



# Rhodesian Ornithological Society Bulletin No. 17

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## ***FISH-EAGLE ATTACKING A RED-BILLED TEAL***

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On June 19<sup>th</sup>, while on my usual weekly visit to a large dam about 20 miles east of Gatooma, I witnessed an incident which seems to run contrary to what one reads in books. All authorities which I have seen state that the African Fish-eagle feeds exclusively on fish, yet I watched one for 40 minutes, making repeated efforts to catch a Red-billed Teal.

I was sitting quietly in the bush beside the dam. Near the opposite shore, about 150 yards from me, a flock of about 50 Knob-bill's [Comb Duck], accompanied by a few teal, were resting on the surface of the water. Then a fish-eagle flew over them, and struck down into the area occupied by the ducks. Unfortunately I could not see its point of strike, as it was behind a large tree — one of many which stands dead in the dam. At the time I presumed it to be at a fish swimming in the same area, but subsequent events indicate that I was mistaken.

Both eagle and ducks flew away, but the eagle returned, and perching in the above-mentioned tree, was clearly keeping watch for something beneath. I then saw the teal surface under the lower branches, which are fairly dense. The eagle at once attacked, but the teal was easily able to escape by diving and coming up beneath the branches where the eagle could not follow. This went on for about 20 minutes, the eagle trying all sorts of ruses to conceal itself and persuade the teal to surface in a position where it would be vulnerable. Sometimes it hopped down from branch to branch until it was close to the surface of the water and would wait there; at other times it sat on nearby trees, from which it could watch the whole area. At still other times it would fly slowly upwind over the teal's hiding place, and on two occasions stooped, but without success. Finally it became discouraged and flew away.

On one occasion when the teal surfaced and flapped the water off its wings it appeared to me that it was short of several primaries in the left wing, and was possibly unable to fly. It would be interesting to know whether it was partially disabled as a result of the eagle's first attack, or whether the latter attacked it because it was already unable to fly.

A.B. Fletcher

## ***NOTES ON THE WHITE-BACKED NIGHT-HERON***

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While boating on a very quiet backwater in the Hippo Pools at Hartley on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 1953, a rather unusual looking bird was flushed from a nest. The bird hopped off the nest and walked up the branches to disappear into the bush. Very little was observed of it, except that it was dark-coloured, about twenty inches long, with a large white ring around the eye. The nest contained three white eggs with a suggestion of green in them. One which was taken was fresh and measured 48.5 x 35 mm.

The nest was about three feet above the water level on a laterally forked branch. It was about one foot in diameter, made of various sized sticks and twigs, and without any lining in the slight depression which held the eggs. It was visited several times during the next couple of months, and both birds

were seen, but not clearly enough for certain identification. At the time I thought they might possibly be Green-backed Herons, but later events are against this. On the last occasion the nest was visited it appeared deserted and the one remaining egg was removed.

On Sunday the 10<sup>th</sup> July 1955, the birds were again seen. This time they were a couple of hundred yards downstream from the previous nest site in a small creek in an island in the middle of the river. One of them remained close to the boat, and an exceptionally good view was obtained, leaving no doubt of its identity. The very dark blue-black of the head, with the large eye and white patch round it were clearly seen. The back and side of the neck were a chestnut colour; the chest was flecked rather like a female Squacco Heron, and the legs a greenish-yellow. The final distinguishing point which had not been seen previously was the white band of feathers down the back from which the name White-backed Night-heron is derived.

D. Bowen.

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, on the way from Salisbury to Marandellas, I saw near the Melfort Dam, a bird which I have not yet identified for certain. I watched it for some time through glasses, made a quick sketch, and wrote down some notes. It was a large bird of eagle type, entirely white below, except for the black wing-tips; head entirely white, and mottled brown on back and upper wings. The tail was short and well fanned, the wings very broad and powerful, and the bird as large, I judged, as a Martial Eagle. On August 17<sup>th</sup>, about 5 miles on the other side of Melfort Dam, and still on the main road, I saw the same bird again. This time I saw it on several occasions, hovering in the manner of a kestrel or Black-shouldered Kite – motionless with quivering wings. I was conscious again that it was a very big bird and very white. This seems to preclude the possibility of its being a Sea-Eagle. Possibly it was an Osprey, but the brown breast shown in *Roberts'* illustration was not visible on either occasion.

On May the 19<sup>th</sup>, my husband and I were driving towards the Bonda Mission near Rusape when we saw an unforgettable sight. A Secretarybird, which I had always thought of as markedly terrestrial, was circling very high in the air. We both had binoculars and stopped to watch, fascinated by the easy soaring flight, and were then privileged to see what must have been a mating display. The bird, always at a considerable height, would rush upwards; then close its wings tightly so that the whole body, wings and tail formed a solid straight pillar, head upwards, and still travelling up, until as the momentum came to an end, he fell gracefully over into a diving position; plummeted down for a considerable distance, then opened his wings and "flattened out"; to start the manoeuvre again. It was most exhilarating to watch as he went through this graceful display over and over again with every sign of intense joie de vivre.

I was busy in my house on July the 21<sup>st</sup>, when I heard a bird call which was entirely new to me – very loud and clear. Eventually I went out armed with field glasses and rather expecting to find something of the size of a francolin. The bird was, however, Sowerby's Barbet [Whyte's Barbet]. It may, of course, be quite common in this district (Marandellas) but I have never seen it before. I watched it for some time and saw it swallow a large fig. I hoped it would stay to nest, but have not seen or heard of it since.

Margaret L. Snell.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> April, a nightjar killed in the road was brought to us. It was the European Nightjar, rather late in getting away. Our Wire-tailed Swallows have not left at all this winter, and are always busy hawking insects round the dam. On the 18<sup>th</sup> July they were already lining their nest — no time to be lost!

A Klaas's Cuckoo visited us on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June. I watched him calling until the owner of the territory, a Boubou Shrike [Tropical Boubou], chased him away. I heard the cuckoo call further away for about a month, but have not seen him again.

B. Finlayson (Goromonzi)

My Red-headed Weavers near the house have started building very early this year, and including some from last season, I have seen 19 nesting sites. I am watching one as I write; he has just woven a leaf rib into a nest, and is admiring his work from nearby. His plumage is not yet complete, as his head is orange, not a brilliant pillar-box red. Red-headed weavers seem to be my speciality. I don't know if this has anything to do with the fact that my husband has red-heads in his family, and a webster is a weaver in early English.

L.C. Webster (Miami)

### CHECK LIST OF THE BIRDS OF SOUTHERN RHODESIA

This check list is nearing completion, and in order to fill in certain gaps, Messrs' Smithers, Coffin-Gray and Rankine recently visited the Zambezi valley some 60 miles east of Chirundu to collect material, and a further expedition, consisting of Messrs' Smithers and Rankine, and Dr. G. Bond left on the 5<sup>th</sup> October for the low, forested area south of Mount Selinda. The first expedition yielded, among other interesting items, two "first records" for Southern Rhodesia; Livingstone's Flycatcher *Erythrocerus livingstonei* and the Mottled Spinetail *Chaetura ussheri*.

The attention of collectors is drawn to the two following lists of doubtful species. Specimens of these are required before they can be included in the list, and the National Museum is very anxious to have them. Any specimens you may have should be sent either to the National Museum, P.O. Box 240 Bulawayo, the Queen Victoria Museum, P.O. Box 8006 Causeway, or to Captain R.H.R. Stevenson, P.O. Box 124 Selukwe.

The following species will appear in the Check List in smaller type than the remainder, as, although there is reasonable ground for assuming that they do occur, no material is available for examination, either in the National Museum, Queen Victoria Museum, Transvaal Museum, Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg, British Museum, American Museum of Natural History, or the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia.

<i>Melanophoyx vinaceigularis</i>	Red-necked Heron [Rufous-bellied Heron]
<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	Glossy Ibis
<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	Egyptian Vulture
<i>Hieraaetus dubius</i>	Ayres's Hawk-eagle
<i>Gypaetus barbatus meridionalis</i>	(African) Lammergeier
<i>Buteo oreophilus</i>	Forest Buzzard
<i>Falco cuvieri</i>	African Hobby
<i>Coturnix coturnix africana</i>	African Quail [Common Quail]
<i>Excalfactoria adansoni</i>	Blue Quail
<i>Tetrapteryx paradisea</i>	Stanley Crane [Blue Crane]
<i>Squatarola squatarola</i>	Grey Plover
<i>Hemiparra crassirostris leucoptera</i>	White-winged Plover [Long-toed Lapwing]
<i>Tringa totanus totanus</i>	Common Redshank
<i>Arenaria interpres interpres</i>	Ruddy Turnstone
<i>Numenius arquata arquata</i>	Eurasian Curlew
<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian Tern
<i>Tauraco schalowi marungensis</i>	Schalow's Turaco
<i>Lophoceros bradfieldi williaminae</i>	Bradfield's Hornbill
<i>Merops superciliosus superciliosus</i>	Madagascar Bee-eater

<i>Buccanodon leucotis leucotis</i>	White-eared Barbet
<i>Turdoides leucopygia hartlaubi</i>	Hartlaub's Babbler
<i>Bradypterus babaecala msiri</i>	Katanga Swamp Warbler [Little Rush-warbler]
<i>Psalidoprocne holomelas holomelas</i>	Black Rough-wing [Black Saw-wing]
<i>Hypargos margaritata</i>	Pink-throated Twinspot
<i>Estrilda perreini poliogaster</i>	Grey Waxbill

The authors propose to reject the following species unless further evidence is forthcoming which warrants their inclusion. Your co-operation in providing this evidence would be greatly appreciated, and if sufficiently convincing, they will be reinstated. All these species have been referred to in the literature as occurring within Southern Rhodesian limits.

<i>Podiceps caspicus gurneyi</i>	Black-necked Grebe
<i>Podiceps cristatus infuscatus</i>	Great Crested Grebe
<i>Botaurus stellaris capensis</i>	Cape Bittern [Eurasian Bittern]
<i>Chelictinia riocourti</i>	African Swallow-tailed Kite
<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i>	Palm-nut Vulture
<i>Aquila clanga</i>	Greater Spotted Eagle
<i>Circaetus fasciolatus</i>	Banded Harrier-Eagle [Southern Banded Snake-eagle]
<i>Circaetus cinerascens</i>	Larger Banded Harrier-Eagle [Western Banded Snake-eagle]
<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	European Marsh-harrier [Western Marsh-harrier]
<i>Buteo rufofuscus rufofuscus</i>	Jackal Buzzard
<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	European Shoveler [Northern Shoveler]
<i>Francolinus garipeensis</i>	Orange River Francolin
<i>Sarothrura lineatus</i>	Striped Pigmy Rail [Striped Flufftail]
<i>Ptilopachus petrosus</i>	Stone Partridge
<i>Neotis ludwigii</i>	Ludwig's Bustard
<i>Neotis denhami stanleyi</i>	Stanley's Bustard [Denham's Bustard]
<i>Afrotis afra afroides</i>	Black Korhaan [Northern Black Korhaan]
<i>Eupodotis cafra cafra</i>	White-bellied Korhaan
<i>Stephanibyx lugubris</i>	Senegal Plover [Senegal Lapwing]
<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Common Whimbrel
<i>Crocethia alba</i>	Sanderling
<i>Calidris melanotos</i>	American Pectoral Sandpiper
<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Lesser Black-backed Gull
<i>Pterocles namaqua</i>	Namaqua Sandgrouse
<i>Merops boehmi</i>	Bohm's Bee-eater
<i>Jynx ruficollis</i>	Red-breasted Wryneck [Red-throated Wryneck]
<i>Motacilla capensis beirensis</i>	Beira Wagtail [Cape Wagtail]
<i>Andropadus importunus</i>	Sombre Bulbul [Sombre Greenbul]
<i>Sigelus silens</i>	Fiscal Flycatcher
<i>Bradornis infuscata</i>	Chat Bradornis [Chat Flycatcher]
<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	Whinchat
<i>Sheppardia gunningi</i>	Gunning's Robin [East Coast Akalat]
<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	European Barred Warbler
<i>Cisticola subruficapilla</i>	Dancing Cisticola [Grey-backed Cisticola]
<i>Cisticola rufa</i>	Rufous Cisticola
<i>Cinnyris shelleyi</i>	Shelley's Sunbird
<i>Passer melanurus</i>	Mossie [Cape Sparrow]
<i>Ploceus capensis olivaceus</i>	(Eastern) Cape Weaver

### **Branch news**

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SELUKWE. This Branch carries on with the collecting of species occurring in the district, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to find new or hitherto unrecorded species. Among the specimens obtained are a Zambezi Sharp-billed Honeyguide [Brown-backed Honeybird], a female African Hawk-eagle, and an African Tree-Creeper [Spotted Creeper].

A list of the birds found in Selukwe township shows that 52 birds have been recorded as residents. Large flocks of Red-winged Starlings have been roosting in the large gum trees opposite the Standard Bank in the middle of the town.

Our first Yellow-billed Kite was observed on the 12<sup>th</sup> September; they soon became common and eggs have already been taken in the Selukwe Reserve. Another find is the eggs of the Bat Hawk. These though not attractively coloured, have a peculiar gloss, almost like a duck's egg. Most raptorial birds bred very early this season.

SALISBURY. The two important forthcoming events are a film show by

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Mr. D.C.H. Plowes on the 12<sup>th</sup> October, and the Annual General Meeting, which will be held here on the 4<sup>th</sup> November.

BULAWAYO. The two long weekends have seen two most successful camps at Mbazhe Pan, Nkayi. An African Hawk-eagle's nest was found, and on the second visit the outstanding record was that of an African Skimmer. The heron family included four unusual species – Goliath Heron, Great Egret, Rufous [Rufous-bellied Heron] and Squacco Heron.

Local field meetings have been held at the Upper Umgusa Dam, and at White Waters, Matopos. At the latter place a Black Eagle's [Verreaux's Eagle] nest with a well-grown chick was found.

### Nest Record Card Scheme

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Records from all sources now cover a total of 380 species, and 881 cards, representing 37 of the most important or most frequently recorded species have been duplicated and sent to Mrs. Campbell, the national organiser of the SAOS scheme. These 37 include Layard's Bulbul [Dark-capped Bubbul], the Yellow Bishop, Tawny-flanked Prinia and Southern Masked-weaver, all represented by over 50 cards, as well as 15 other species all with over 20 cards each, and 19 cards of the duck family, Anatidae.

R. Theisen obtained a specimen of *Pytilia afra* [Orange-winged Pytilia] from a nest containing 4 eggs; this is our first breeding record for this species.

On March 16<sup>th</sup> this year, Dr. Gilges and Mr. Button saw a White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba* at the Victoria Falls Boiling Pot. The bird is a migrant from Europe, which has been recorded on several occasions from Nyasaland [Malawi], but not previously from the Rhodesias.

PLEASE REMEMBER THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, WHICH WILL BE HELD IN THE NATURAL RESOURCES BOARD ROOM, SALISBURY, ON NOVEMBER THE FOURTH.