



# NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

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## Life Histories Wanted

Professor Winterbottom sent me the following most interesting survey which is also an appeal to all our members for help in filling gaps in the knowledge of some of the most common birds of our area. He writes:

The forms filled in of monthly occurrence by Districts in the Club area throw some light on the ubiquity of our birds. There are 18 species which have been recorded for every month from 10 or more districts (out of 17 - but for two of these, Ceres and Vanrhynsdorp, cards are not available for every month, so in effect, it is out of 15). These are:

Cattle Egret, Black-shouldered Kite, Cape Turtle Dove, Laughing Dove, Cape Bulbul, Stonechat, Cape Robin, Karoo Robin, Cape Wagtail, Karoo Prinia, Fiscal Shrike, Bokmakierie, European Starling, Pied Starling, Lesser Double-collared Sunbird, Cape Sparrow, Cape Weaver and Cape Bunting.

These 18 we may call the most widespread and conspicuous of our birds. A little less so (recorded every month in 7 - 9 districts) are another 18:

Grey Heron, Yellow-billed Duck, Rock Kestrel, Cape Francolin, Blacksmith Plover, Thick-billed Lark, African Sand Martin, White-necked Raven, Familiar Chat, Grey-backed Cisticola, Fiscal Flycatcher, Red-winged Starling, Orange-breasted Sunbird, Pale White-eye, Cape Bishop, Common Waxbill, Cape Canary and Yellow Canary.

We can ask ourselves what we know about these birds. About the Cattle Egret, thanks to David Blaker and Roy Siegfried, we know a lot - and we have Jack Skead's study in the Eastern Cape too.

Of the others, Miss Claire Robinson has studied the Laughing Dove and the Bokmakierie in the south-west Cape; Mrs Rowan has studied the Cape Robin, Yellow-billed Duck and Red-winged Starling; and, with Professor Broekhuysen, the Karoo Prinia; R.K.Schmidt has produced a study of the Lesser Double-collared Sunbird and Prof. Broekhuysen one of the Orange-breasted Sunbird. He and I have published a study of the White-eye; and work on the Cape Sparrow and Cape Weaver is in progress. The late Prof. Hall studied the Blacksmith Plover.

Outside our area, a good deal has been learnt about the Cape Turtle Dove, Cape Wagtail, Fiscal Shrike, Cape Weaver, Familiar Chat, Common Waxbill, and Cape Canary, mostly in the form of papers by Jack Skead; and Richard Liversidge has a study of the Cape Bulbul approaching completion.

This leaves 15 of the 36 species virtually unstudied in South Africa at all; and another eight about which we know far too little in our own area. In fairness to our members, it should be added that several of our migrant species, which obviously don't qualify for listing above but which are just as widespread and conspicuous when they are here, have been well studied - the European Swallow (Broekhuysen), Pearl-breasted and Greater Striped Swallows and White-rumped Swift (Schmidt), and Little Stint (Middlemiss). We might also mention important studies of other species, such as the Mousebirds (Mrs Rowan), Cape Shoveller and Black Duck (Siegfried), Black-necked Grebe (Broekhuysen and Frost), Southern Pochard (Middlemiss), Black Oystercatcher and Kittlitz's Plover (Hall), Klaas's Cuckoo (MacLeod and Hallack), Red-capped Lark (Winterbottom and Wilson), Olive Thrush (Mrs Winterbottom), Cape Batis and Cape Sugarbird (Broekhuysen).

This is not a bad record. But who will tackle the common species not yet properly studied?

#### Garden Bird Feeding

Some of the members may have heard that the British Trust for Ornithology is organising an enquiry into Garden Bird Feeding and we at the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute think it would be interesting to do the same in Southern Africa. Anybody who regularly puts out food for birds can take part. Will those interested please contact the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, C.P., for detailed instructions and the forms.

Prof. J.M. Winterbottom, Director.

#### Bird Life of our Islands

As a reply to this report in Newsletter 94 I received the following note from a junior member, F. v.d. Merwe, Stellenbosch:

Prof. Winterbottom het gemeld dat daar reeds 21 verskillende spesies op die eiland by Lambertsbaai opgemerk is.

Gedurende die lang naweek (5-7 September) was ek op Lambertsbaai en kon toe die eiland verskeie kere besoek. Gedurende hierdie tydperk het ek altesaam 17 spesies op die eiland gesien en geïdentifiseer. Van die elf spesies wat Prof. Winterbottom noem wat op al die eilande voorkom, het ek almal behalwe een duikersoort gesien.

Ander spesies wat gesien is, sluit in Kaapse Kwikkies, Drieband-Strandloper, Bont Visvanger waarvan twee langs die muur wat na die eiland lei gesien is, asook ander strandloper spesies. Ek was ook gelukkig om n Gryskop-meeu twee keer tussen die Hartlaubse Meeue te sien. Beide keer was die voëls in broeiverkleed en kon dus maklik uitgeken word.

Na die goeie reëns wat vroeër vanjaar in die streek geval het, is daar heelwat voedsel vir die voëls in die veld. n Goeie bewys hiervan is die groot getalle Lelspreus wat opgemerk is.

Op die reis na Lambertsbaai het ek n Swart Kuikendief (Circus maurus) n paar myl buitekant die dorp gesien.

Appointment with a Rare Bird

Since 1966 the Martin Family (Somerset West) had suspected the Tambourine Dove to occur at Kogman's Kloof between Ashton and Montagu. This bird, according to Roberts, occurs from Knysna eastwards; but it has recently been recorded from the Huis River Pass by MacLeod and Uys. It can often be found where there are Castor Oil plants, of which many grow along the river in Kogman's Kloof. By the middle of 1970 the Martins had definitely identified the Tambourine Dove at Kogman's Kloof, which means a considerable westward extension of its range. But to have it accepted as a species new to our area, it had to be seen by another member of the Records Committee (cf. C.B.C. Check List 1963, page 3).

For this reason Robbie Martin asked me to accompany him to Kogman's Kloof on 29 August 1970. It was a lovely day, the mountains sprinkled with snow and daisies galore along the road. Our hopes of seeing the Tambourine Dove, however, were none too great, as it is a swift-flying, shy bird of dense bush. Moreover you have to see it from the front as it is the only dove with white face and underparts.

When we arrived and entered the dense riverine bush, we soon chased up two likely birds, but they flew away from us, showing only their brownish backs for a few moments. It was impossible to identify them as Tambourine Doves, especially as I had never seen the bird before. So we decided to sit under a big Castor Oil tree and wait for the most unlikely thing to happen. And after less than half an hour it did happen: across an open space in front of us two Tambourine Doves flew low towards our tree, braked when they spotted us, and thus clearly showed their white faces and underparts, which destroyed any doubts about their identity.

Later I saw another two Tambourine Doves flying past me farther up along the river, so there may be several pairs in the kloof. I was then watching a Sweet Waxbill building in a thorn tree about 15 to 20 ft above ground. We had noticed the male collecting material and seen it flying into this tree. I watched the nest-building for about half an hour and was surprised to see only the male collecting material on the ground and doing all the building. He really worked hard during that time. The female was sitting in the tree next to the less than half-completed nest, but I never saw her taking material or helping with the building. The male went on collecting material and building even after she had flown away.

We also observed Namaqua Prinia and Tchagra Shrike at this lovely spot which is well worth a bird-watching visit.

Week-end Camp at Kersefontein  
(24/25th October)

Paging through back numbers of the Newsletter I found that on 17th November 1957 the Cape Bird Club had an outing to Mr Melck's farm Kersefontein on the Berg River. The purpose of this excursion was to check Peter Wilson's observation of breeding Spoonbills. Guided by Peter Wilson we found six Spoonbill nests, one contained three small young, the others eggs.

After 13 years the C.B.C. arranged an outing to Kersefontein again, and all those who went are grateful to Mr Melck for giving us the opportunity of seeing the wealth of birdlife on his farm. The flowers were beautiful too, I had never before seen so many Chinchinchees in the veld.

This year Kersefontein offered a rarity in our area as a special attraction; the Glossy Ibis, of which we saw six

flying together on Saturday afternoon. The Spoonbills must have increased a lot since 1957. Although it was difficult to estimate their numbers among the clouds of white birds rising from the reeds in the river, there must have been at least 100 Spoonbills among them. Sacred Ibis were plentiful as well as Little and Yellow-billed Egrets and of course hundreds of Cattle Egrets. Darters and Cormorants, Grey Herons, Night Herons and a few Purple Herons were seen, and even the Fish Eagles showed themselves.

Nesting must have started earlier this year than in 1957, as we found several spoonbill nests with chicks of which about 10 were big enough to be ringed, but there were also nests with eggs, mostly clutches of three. About 10 Sacred Ibis were also big enough to be ringed. It is difficult, however, to get even a rough estimate of the number of birds there or the state of breeding, because the reed beds are so extensive.

A Wilson always seems to provide some special excitement at Kersefontein. This time it was Geoff Wilson, our ringing expert, who had his nets up and caught a strange little brownish bird which was identified as a Willow Warbler, indeed a rare and early record of a migrant from the northern hemisphere. (Mr Lockhart, on 15 April 1970, watched 4 Willow Warblers for about 30 minutes foraging together for insects in the company of 8 Cape White-eyes in the willow trees bordering Paardevlei. Their distinctive call attracted his attention which, he says, is rather well described in Roberts as a plaintive "foowee".) It is not surprising that it was also Geoff Wilson who found a nest of the Glossy Ibis which contained three small chicks.

Watch out for Little Swifts

Mr Morgan discovered a newly established small breeding colony of Little Swifts under the eaves of a tall building in High Level Road between Sea Point and Cape Town at the end of October.

(The apparently first breeding colony of Little Swifts in the Cape Peninsula which started in the spring of 1963 at Plumstead is still going strong, the number of birds has increased considerably. Editor).

Nest Record Card Project: 1969

During the year under review nesting by 106 species was recorded in the Western Cape. An additional 27 species featured in cards for previous years. The total number of cards received was 1723 including 12 colonial cards. The totals for 1968 were 2080 and 20.

Nesting by the following species was recorded on 10 or more cards:

Egyptian Goose	10	Cape Robin	13
Cape Wigeon	10	Fantail Cisticola	19
Cape Shoveller	35	Cloud Cisticola	11
Cape Dikkop	26	Le Vaillant's Cisticola	11
Coot	358	Karoo Prinia	16
Stilt	30	Larger Striped Swallow	11
Kittlitz's Sandplover	19	Fiscal Shrike	22
Crowned Plover	80	Bokmakierie	11
Blacksmith Plover	21	European Starling	54
Cape Turtle Dove	115	White-eye	13
Laughing Dove	245	Orange-breasted Sunbird	23
White-rumped Swift	13	Sugarbird	13
Cape Wagtail	17	Red Bishop	36
Tawny Pipit	32	Cape Sparrow	106
Olive Thrush	10	Yellow Canary	11

The species mentioned above, plus a few others such as the Karoo Robin, Cape Weaver and Cape Canary constitute our more common breeding species and I appeal to all members to prepare and submit a card for every nest they find.