

NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

NR 79

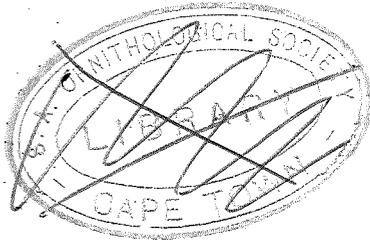
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79

October

1965

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Prof: Winterbottom writes: With records this year of the African Jacana from Faure and Black River (New Letter 78) and, still more recently, from De Hoop. Bredasdorp, 1965 might go down in our history as "the year of the Jacana. Incidentally, it has sent me delving into past records of this bird from our area; and the following have been unearthed:

Cape Division and Swellendam (Stark and Sclater) Rosecommon Road (W.P. Stanford. News Letter 6.) Citrusdal (J.D. McDonald. Contributions to the Ornithology of Western S. Africa, p.64) Kramat (John Martin, News Letter 58).

There must be more. The Check List gives it for Bredasdorp and Hopefield, but I cannot substantiate these. Can any of the News Letter readers help?

More Jacana Records.

Miss N. Williams reports: I spent a most enjoyable Sunday at Paarl (19th. Sept.) visiting the Sewage Farm at the suggestion of the Town Engineer. It is a most attractive site and the bird life is prolific. Mr. Hare said that there were four Jacanas there for about four months. Last week he saw only one, which he has not observed again since the Ruffs arrived - they use the same marshy strip. He did not think the presence of the Jacanas was of any importance.

There were innumerable night herons, grey and black-headed herons too, all nesting, as well as gallinules, pochards, maccoas and coots.

A scenic circular drive leads round the pans, but one can walk along numerous other paths. Paarl regards this sewage farm as a show piece, not as a prohibited area. Visitors are welcome, but permission should be obtained from the Town Engineer (a phone call is sufficient) for groups of people.

On 14 October I watched a single Jacana feeding

along the edge of a temporary vlei at Philippi. This vlei is surrounded by dense grass on three sides and a patch of reeds on the fourth, in the water there are plenty of wateruintjies. When it is drying out in summer, part of it is used for the cultivation of vegetables.

Miss L. Heine saw a Jacana at the Paarl Sewage Works on 31 July 1965; this was her first observation of a Jacana there although she has visited this spot in summer and winter for several years.

Mr. R. Siegfried and Mr. P. Milstein saw three Jacanas at the Paarl Sewage Works on 24 October.

Miss K. Irish, together with Miss H. Troughton, saw two Jacanas on Alderman's Dam on 6 August. She has visited this dam frequently since early June and on each occasion seen one Jacana.

Other records of rare birds.

Mr. R. Siegfried writes: In the south-western Cape extra-limital waterbirds are often recorded during winter and early spring. This year proves no exception - witness the Jacana reports. At the beginning of August, Mr. David Blaker told me that he had seen a Squacco Heron at Paardevlei, Somerset Strand. On 7 August I also saw a Squacco. The bird (possibly the same Blaker had seen) was observed under ideal conditions for 15 minutes at a distance of about 40 feet. A Squacco was seen again at Paardevlei on 15 August.

Under not quite such good conditions, on the evening of 3 August, I saw what may have been a Great White Heron. I observed the bird in poor light, while watching Cattle Egrets at a roost in Devon Valley, Stellenbosch. Fortunately about 25 Black-headed Herons also use this roost and this allowed a size comparison. The bird was about the same size as the Black-headed Herons. If not the Great White Heron, and leaving aside the confusing colour changes for which some members of the Heron family are known, it is possible that the bird was an albino.

Spoonbills are regular residents in the Stellenbosch district during the wet months of the year, as well as the Sacred Ibis which invade the Boland in their hundreds; I counted 96 Ibis at the Devon Valley roost on 3 August.

This winter seems to have produced its fair share of surprises in birds of prey as well. On 3 August, near Stellenbosch mountain, I saw what I took to be an African Goshawk. The beginnings of a Black Harrier nest about 40 feet high in a clump of bluegum trees unfortunately came to nought. The birds were first seen on 1 August and again the following day, but on 9 August the birds and the few sticks of nesting material had disappeared.

A small group of Cattle Egrets together with Little Egrets roosted for a few weeks at Scarborough during the winter of 1964(cf. Cattle Egrets on the sea shore, Newsletter 78)

On 21 October one of my colleagues saw a Glossy Ibis at the Paarl Sewage Works. On the morning of the 24th. a bird of this species was seen at Paarl by Peter Milstein from the Transvaal and myself.

Karoo Robin feeding its mate on the nest.

On 28 August 1965, at Somerset West, Mr. G.D. Underhill observed a Karoo Robin building a nest. At noon on 6 September, his wife and he checked the nest, and found the bird sitting on three eggs. They also noticed a Robin carrying food to the site., but could not find a nest with young. Throughout the afternoon, while he did some weeding nearby, the food-carrying continued. On one occasion it was a green caterpillar and later an earthworm which was

collected at a spot where he had disturbed the soil in pulling out a large weed. At 4.p.m. they decided to keep a closer watch and found that the food was definitely being carried to the nest they had previously located. They put the bird off the nest, just to confirm that the eggs had not hatched during the day, and could but conclude that the delicacies were being taken to the brooding bird. A similar observation of a Karoo Robin feeding its mate which was sitting on a nest with three eggs, was made by Mr. Underhill at Worcester on 17 September 1965.

Recovery of Cattle Egret

A Cattle Egret which had been ringed by Mr. A.R. Brown as a young bird at Maccoa Vlei, Strandfontein on 26 November 1960, has been recovered at Umlaas, Natal on 21 April 1965.

Cliff Swallows and their tenants.

Mr. John Martin reports from a September trip through the Northern Cape, Free State and Transvaal: We saw numerous colonies of cliff Swallows under bridges and on buildings. Usually these swallows had tenants, the Cape Sparrow perhaps being the most common. At the first colony just north of Colesberg and across the Orange River we found last year's partly-built nest occupied by Mossies with young and another nest close to it had a pair of Familiar Chats with three eggs. At other sites, House Sparrows were using the nests. Some of the swallow nests were occupied by White-rumped Swifts and others by Little Swifts. Just beyond Schweizer-Renecke at an old bridge over a dry river, Robbie and I were looking at a disused colony of Cliff Swallow nests when a Pied Barbet flew from one of them. We were not certain from which nest it had come; although we waited some time for it to go back to the nest again from where it had sat on a thorn tree next to the bridge, limited time forced our patience to give out before that of the barbet. A fascinating study of bird species using Cliff Swallow nests could be made and I am sure our W.B.C. friends have some interesting notes on this subject.

Sugarbirds in Eucalyptus.

Mr. P. Tongue reports: The gum trees surrounding the now ruined farm of Olifantsbosch, are always alive with Sun- and Sugarbirds. When I arrived on the afternoon of 14 August, male Sugarbirds were flighting to and from the tops of the trees, whilst inside in several places there were those cackling, gobbling meetings that go on in the Sugarbird communities.

I had a good look, but could see no signs of any nests, but I never find nests unless they are those of rooks in the U.K. There were, however, plenty of females as well as males. At the back of the clump of trees, where there was a more open view, I saw that the Malachites and the Lesser Double-collared Sunbirds were eating those Harpo Marx tufts of green thread that grow on the eucalyptus. They were being joined by the Sugarbirds which were eating the same thing. This I watched for some time, and there is no doubt about it.

On August 9 at 11 a.m., Mr. Tongue saw a Secretary Bird fly over the National Road near Lincoln Street Bridge, Belville. One wonders whether the Secretary Bird has ever been recorded so close to the city.

Black Harrier near Wellington.

Prof. and Mrs. Winterbottom were delighted to see a Black Harrier fly across the road between Wellington and Hermon. They were less delighted, but still interested, to find House Sparrows at Gouda. The beastly little bird may now be expected almost anywhere.

Young Birdwatcher sets good example.

During the Eerste River outing on September 25, several members noticed with pleasure the keenness of eight-year-old Betty Hallack of Somerset West. She was apparently the only watcher who compiled a list of all the birds she saw, recording a total of 29

species. She seems to be following in the footsteps of the many keen Somerset West members.

New Index for Newsletter

The Cape Bird Club is indebted to Prof. Winterbottom for compiling another section of the index of our Newsletter, covering Nos. 31 to 60. Mrs. Broekhuysen kindly undertook the tedious job of typing the stencils for the five pages of this index. The index will increase the value of your Newsletter collection tremendously. Copies of this section, as well as the first covering Nos 1 to 30, are obtainable from the Secretary or the Editor at the price of 10 cents each.

Unusual Birds in a Garden.

Mrs. Eileen Hodgson reports from Betty's Bay: During June we were visited by three Grey-winged Partridges. They were here on and off for about a week and did a great deal of damage to bulbs, especially ixias, gladioli and freezias. After their visit we heard them calling for a few days, but they did not visit us. At the end of September, one was calling in the scrub and then visited the same bulb bed for two days but then disappeared until October 7 when he came right up to the house calling loudly. As the bird had spurs, we concluded it was a male, calling for a mate. He spent the whole day round the house; even when disturbed by the car or people, he only disappeared for a short time. He never stopped to feed, even though the Rock Pigeons and the Cape Turtle Doves were eating seeds on the grass. Early on the 8th he was here again, behaving in the same way, but left about 11 a.m. and we have never seen him since.

There is a male Pintailed Widow Bird which has been with us for four summers. He leaves about the end of March and comes back in August; this year he appeared in July already, still in winter plumage. He is not marked, but as he uses the same perches and comes for our whistle, we are certain it is the same bird. He chases all the seed-eating birds, especially the Buntings. Where the sex can be distinguished, as in the Cape Widow Bird, it is noticeable how especially aggressive he is to the males, giving them no time to feed.

We notice a pattern of behaviour in the insect-eating birds too, when we put out cheese or bits of meat. The Wagtails are giving way to the Cape Robins, which in turn yield to the Rock Thrush.

Sir Llewellyn Andersson and S.A.O.S. Essay Competition.

The competition is open to school pupils between the ages of 10 to 18, divided into three age groups. The essays may be written in English or Afrikaans. Closing date is March 31st, 1966.

In each age group, a First and a Second Prize will be awarded; Prizes will be in the form of books on birds. In this competition, particular attention should be given to personal observation.

For further details and subjects for 1966, please write to
Mr. R.D.W. Brown,
5, Orlando Road, Kensington, Johannesburg.

Waders are back at Langebaan.

Miss N. Williams and Miss Allin spent a week-end at Osterwal, Langebaan, on October 16/17. They report that they were able to watch the waders on the out-going tide, even better than with the in-coming tide, at Schrywershoek in March.

It was interesting to compare the plumage of these birds with their plumage of seven months previously. For instance, the Grey Plovers were in various stages of black and white markings and one particularly could be singled out as having lost very little of his breeding plumage. Then there were the Curlew Sandpipers back to their normal summer dress; the Turnstones, dozens of them, were a sight, but unfortunately not one Terek Sandpiper was to be seen. Whimbrels exceeded Curlews by far, but only one Treble-banded Sandplover could we find in the masses feeding on the green growth exposed by the receding tide.

Perhaps the greatest joy was to sit in the car watching the quarry where the Bee-eaters nest every year. They were first observed on September 17 this year. We never saw more than ten at one time and none appeared to be nesting seriously. We watched two pairs where the male fed the female - presumably this is a courting practice. The two-day observation accounted for 58 different species.
