Woodrow showed a well-produced and interesting colour-film on the Slimbridge Wild Fowl Sanctuary and this was followed up by an interesting account by Prof. Winterbottom on the Percy FitzPatrick Institute Expedition to South West Africa, which had recently taken place. On the next two Evening Meetings Mr. R.K. Schmidt talked on two groups of birds, he is very interested in. On the first occasion he talked about Sunbirds and especially the Lesser Double-collared Sunbird, of which he has made a detailed study and has just submitted a paper to "The Ostrich". On the second he talked on "Swifts and their Ways". Both talks were very well prepared and delivered in the typical Schmidt-fashion, which we all enjoy so much. At the eighth evening meeting, Professor C.J. Uys talked on "Ornithological Excursions to the Bredasdorp Area". In this talk, which was illustrated with a large number of very beautiful colour-transparencies, the many "bird-discoveries" made in that area were described. It was an outstanding evening which was very well attended.

#### FIELD OUTINGS

During the past year eight excursions were organised. They covered:- (1) Sir Lowry's Pass, (2) Bonteberg, (3) Rocklands at Klipheuvél, (4) Klavervlei, (5) Strandfontein Disposal Works, (6) Olifantsbos in the Cape Point Reserve, (7) Skrywershoek, (8) Schapen Island, Langebaan.

The Sir Lowry's Pass excursion was scheduled for July but that Sunday the weather was really bad. Thanks to Mr. John Martin the excursion was then held in September. Few members attended, but they did miss a most interesting day under ideal weather conditions. The nest of a Sentinel Thrush was located. The excursions to Rockland and Skrywershoek were week-end camps and especially the latter drew the record attendance of 40 people, while many more came on the

Sunday. The Excursion to Schapen Island was a ringing excursion, which was organised after it was discovered that there were large numbers of Black-backed Gull chicks and Sacred Ibis chicks. The weather conditions were bad and the crossings very rough, but thanks to a very good 'skipper' and a very faithful small powered outboard motor no accidents occurred and many birds were ringed.

#### SUB-COMMITTEES AND SCHEME ORGANISERS

The Club owes very special thanks to Miss H. Troughton, who with the help of Mrs. C.E. Chaundy was again responsible for the evening teas. I can assure these two ladies that we very much appreciate what they have done for us, and that we are extremely grateful.

We are also very grateful to Mrs. M.G. Winterbottom for arranging lifts for those who needed them at outings. Mrs. J. Sawkins has been responsible for obtaining permits and permissions for the different areas of the outings, and she has done that very efficiently. I take this opportunity to thank her on behalf of all of us who enjoyed the many excursions.

Mr. R.K. Schmidt again edited the News Sheet of the Club, which certainly has maintained its excellent standard. Mr. John Perry looked after the Club's Slide Collection. Mr. H.K. Morgan continued to act as Organiser of the Red Bishop Bird Inquiry Scheme, while Dr. J.M. Winterbottom once more was in charge of the Bird Field Card Scheme. Mr. John Martin was in charge of "Nest Record Card Scheme", while Mr. S. Clark looked after the "Behaviour Enquiry Scheme". Dr. G.J. Broekhuysen was responsible for the distribution of rings and the filing of ringed bird-recoveries in the Club's filing cabinet. He also acted as recorder of observations on the movements of migratory species. Mr. G.K. Lestranger very kindly and very effectively acted as the Club's lecturer to Schools and other interested organisations and during his many lectures must have spread the gospel.

#### MEMBERSHIP

The Membership of the Cape Bird Club at the end of the period under consideration, stood at 246. It, therefore, has remained rather static. May I once again plead to members to try to break this apparent status quo and to enrol some of their friends and let them join our Society.

In ending this report I have very great pleasure in thanking my Fellow Committee members for their enthusiasm. This applies to all of you but especially to the Hon. Secretary, Mr. H.K. Morgan and the Hon. Treasurer Mr. S.W. Clarke, both of whom fill key positions in the Committee.

May I make use of this opportunity to express also my deepest feelings of appreciation to the Cape Bird Club for their very kind gesture in making me a Honorary Life Member of the Club. Often this honour is bestowed on one when one has just about ceased to exist. It is very much appreciated that in this case an exception has been made.

Lastly but not least I like to thank the Head of the Department, Professor John Day, for allowing us to have our Meetings in the Department of Zoology.

G.J. Broekhuysen.