

CAPE BIRD CLUB : KAAPSE VOELWAARNEMERSKLUB

NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF.

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Learn to know your birds

During the Annual General Meeting it was again mentioned that the Cape Bird Club should do more to teach its members, especially the new ones, to identify the common birds of our area.

I agree with Professor Winterbottom who once said: "To know your birds is an individual effort" and I should like to add: "It is an effort which must be kept up over years." But just because nobody can teach you this art quickly and you have to do it yourself, it gives you great satisfaction and keeps your interests alive. A few hints may be helpful, however, to overcome some of the difficulties.

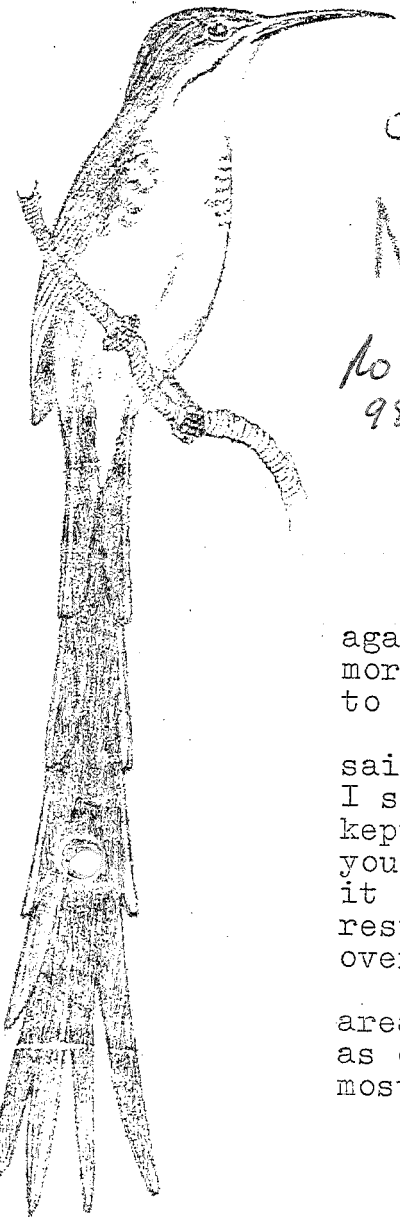
The best way to start is to select a small area, not too far from your home, and to observe in it as often as possible. Near Cape Town your choice will most probably be one of the following three habitats:

- A) a mountain slope
- B) indigenous bush on the Flats
- C) a vlei with reeds.

In any of these habitats you will probably know three or four species of the birds already or you will be able to identify them easily with one of the many good bird-books which are now available. Don't disregard those easy ones, but try to learn their various calls and songs, so that you can recognise them even when they are hidden in dense bush. And when the breeding season comes, do make a real effort to find their nests. Buy a copy of the Check List of Birds of the S.W. Cape 1963 (Price 50c, postage paid, obtainable from our Secretary) which will tell you the breeding season of every species and which also indicates the dominant species for most habitats.

It is often better to sit down and watch than to walk around. If during the nesting season the birds fly around you, carrying nesting material or food, but do not go to the nest, you should move a short distance away, as you were most probably too close to their nest.

In every one of the three above mentioned habitats you will notice one or two of the so-called "little brown birds" which are difficult to identify. Around Cape Town you will succeed even with these little birds, if you remember that the Karoo Prinia certainly occurs in A and B and may also be found around C, that is in the bush surrounding a vlei. The typical little brown bird of A is the Neddicky (Cisticola fulvicapilla); the one occurring in B is the Grey-backed Cisticola (C. subruficapilla) and the one inhabiting marshy ground around C is Levillant's Cisticola (C. tinniens) with the easily remembered "set" song, something like a very rapid "Pick where you li-ik" (according to Gill's "First Guide to S.A. Birds").



Now good luck to all beginners. Please don't forget to submit Nest Record Cards of even the most common birds to Mr. G. Underhill.

Crested Grebes nesting

On 23 May '71 my son observed several pairs of Crested Grebes which seemed to be breeding at Lake Marina Township, Bot-River Vei. Mr. & Mrs. Hunter, who are new members of the Cape Bird Club, kindly lent us a canoe so that we could check the nests on 31 May. The first nest which the Hunters had observed for more than a fortnight, contained 4 eggs. We found 6 more nests, of which three contained 3 eggs each, one 2 eggs and two had 1 newly-laid egg each. On all nests the birds were sitting and all eggs were lightly covered with nesting material when we checked them. The nests were built in patches of floating vegetation which was just below the surface. On 27 June my son observed that chicks were being fed at one nest.

On 31 May there were also several Coot nests there, two with 4, one with 5 eggs and one with 1 egg.

Birds and Man

Professor Winterbottom sent the following most interesting information:

The effect of human activities on our bird life has been discussed in a number of technical papers rather tedious for the ordinary amateur to read. The following analysis of data in the Club's Field Cards will, however, show some of these effects in an easily assimilable form.

The indigenous vegetation of the south-western Cape is bush and scrub. The ten most frequent birds in this type of terrain are, in order of frequency:

Karoo Prinia, Bokmakierie, Cape Robin, Cape Turtle Dove, Fiscal Shrike, Cape Bulbul, Cape Bunting, Grey-backed Cisticola, Karoo Robin and Lesser Double-collared Sunbird.

In the nearest equivalent man-made environments, gardens and wattle plantations, the ten most frequent species are:

Cape Turtle Dove, Cape Robin, Fiscal Shrike, Cape White-eye, European Starling, Laughing Dove, Cape Sparrow, Cape Bulbul, Karoo Prinia and Cape Weaver.

It will be seen that only half the species in the first list occur in the second.

In vineyards and orchards, the ten most frequent species are:

Cape Turtle Dove, Cape Sparrow, Cape Canary, Laughing Dove, Fiscal Shrike, Cape Weaver, Black-shouldered Kite, Bokmakierie, Karoo Prinia and European Starling.

Four of these occur in the first list and no less than seven in the second.

In the even more altered environments of grain-fields and pastures, the ten most frequent species are:

Cape Sparrow, Richard's Pipit, Red-capped Lark, Fiscal Shrike, Thick-billed Lark, Cape Weaver, Pied Starling, Orange-throated Longclaw, Cape Bishop and Stonechat.

Only one of these occurs in the first list and only three in the second and third.

The effect of human activities on our bird life includes, therefore, a decided decrease in the relative abundance of the Karoo Prinia, Bokmakierie, Cape Bunting, Grey-backed Cisticola, Karoo Robin and Lesser Double-collared Sunbird; and a relative increase in Cape Turtle Doves, Cape Sparrows, European Starlings, Laughing Doves and Cape Weavers - generally less interesting birds, though an ornithologist ought not to have favourites!

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR
ENDING 14 MAY 1971

During the past year the Committee met 8 times and these meetings had a 86 % attendance which is quite satisfactory and slightly better than during the previous year.

Of the variety of items discussed during the Committee Meetings the following probably deserve mentioning in this report:

1. During three Committee Meetings the threat to the Langebaan Lagoon by the proposed establishment of salt works at the southern half by the Johannesburg Consolidated Investment Company was discussed. It was decided that the Club should protest to the Minister of Planning and a letter was sent on 3 July 1970.
2. The extension of the area covered by the Cape Bird Club was also under discussion. Especially Mr. Rudolf Schmidt and Mr. John Perry did a lot of work in this connection and we like to thank them. The suggested extension has now been approved of by the South African Ornithological Society, and therefore, has now taken effect.
3. At the suggestion of Mr. Geoff Wilson the starting of "Informal Field Outings" were discussed. At these outings a limited number of interested members were going to assist certain members engaged on particular projects. It was decided to start these meetings and Mr. Wilson and Mrs. N. Davis agreed to organise them.
4. Participation of the Club in the newly founded "Conservation Co-ordinating Council" was discussed and it was agreed to have a representative on the Council.
5. Mr. Sam Butler presented three of his paintings i.e. "A View of Grabouw", "The Cape Bird Club at Jonkershoek", "Flamingoes at the Wild Fowl Trust, Slimbridge" to Professor Winterbottom and the Club was asked to organise the sale of these paintings. The profits of two would go to the Percy FitzPatrick Institute and of one to the Cape Bird Club. The best way of making a maximum profit on these paintings is being investigated. Once again we like to thank Sam Butler for his very generous donation.
6. The Committee received a letter from Mr. L.W. Brownridge, in which attention was drawn to the proposed construction of an air-strip at Killarney. This would have an adverse effect on bird life at Rietvlei and Milnerton. It was decided that the Committee should lodge an objection with the Cape Divisional Council. It now seems that no air-strip is going to be constructed.
7. A request from the S.A.C.S. asking larger Branches to produce and pay for one issue of "The Bokmakierie" every two years in view of the rather strained financial condition of the S.A.C.S. was discussed.

The Committee decided that the Club could not undertake the financing of one issue of "The Bokmakierie", but would be prepared to make a special donation towards this publication. A provisional figure of R50 was approved of.

EXCURSIONS AND MEETINGS

During the past year there were 9 Evening Meetings as scheduled on the program and 2 extra ones, i.e. on 17 July 1970 Mr. Philip Tongue spoke on his recent visit to Australia and on 16 April 1971 Mr. Peter Steyn talked about and showed colour transparencies of "A 5000 miles trip for Birds".

There were 9 Field Outings as indicated on the program except for a change of a visit to Banhoek to a visit to Kirstenbosch. In addition there were three informal field outings.

MEMBERSHIP

The membership to date stands at 352. Twenty one members were written off for not paying during 1970 and eight resigned.

May I once more appeal to members to try to enroll new members?

SUB-COMMITTEE AND SCHEME ORGANISERS

Again, during this year which lies behind us, a number of kind ladies were responsible for making tea at the different Evening Meetings. We are extremely grateful to them.

Mr. S. Clarke was responsible for obtaining permissions for the different Field Outings and for the final arrangement of the Program for 1971. We like to thank him warmly for all the trouble he has had.

Mr. Rudolf Schmidt, the Club's Vice-Chairman, not only edited the News Letter again, but also took the Chair whenever the Chairman could not make it.

Miss N. Williams kindly typed the stencils for the different issues of the News Letters.

Professor Jack Winterbottom again looked after the Field Card Scheme and Mr. George Underhill after the Nest Record Scheme.

Your Chairman continued as Recorder of Movements of Migratory Species and Mr. Allan Morris again was the Keeper of the Club's Slide Collection.

Mrs. N. Davies has been kind enough to organise the Dinner for the Annual General Meeting of the S.A.O.S. which this year will be held in Cape Town.

In ending this report, it gives me pleasure to thank the members of the out-going Committee and especially the Hon. Secretary and the Hon. Treasurer for what they have done during the past year.

Both the Treasurer, Mr. Geoff Wilson and the Secretary, Mr. Keith Morgan have decided to resign from the functions they held which, in the case of the Secretary has been a long and very beneficial time.

Mr. Allan Morris, a Committee member of long standing, and who many years ago joined the Club as a Junior Member, has agreed to take over the Secretary ship from Keith Morgan. We are very fortunate indeed. Keith Morgan has agreed to take over the Treasurership from Geoff Wilson.

Once again, I like to express the Cape Bird Club's appreciation and gratefulness to Professor John Dat, the Head of the Department of Zoology, for allowing the Club to use the Zoology Main Lecture Hall for its proceedings.

I also like to thank Professor Winterbottom, the Director of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute, for the use of the Institute's Library for the informal gatherings after the Evening Meetings.

G.J. Broekhuysen,
Chairman.