



CAPE BIRD CLUB : KAAPSE VOELWAARNEMERSKLUB

# NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

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Mrs. Rowan has come to the rescue of all those bird-watchers in Southern Africa whose life-lists are a bit on the short side, by showing that our opportunities are not as good as the handbooks suggest. She writes:

How many birds do you know ?

Apropos of the discussion on Life Lists and Annual Lists in the last two Newsletters, it seems to me that any bird-watcher in South Africa who sees over 400 birds in one year - or even in 10 years - is doing extraordinarily well, since our practical opportunities are not nearly as good as they might superficially seem.

Although it is true that Cabanis's Bunting the last bird in the revised "Roberts", is numbered 875, the figure is misleading. If you actually count all the full species listed in this book, you will find that the true total is only 805. Of these, about 55 or 60 occur only once every few years as unusual vagrants in our area, while another 70-odd are birds of purely marine environments. Thus, unless our hypothetical bird-watcher goes to sea and also enjoys some remarkable luck with vagrant species, his possible score is at once reduced from a supposed 850 to something nearer 675.

Amongst these, about 60 are raptors, of which many are very scarce, and at least another 30 have purely nocturnal habits. Others are highly secretive or rare, like some of the rails; or else have a remote and restricted range, like Rudd's lark and the Herero Chat. Nor must we forget that about 100 of our "regular" species are migrants, with us for about six months of the twelve, so that we have only a 50% chance of seeing them in any one year.

By and large, I would be surprised if the average bird-watcher in this country enjoys reasonably practical opportunities to see more than 600 - 650 different species, if as many, in a single life-time; and to record two-thirds of this number in a single year - as Dr. Winterbottom has done - must be a most unusual achievement. My own list for South Africa, compiled over the last ten years, totals only 425, and I have covered many thousands of miles to achieve that figure.

Incidentally, for those who may be tempted to keep Annual, as well as Life Lists, I would suggest that the "rules" for compiling the two should differ. For a Life List one must, as Mr. Tongue says, exclude all the Hoodwinks and the Handsaws - everything that was not seen clearly enough to be certainly identified and recognised on sight again. For an Annual List, however, it is surely permissible to admit birds which you know well, but in any particular year may have "seen" only with your

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cars. If this is not allowed, I think there will be many Annual Lists lacking such common species as the Piet-myn-vrou and the Red-eyed Dove, even though both may have been shouting their heads off throughout the summer in the compiler's garden.

Mr. A. Morris who has been watching regularly at the Strandfontein Sewage Farm, has recorded a most unusual bird:

Grey Phalarope at Tamatie Vlei.

Fortunately the 13th. March this year was on a Saturday, as it turned out to be a really lucky day for me.

I was sitting on the bank at Tamatie Vlei watching a group of Black-backed Gulls on the island. Many of these were immatures getting in a little "bombing" practice. Instead of dropping the normal mussel from a height to break the shell, they were using pieces of stick. Up they would fly, hesitate as if trying to pluck up courage, and then drop the stick onto the island. Some would try to catch the stick before it hit the ground - a few were lucky, most were not. This performance went on for quite a while and although there were adults present none of them joined in.

Quite near where I was sitting a group of about fifty Little Stint were feeding in shallow water, and at this time of the year it is always interesting to see if any plumage changes are taking place. Scanning the group with the glasses I noticed a bird that I had never seen before. About the size of a Curlew Sandpiper, with streaky grey back, grey crown, white underparts and a most distinctive heavy black stripe through the eye. While the Stints were walking about feeding, this little bird was swimming with quick, jerky movements. Notes were made, and then home to check the books. Roberts was not too helpful, but after checking the illustrations and descriptions in Peterson's "Birds of Britain and Europe there was no doubt - a Grey Phalarope.

A most satisfying afternoon. Another visit on 21 March revealed that the Phalarope was still at Tamatie Vlei feeding in company with a mixed group of waders.

Even on 27 March Mr. Morris was able to spot the Grey Phalarope again on a small pool near Tamatie Vlei and show it to Mr. A. Brown and me and we can confirm his identification according to the illustrations in Peterson.

Bring your Check List up to date.

Prof: Winterbottom writes: Although our Check List was published less than two years ago, there are already a number of additions and other changes to be made. I do not here propose to give a list of all the additional District records for various species, which would need several pages to set out, but the following are the more important changes:

5. Podiceps nigricollis gurneyi becomes Podiceps cuspidatus gurneyi.
- 153a. Calidris melanotos (Vieill.), Pectoral Sandpiper. New species, from Rondevlei, 25. March 1965.
174. Hydroprogne Caspia (Pall.) becomes H. tschegrava (Lepechin).
- 192 a. Cuculus C. canorus L.. European Cuckoo. Species now admitted to full List from Appendix on a record from Renierskraal (McLeod, Uys, Brown and J. Martin).
212. Bubo c. Capensis. A 1965 record from Vredehoek.
267. Saxicola torquata. Birds from the mouth of the Olifants River represent S.t. clanceyi Courtenay-Latimer.
- 275 a. Euryptila subcinnamomea (Smith), Cinnamon-breasted Warbler. New species found nesting in Gray's Pass by R. and J. Martin.
299. Psalidoprocne h. holomelas. becomes P. pristoptera holomelana.
300. Campephega sulphurata becomes C. phoenicea flava Vieill.

5.p.m. The bird was still warm and showed hardly any sign of the impact, although blood was dripping from a small wound. It made me really sad to think that even such a dashing bird may become a victim of modern traffic.

Mrs. M. de Villiers observed a nesting colony of Darters in the Olifants River Dam at Clanwilliam. Projecting from the water are dead branches of submerged trees in which the Darters roost and on which they nest when the water-level drops. In the last week of December there were four nests with birds brooding on three of them; one nest contained three eggs.

Records of late breeding.

Mr. Pringle recorded two nests with eggs of Common Waxbill in Bergvliet at the end of March.

Between 5 and 15 April I observed a pair of Pied Starlings feeding young in a hole above the window of a shed at Strandfontein Sewage Farm.

On 16 April in Cape Town I saw a pair of White-eyes feeding three fledged young.

In a nest of White-rumped Swifts at Plumstead the young could be heard begging until 20 April, they probably flew on 21 April which is a fortnight later than my previous latest fledging date.

Please, members, don't forget to report any late breeding records which you may have.

Miss Troughton informs me; The news has reached me of the untimely death in a London hospital of Miss Elizabeth Frere. As she turned up for all our bird outings and lectures during her last visit to S. Africa, there may be many in our Club who will remember her - for her bubbling enthusiasm, for her complete disregard of accident or mishap provided there was an interesting bird to be found, and for her grand humour. She 'discovered' the vlei near Zwaanswky School when it was flooded in the spring, and was entirely happy scrambling about through hedges and ditches and tallying the waterfowl. She told the story against herself of trying to cross an 8 foot ditch by picking up a massive plank and heaving it across. Unfortunately the plank slipped and she landed up to her neck in dirty water. But she merely climbed out, shook herself like a dog and took the train home.

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315. Onychognathus naboroup has now been recorded from the Robertson District.
320. Anthobaphes violacea and 321. Cinnyris chalybea. These two genera have been abolished and fused with Nectarinia, so the names become Nectarinia violacea and N. chalybea.
324. Xanthophilus capensis. This genus has been fused with Ploceus, so the name becomes Ploceus capensis.
332. Passer domesticus has now been recorded from Plumstead and the Bredasdorp, Clanwilliam, Hopefield, Malmesbury, Robertson and Swellendam districts.

Re-defining the Cape Bird Club area.

In a letter to the Cape Bird Club Committee, Prof: Winterbottom suggested a modification of our area to make it a more natural unit. Instead of the Olifants and Breede Rivers, the mountains to the east and north of these rivers should be made the new boundaries.

This extended C.B.C. area would comprise the whole of the following magisterial districts:

Piquetberg, Hopefield, Malmesbury, Tulbagh, Wellington, Paarl, Bellville, Cape Town, Wynberg, Simonstown, Stellenbosch, Somerset West, Calddon, Robertson and Bredasdorp; and the parts of the following districts defined as under:

Vanrhysdorp: that part south and west of the Olifants River.

Clanwilliam: that part south and west of the Cedarberg Mountains.

Worcester: that part south of the Hex River Mountains and Langeberg Mountains.

Swellendam: that part south of the Langeberg Mountains.

Montagu: that part south of the Langeberg Mountains.

This would give a much more natural unit; it would do away with the awkward straight line across the Tulbagh district between the sources of the Breede and Olifants Rivers; it would eliminate the tiny sliver in the Agter Witzenberg; and it would include the towns of Clanwilliam, Citrusdal, Worcester, Robertson and Swellendam in our area.

The committee decided that adoption of the extended boundaries now would detract from the value of the Check List only just published. Members are, however, advised that the additional territory is being brought under our jurisdiction for study and the collection of records, and that it will be formally incorporated into our area when our Check List is revised.

Interesting records from our area.

Miss D. Clark, on 4 April, observed 12 Black Storks feeding round a small area of water at Rietvlei.

Mr. A. Brown, on 14 February, caught a European Swallow which had been ringed as fledged juvenile in Cheshire, England in August 1964.

Mr. E. Middlemiss, on March 11, in his office at Rondevlei, caught a male Lesser Double-collared Sunbird which had been ringed as a nestling at Strandfontein on 14 September 1963.

Miss N. Williams, who is an eager watcher of birds in the Black River area just below St. Joseph's Hospital, reports what may be seen there in the immediate vicinity of our most modern high-ways. On 25 February, within twenty minutes, she recorded: 1 Gallinule, about 10 Ethiopian Snipe, several Stilts and Black-smith Plovers, one or two Moorhen, the ever-present Le Vaillant's Warbler. 1 Black-Shouldered Kite, 1 Red Bishop in sparkling crimson dress and, last but not least, 2 Painted Snipe which she had not seen there before in the 2½ years of her watching in this area.

Near the above spot on Settlers' Way I found a dead Lanner Falcon which must have been killed by a car on 29 March at about