

Conservation Corner: March 2024

By Karis Daniel

Since the African Oystercatcher counts on Robben Island reported in the December newsletter, fieldwork has shifted focus to monitoring breeding success. Researchers and volunteers walk the 10-kilometre perimeter of the island every six days, searching for nests and checking the status of eggs laid in previous weeks.



Amaia Sagarzazu and Amandine Doré measuring eggs at a new nest.

Photo: Karis Daniel

High temperatures, a rocky coastline, and no shelter mean that this fieldwork is not for the faint of heart (or legs!). The team stops at every active nest, measuring the length, breadth and mass of new eggs and checking that previously laid eggs are still viable.

In recent weeks, volunteers have been treated to sightings of hatching eggs and very young

Oystercatcher chicks. Once a chick has 'pipped' its egg (made a small hole), it takes several hours to emerge fully. After hatching, chicks only stay at the scrape for a day or two. This means that most of the chicks encountered are less than 24 hours old.



A warm egg is a healthy egg. Too cold, and it may have been abandoned by the parents; too hot, and the embryo will not survive.

Photo: Karis Daniel



A newly hatched chick and pipped egg.

Photo: Karis Daniel

As of 30 January, the monitoring team had marked 101 nests on the island, 30 of which were active. Over the next two months, as the number of new nests dwindles, fieldwork will revert to census counts of adult and juvenile birds. These counts help to determine the survival rates of Oystercatcher chicks on the island and will continue through the rest of 2024.



Like many waders, the feet of Oystercatcher chicks are well-developed in relation to the rest of their features. Strong legs and feet allow chicks to walk and run on uneven surfaces from day one.

Photo: Karis Daniel

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