



Rhodesian Ornithological Society Bulletin No. 11

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

This bulletin is reappearing after rather a long lapse and I take this opportunity of saying 'hello' to fellow members of the Rhodesian Ornithological Society. A newcomer to Rhodesia, I have as yet, only been able to meet Bulawayo members, but hope to become better known to everyone else through these pages.

But the purpose of this bulletin is not for you to get to know me; it is for you to get to know one another and it need the support of every member if it is to succeed. Our membership is not large, and we are scattered throughout the Federation, some of us are fortunate enough to be close to the branch headquarters at Salisbury, Bulawayo and Selukwe, but for those not so fortunate, this bulletin will, I hope, help you to keep in touch.

"What can I do?" you will ask. Well, we all enjoy telling our friends of our birdwatching experiences. If they are worth talking about, they are worth writing about. Write to me, Dr. R.M. Harwin, c/o City Health Dept., P.O. Box 1946, Bulawayo, and I will be glad to have your notes.

MATABELELAND SUB-BRANCH

Only one field outing has so far been held this year, to Mr. Nason's farm on the northern edge of the Matopos. Among the birds seen were a Wahlberg's Eagle, numbers of Plum-coloured Starlings [Violet-backed Starling] and several European migrants – Steppe Buzzard, Tree Pipit, Red-backed Shrike, Spotted Flycatcher and Willow Warbler.

A series of evening meetings was held during March and April, the first three being lectures by Professor John Emlen of the University of Wisconsin. In his first lecture he spoke of bird study in general, with particular reference to migration and the marking of migrant birds, and the local problems of trapping and marking that faced ornithologists in Southern Africa. He mentioned one species, the Red-billed Quelea, in which these problems had been successfully dealt with, with the result that over 3000 had been ringed, and some interesting recoveries made. On the other hand, we knew almost nothing about the Palaearctic migrants.

Professor Emlen's second talk was entitled "Observation and Recording of Bird Behaviour". It turned out to be an interesting account of observations made by him and other ornithologists at a colony of Ring-billed and Herring Gulls on Lake Michigan. He told how they had seen many differences in the behaviour of the Ring-billed, as compared with the Herring Gull, which had not previously been recorded. His third lecture was devoted to the experimental study of bird behaviour, and in spite of the more technical nature, the interest of the audience never flagged. They were highly amused to hear of a homing pigeon being rotated on a gramophone turntable during transport from one place to another in homing experiments.

Mr. Smithers showed films of the National museum's recent expedition to the Makgadikgadi Salt Pan. Although only about 200 miles from Bulawayo, many desert species of mammals and birds, such as the Springbok and Orange River Francolin, which do not occur in the Rhodesias, are found

there. The listeners must have felt envious when they heard his description of the hundreds of thousands of flamingos and pelicans.

Finally a film, the "Lake District through the Seasons" was shown by a visitor from England, Mr. Cowen. This was of general nature interest and included an appealing shot of young field mice in their nest.

SELUKWE SUB-BRANCH

We have had three meetings since the issue of the last bulletin. Some members have been active in collecting data and we have now collected over 550 skins for the National Museum since the branch was formed here. The most interesting are several immature Great Spotted Cuckoos and three specimens of the Cuckoo Finch, two in immature plumage. These latter have been observed by C. Fisher, who allowed some to breed out and eventually fly off, breeding in Zitting *Cisticola Cisticola juncidis terrestris* nests in the Selukwe reserve. This is further proof that the clutch of eggs in the National Museum reported as being of this species cannot be authentic. The young birds are much more orange than yellow. The sharpness of their claws is a noteworthy observation.

Vultures are again regular visitors to the carcasses set out for them in the Selukwe reserve, but the White-bellied Crows [Pied Crow] are the first arrivals at the feast and have lately been observed attacking live donkeys. It was reported that one had pecked out a donkey's eyes, but I rather think that the donkey in question had probably been already blinded by one of our natives who often punish the poor brutes in this way for eating their crops.

Ospreys have been seen in the reserve, fishing in one of the dams there, and a pair has definitely taken up residence, and fish regularly in the Mtshandig Dam. A pair of Common Whimbrel was seen and heard on the shores of this dam last month. Only a sight record could be made, as no shooting is allowed there, and the birds are almost unbelievably tame. There are not as many Egyptian Geese as formerly and motor boats may be the cause.

Our collection of local warblers has been very much augmented, and well authenticated clutches of warblers' eggs have been taken. They vary so much that it is almost impossible to identify them without the sight of the birds themselves or their nests.

Guineafowl School sub-branch has not been so active lately. Their keenest members have left the school, with the exception of Hamish Peters, who does a lot of birdwatching and collecting.

The new record sheets introduced by Mr. Rankine will fill a long felt want, although we are not quite in agreement with the headings, and more room should be left for observations. These are, however, minor details and we hope Mr. Rankine will undertake the collecting of these records for the Society.

R.H.R. Stevenson.

VULTURES AT BANKET

One Friday recently I had a calf killed by a leopard and poisoned the kill. My boys did not find the leopard until it was too far gone to skin. I went out on the Wednesday morning and put up a couple of dozen vultures from the carcass and surrounding trees. These birds were of a uniform dark brown with a whitish head, no white on the back, and rather small – presumably the Hooded Vulture.

The amazing thing is that I have never seen vultures around here before, and I have been in this area 21 years and on this farm for 19. My gun boy and I must account for a score or so baboons a year and the carcasses are usually left in situ and neither of us have ever seen vultures round them.

G.W. Parnell.

Notes from Umvuma

The country here is varied and the vegetation largely transitional with no real climax trees. This is well illustrated in that we get all three *Tockus* hornbills here — roughly in the following habitats, but all overlapping widely:

Tockus nasutus (African Grey Hornbill) — *Brachystegia* woodland

Tockus erythrorhynchus (Red-billed Hornbill) — Mopane

Tockus flavirostris (Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill) — Thorn bush; Acacia.

What are the latest dates for the Amethyst Starling [Violet-backed Starling] *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster verreauxi*? I am very surprised to find it still here at Umvuma, where it is presently (6.5.54) common in flocks. Previously my latest date was the 18th March at Sinoia [Chinhoyi]; and previous to that the 17th of the same month at Makwiro. In consequence I am very surprised to find it here so late. Quite possibly some spend the winter in this part of Rhodesia.

M.P.S. Irwin

SAOS NEST RECORD CARDS

Dr. Winterbottom has sent in 54 cards dating from the time he lived in Northern Rhodesia. These bring the total to over 1400. In several cases sufficient cards have been received to determine the breeding, fledging and incubation periods and average clutch size. The results obtained from three members of the weaver family are as follows: (N.B. the method of recording is based on C.W. Benson in his *Check List of the Birds of Nyasaland*. Roman numerals refer to months, and the figures below them denote the number of clutches laid in the particular month. This method has also been used in determining the size of the clutch).

Southern Masked-weaver. 16 cards (including one colonial card), 43 clutches, September to February.

ix	x	xi	xii	i	ii	c/4	c/3	c/2	c/1
8	16	9	—	4	6	1	23	17	2

The one colonial card was by Turnbull Kemp. The contents of 27 nests in the colony were counted.

Southern Red Bishop. 16 cards, 67 clutches, December to March.

xii	i	ii	iii	c/4	c/3	c/2
4	43	7	13	4	48	25

R.K. Brooke had 19 nests on his card. There were only three with 4 eggs. All other nests had three.

Yellow Bishop. 16 cards, 23 clutches, December to April.

xii	i	ii	iii	iv	c/3	c/2	c/1
1	11	8	2	1	13	18	2

P. Linton of Beatrice did a useful card, working out the fledging period.

H.M. Miles

The Annual General Meeting of the SAOS will be held at Port Elizabeth on the 28th June. The agenda and the programme of the Ornithological Congress will be sent out later. Watch out also for details of the ROS AGM which will probably be held at Selukwe.

For the benefit of those who have not yet paid their subs. for 1954, who include, unfortunately, several Northern Rhodesian members, the Hon. Treasurer is now Mr. A.B. Fletcher, P.O. Box 124, Gatooma, who is always glad to receive contributions.