



Rhodesian Ornithological Society Bulletin No. 16

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Editor: Dr. R.M. Harwin, City Health Dept.,
P.O. Box 1946 Bulawayo.

A note on the nesting behaviour of Kittlitz's Plover

On August 15th 1954, I was sitting in my parked car on the foreshore of a large farm dam about 20 miles from Gatooma, with the idea of locating the position of brood of young Blacksmith Lapwings which I knew to be within 50 yards. My attention was drawn to the behaviour of a pair of Kittlitz's' Plovers about 25 yards away. The male bird ran about vigorously over an area about 20 yards square, making "scrapes" at intervals, and calling to the hen from time to time. She, however, stood about with an air of complete indifference, and could only occasionally be persuaded to come and inspect them. When she did so, she sat down in the "scrape", turned round several times, settled herself, surveyed the view, and then got up and walked off with an expression of disapproval. On four such occasions coition took place; at intervals of 6 to 10 minutes, and always before the hen inspected the scrape. One particular scrape at length appeared to satisfy the bird's requirements, and she spent a considerable time fussing around it, moving odd bits of material, and even returning to it several times for another look.

When I left, I was in great hopes that she would lay in this spot, but unfortunately she did not do so. I never found the nest, but caught a nestling some hundreds of yards further along the shore on October 17th, and saw two juveniles with one of the adults on November 1st. (There was only one pair of Kittlitz's Plovers on the dam during this time).

A.B. Fletcher.

Bird watching with a cat

Our three-months-old kitten was not really old enough to take an interest in birds when we allowed her to come with us for a picnic tea one Saturday afternoon. The birds, however, did not seem to appreciate this, and more than made up with the interest they took in the kitten. Her gambols in the grass quickly attracted the attention of four or five Marico Flycatchers, which, chattering and scolding loudly, flew into the bushes above her, at times hopping on to low branches within three feet of the ground, and taking very little notice of the human onlookers. Their noise soon attracted a variety of Bishop Birds [Southern Red Bishop] from the nearby reeds, and these joined in, although more timidly. Next to come were a couple of Yellow-eyes [Yellow-fronted Canary], followed by a Long-billed Crombec, a Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, a Black-cheeked [Black-faced Waxbill] and a Violet-eared Waxbill. The kitten, however, took absolutely no notice of them, and after keeping it up for twenty minutes or so, the birds gave it up as a bad job.

R.M. and J. Harwin.

LOCAL NEWS

Mashonaland Branch: A most enjoyable meeting took place recently at the residence of Dr. N.A. Campbell, in the form of a competition in identifying a number of bird skins which had been selected and forwarded by our President, Mr. R.H.N. Smithers. The competition was won by Hamish Peters.

After refreshments, Mr. Rankine gave us some interesting and informative comments on a number of the birds represented. By reason of the informal nature of the gathering, the members, some of whom had come from as far afield as Marandellas, had ample opportunity to exchange views.

Similar, and equally successful, bird “quizzes” have also been arranged in Bulawayo and Selukwe.

Matabeleland Branch: We have been very sorry to lose Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan who have left to settle in Scotland. This branch owes much to the efforts of Mrs. Buchanan as branch Secretary during the past few years. A farewell party in their honour was held at the National Museum, when they were presented with a travelling rug, a suitcase, and a very special presentation of a mounted Scaly Finch.

NATIONAL MUSEUM

Mr. C.W. Benson spent three weeks, working through the Northern Rhodesian material from the 1st to the 21st May, and spoke to the Matabeleland branch on his experiences in Northern Rhodesia [Zambia]. Another distinguished visitor was Dr. J.P. Chapin on his way to the SAOS congress. Unfortunately, Dr. Chapin only spent one night in Bulawayo, which clashed with the visit of Sir Edmund Hillary, so a talk was impossible.

The Mashonaland Branch of the Schools Exploration Society have submitted an interesting collection of 26 bird skins from the Mount Darwin area.

Sanyati diary

The old Wire-tailed Swallow’s nest was cleaned out and relined during the latter part of January. The first egg was laid on the 4th February, and the eggs hatched on the 22nd and 23rd. By the 10th March the chicks were very well feathered and active, but on the 11th I heard an awful commotion, saw the parents were very agitated, and on investigation found a snake in the nest. We killed it but found it had swallowed two of the chicks.

An African Paradise-flycatcher was building a nest at the Copper Queen Mine on the 6th March. One egg was laid on the 12th, but two days later the nest was deserted. The date seems rather late for them to be building.

White Storks passed over flying northward throughout March. 20 arrived on the 24th April, and one individual on the 13th May.

14 Trumpeter Hornbills were flying round the house on the 27th May, scaring the wits out of the fowls before they finally went down to the river.

R. Collins

NOTES AND NOTICES

On the 28th April, I found a Blue Waxbill laying in the nest of a Southern Masked-weaver. She had apparently laid three eggs, but the nest also contained two other much larger eggs (18 x 13¾ mm against 15½ x 11 mm.) Could the two larger eggs have been those of the Cut-throat Finch? All five eggs were quite fresh.

R. Theisen

I have known Red-winged Starlings (the same pair) nesting in a box on the verandah of Mr. P. Fletcher’s farm, Zimbele, Bembesi, for at least the last 15 years. They bring out about 3 or 4 clutches every year and never leave the farm.

F.W. Porter

May 26 – For the last three mornings a flock of Violet-backed Starlings have been on the top of a large acacia tree together with a flock of *L. c. elizabeth* [Miombo Blue-eared Starling]. These are identified by the young having rufous underparts and by the call.

About the middle of May there were three birds on our drive – heavily streaked on the breast; white collar, and black marks near the eye. At first I couldn’t identify them from *Roberts*, but I am sure they must have been Dusky Larks.

G. Attwell

Mr. D.C.H. Plowes has recently made two noteworthy discoveries. 70 miles south of Gwanda he found the first large colony of Wattled Starlings in Southern Rhodesia – about 1000 nests in an area of ½ a square mile. He has also found a breeding colony of Whiskered Terns in the Tjolutjo district – another first breeding record. Specimens from both these colonies have been secured for the National Museum.

Mrs. P. Hiller reports a flock of about 20 Grey Crowned Cranes which have been resident on a farm 7 miles from Salisbury for some years. This must be one of the largest known flocks in this area where the Wattled Crane is more usual. Incidentally, why do these two species have such different breeding seasons? The Crowned in January and the Wattled in June.

The Hon. Treasurer, Mr. A.B. Fletcher, wishes to call members attention to a change in the number of his P.O. Box from 124 to 243, Gatooma

Pan-African Ornithological Congress

The South African Ornithological Society is organising a Pan-African Ornithological Congress at the Victoria Falls in July, 1957. The duration will be a week, excluding various excursions which will follow. Papers are invited under the following headings:

Systematics and Anatomy Conservation Breeding and general behaviour Migration
Ecology and Distribution.

Further information will be sent out from time to time. Anyone interested in receiving it promptly should send his or her name now to the Hon. Secretary, SAOS, P.O. Box 1616, Cape Town. Meanwhile Mr. and Mrs. J.P. Mackie Niven, who represented the SAOS at the last International Congress, and will be visiting Europe this year, are doing their best to publicise the Congress abroad.

NEST RECORD CARD SCHEME

A recent check-up shows that the collection now includes 4480 records on 2650 cards. It is being further expanded by putting *all* known and published Rhodesian breeding records on to cards. But more information is still required, particularly of the commoner species, as these cards will be the main source of breeding data for the forthcoming Southern Rhodesian Checklist.

A start is being made on duplicating the cards, and so make the information more readily accessible to members. So far 550 have been done.

H. Miles.

R.I.P.

Captain C.D. Priest

Captain Priest passed away at Marandellas on the 27th June. As everyone knows, he was the author of *The Birds of Southern Rhodesia* and *Eggs of Birds breeding in Southern Africa*. His passing marks the end on an era of brilliant individualists in Rhodesia to be succeeded by that of co-operative effort.

Mr. Peter Ellenberger

We regret to announce the death, in a motor accident, of Mr. Peter Ellenberger, a Life Member. He was the author of several papers which have appeared in the *Ostrich*, although still in his 20's.