

# Rhodesian Ornithological Society Bulletin No. 22

---

April 1957

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

## *Paradise Flycatcher carrying its unfledged young*

---

Mr. A.B. Fletcher writes from Gatooma:

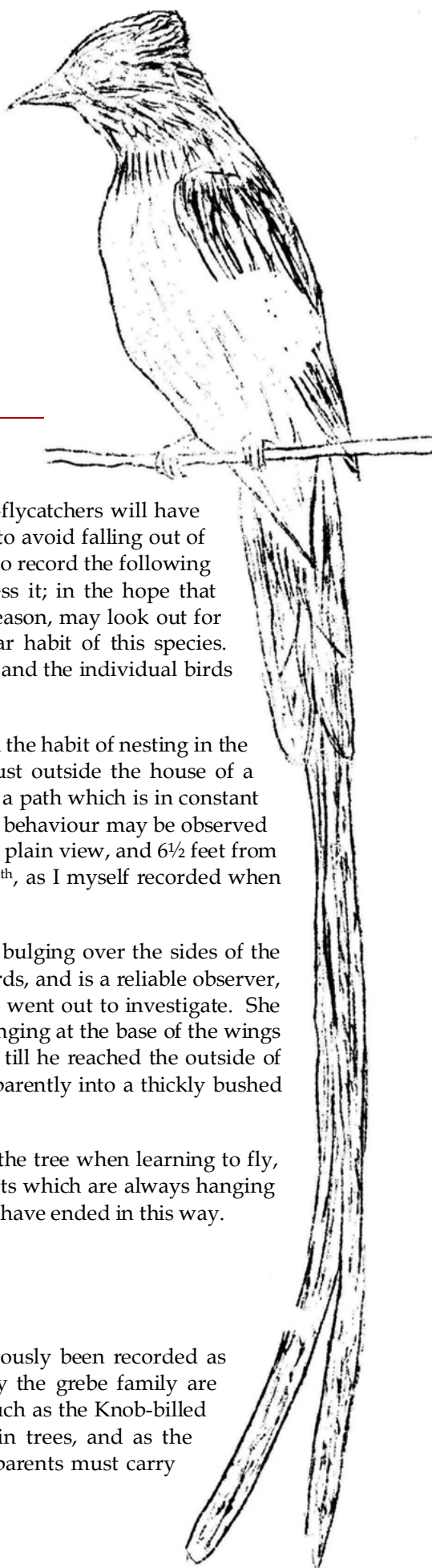
"Many members who have observed the nesting of African Paradise-flycatchers will have wondered how the young, as they near the time of fledging, manage to avoid falling out of the nest, which appears by then too small to support them. I venture to record the following incident, although I did not myself have the good fortune to witness it; in the hope that others who may have a nest of this species under observation next season, may look out for similar occurrences. It is even possible that it may reflect a regular habit of this species. Moreover, not only do I know the observer well, but also the nest site and the individual birds themselves.

For a number of years past, a pair of Paradise Flycatchers have been in the habit of nesting in the lowest branches of a very large Mexican apple tree, which grows just outside the house of a friend of mine, about 3 miles from Gatooma. The tree stands close to a path which is in constant use, and the birds have become quite fearless of humans, so that their behaviour may be observed with great ease. The nest in 1956 was about 10 yards from the path, in plain view, and 6½ feet from the ground. The three eggs were laid on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup>, as I myself recorded when staying there.

One morning when the young were not quite ready to fly, but were bulging over the sides of the nest, my friend's wife, who has always taken a keen interest in the birds, and is a reliable observer, heard a lot of chattering going on near the nest just after sunrise, and went out to investigate. She saw the male flycatcher had the two remaining young on his back, clinging at the base of the wings one on each side. Thus loaded, he scrambled from branch to branch till he reached the outside of the tree, and then took off, flying over the roof of an outbuilding apparently into a thickly bushed area about 50 yards from the house.

It is to be noted that had the young birds fallen out of the nest or of the tree when learning to fly, they would have fallen immediate victims to one of the half-dozen cats which are always hanging about the house. One of the brood had already disappeared, and may have ended in this way.

Editor's Comment. As far as I am aware no African bird has previously been recorded as carrying its young in flight, although some water birds, particularly the grebe family are known to do so when swimming. Some members of the Anatidae, such as the Knob-billed Duck [Comb Duck] and Egyptian Goose, frequently nest in holes in trees, and as the ducklings leave the nest soon after hatching, it is assumed that the parents must carry them down, but the process has never been observed.



A.H. Chisholm, in his book *Bird wonders of Australia*, devotes a chapter to "Carrying the baby in Birdland", and points out that five different methods have been reported in which birds may carry their young; in the beak, in the claws, on the back, between the legs, and under the wings. The species in which it is best known, of course, is the European Woodcock, of which there are now numerous instances known of a parent carrying its young between its legs, but Chisholm mentions instances of carrying the young in several Australian species.

I would be most interested to know if readers have met with, or even heard of, other instances of African birds, not only Paradise Flycatchers, carrying their young.

**A Salisbury member records** seeing a pair of Indian Mynas [Common Myna] in his garden in January. Speculating as to their origin, he wonders whether they have escaped or been deliberately liberated from an aviary, or whether perhaps this represents part of a natural spread from Natal.

Most likely these birds have escaped or been released from captivity. The natural spread of the Indian Myna does not seem at the present to have carried it beyond the boundaries of Natal. It has been established in Johannesburg now for nearly 20 years, but these birds are believed to have been introduced, and no records between there and Salisbury are known at present.

**Mr. R.K. Brooke raises the question** of the Malachite and Natal Kingfishers. He writes:

"Is the Natal Kingfisher (*Ispidina picta*) [African Pygmy-kingfisher] common in this colony? Most people say it is, but in 7 or 8 years' bird watching in various districts, I have only seen it once at Borrowdale near Salisbury.

"The consensus of opinion of the various authors I have consulted is that the species is remarkably similar to the Malachite Kingfisher (*Corythornis cristata*) in appearance, but that the Natal or Pigmy Kingfisher has no white, or occasionally odd white feathers on the cheek, whereas the Malachite Kingfisher has a prominent white patch.

The crowns of the heads are distinctive in the hand or at close range in the field in good conditions. Also the Natal Kingfisher has an orange-buff nape and the Malachite Kingfisher a purplish-blue one. The name of Malachite Crested Kingfisher has undoubtedly confused observers, as it only erects its crest when wounded.

"The Malachite Kingfisher is confined to water, running or standing; but the Natal Kingfisher may be found as frequently by water as in bush country.

I suggest that if observers remember that the white the white cheek patch is diagnostic of the Malachite Kingfisher, a truer picture of the distribution of the two species will be obtained.

Mr. M.P.S. Irwin points out that the most constant plumage difference is in the colour of the nape. But the Natal Kingfisher, while it may be found along rivers, nevertheless does not fish. It may, of course, pick up insects from the water's edge.

**Mr. H.M. Miles sends the following "Items of Interest"** concerning the Nest Record Card Scheme.

"In Mr. C.W. Skead's "Thank-you List" for the Fringillidae study, will appear more than 30 names of contributors from the ROS. This is due to their nest record cards, which have been duplicated and sent south to him.

We are averaging 100 cards plus, a month this year. If this is kept up, we shall have 5000 cards in the collection very soon. No species has yet a hundred cards to its name; we still require the very common species, not only what is thought to be of interest, or those rarer species, and junior members must substantiate their records more than some of them are doing. Good field descriptions of the bird as you see it are wanted for difficult or similar species.

The usual Annual Report will be sent to all contributors in July for the period 1 July 1956 to 30 June 1957. All those who contributed during that period will be mentioned, with the number of cards completed.

More contributors are still wanted, and some members have not yet sent in all their 1956 cards. Please send all records to my new address, Dept. of Labour, P.O. Box 8156, Causeway. Cards are issued free and all records are acknowledged."

**Mr. G.W. Parnell has further news** of the pair of Secretarybirds about which he wrote in *Bulletin* No. 20, which hatched their young in April 1955. He writes: (22 February 1957)

"I have been surprised to find this pair or another building again this week. It would appear that if they are going to lay, then their eggs will be laid about mid-March, as were the last. No nest was found in 1956, either at the corresponding time, or in August or September.

Perhaps that first nest was not such a freak after all. Perhaps they even rear two broods a year at times. Perhaps they are able to brood more or less all the year round. If they lay in this nest, it will be the third time, to my knowledge it has been used; the first, a nest in September containing two newly-hatched young, both of which survived and flew in December; the second, the nest of which I previously wrote; and now it looks like having eggs again.

Incidentally I have heard of another case, also in this district, of both young surviving. They were removed from the nest when they could stand, and soon became very tame. They hung around for quite a while, consuming vast quantities of boys' meat and hens' eggs, which they swallowed whole. I gather that their captor was quite glad when they decided to emigrate!

**Mr. Fitzroy McLean has some interesting records** made in the Que Que Reserve in November, 1956.

"It may be of interest to record the collection of 2 eggs of the Black Cuckoo in the Que Que Reserve, about 20 miles from Gwelo.

Both the Black Cuckoo and the Red-chested Cuckoo were plentiful in the vicinity of my camp on the Que Que River, and I had observed both being harried by Heuglin's Robins [White-browed Robin-chat] and a pair of Boubou Shrikes [Tropical Boubou] a few yards from camp, but could not find any nests of either.

A pair of Sooty Babblers [Boulder Chat] were nesting a few hundred yards away, and one day I came across them twittering away in alarm; on approaching their nest a Black Cuckoo flew out. It only flew a few yards and perched on a tree, the babblers not attempting to drive it away. I shot the bird and then inspected the nest, which contained two Sooty Babbler's eggs and one cuckoo egg, which was about the same size as the babbler's, only rounder and lighter in colour.

Two days later I collected another Black Cuckoo's egg in the nest of a Heuglin's Robin. The nest contained two robin's eggs, and a piece of shell adhered to the cuckoo's egg. Evidently one of the robin's eggs had been broken and removed from the nest, although I could find no trace of it in the vicinity. Both cuckoo's eggs measure about 26 x 19.5, and are of a pinkish white ground colour, well covered with pinkish brown spots. I would be interested to know if any other eggs of these cuckoos have been taken in Rhodesia.

A feature of the Que Que Reserve is the complete absence of crows, and consequently the few Great Spotted Cuckoos that arrive here soon depart.

A Sooty Babbler was seen feeding a young Red-chested Cuckoo which had just left the nest. The young cuckoo was being mobbed by Glossy Starlings, bulbuls and other birds, when I arrived on the scene. These birds scattered, leaving the young bird behind with its foster parent, which twittered around excitedly until I withdrew to a safe distance, when it started to feed the young cuckoo with what appeared to be worms or caterpillars.

'Sooty Babbler' appears to me to be a misnomer for these birds. They are not as noisy, by any means, as the other babblers, and their habits are very similar to those of the Mocking Cliff-chat (*Thamnolaea cinnamomeiventris*), and even the eggs are similar in coloration, although somewhat larger.

I have had ample opportunity recently of observing several pairs of these birds, and have found three nests, two with eggs and one with fledglings, and in every way they appear to me to be more like a chat than a babbler.

An interesting find was the nest of the Rufous-flanked Grass-Warbler [Red-faced Cisticola], containing 2 addled eggs and a fledgling about a week old. It may have even been a few days older, as it squeaked protests when I removed the two addled eggs. It is unusual to find eggs left in the nest at that stage."

Note. The babbler family, Timaliidae, has become notorious among bird systematists as a "dumping-ground" for any species whose relationships are in doubt. *Pinarornis* is a case in point. Recent systematic work has shown that the bird is, in fact a chat, and it has consequently been transferred to the Turdidae. This, unfortunately, involves a change of English name, and the name "Sooty Chat" cannot be used, as it applies to *Myrmecocichla nigra*, a bird which occurs in equatorial Africa, including parts of Northern Rhodesia. In the forthcoming Southern Rhodesian CheckList, it has been re-christened the Boulder Chat.

***Have you ever submitted an article for publication*** in the *Ostrich* and had it rejected? It is disheartening perhaps, but not only for you. The Editor and members of the Editorial Committee have produced a list of the most common causes of rejection, which is reproduced here, at their request, in the hope that it will help would-be contributors in future. Roughly in order of importance they are:

- (a). Muddled arrangement of data.
- (b). Absence of any critical examination and assessment of the data.
- (c). Conclusions unsupported or inadequately supported by the evidence, as presented.
- (d). Failure to correlate results with other published work,
- (e). anthropomorphism.
- (f). Irrelevant and repetitious passages.
- (g). Too expensive to be published in the Journal.
- (h). Undue insistence on the first person.

***Major E.L. Haydock has for sale*** several back-numbers of the *Ibis* and the *Auk*, which he is willing to dispose of at 15/6 per volume (4 parts), as follows:

*Ibis* (originally 17/6 per part) 1048 to 1955

*Auk* (as *Ibis*, only American)

1949	– 1952 complete
1953	– 3 parts only at 11/6
1953	– 1956 complete

Anyone interested, please communicate with Major Haydock at Katanga Ornithological Station, P.O. Box 267, Luanshya.

Finally; a new list of members has just been circulated. The Hon. Secretary would be glad if members would confirm that the addresses are correct, and notify her of any changes to be made.

The Hon. Editor hastens to add the perennial plea for material for future numbers of the *Bulletin*.