



February 1956

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

*Fish-eagles and Waterfowl*

---

Following the note by A.B. Fletcher in *Bulletin* No. 17 about an African Fish-eagle attacking a Red-billed Teal, two members have sent in accounts of fish-eagles attacking other birds.

Major Trollope writes from Katina Mulilo:

If the eagle mentioned is in fact the Cape Sea Eagle (*Cuncuma vocifer*) [African Fish-eagle] and not the Vulturine Fish Eagle (*Gypohierax angolensis*), then the assumption that it feeds exclusively on fish is incorrect. I have on several occasions watched it devouring waterfowl. On one occasion I wounded a Knob-billed Duck [Comb Duck] at the Rua Cana Falls on the Kunene River in South West Africa [Namibia] and it settled on the river. Almost immediately a Cape Sea Eagle stooped at, retrieved and carried off the wounded bird, which I watched it rend and eat.

Mr. R.A. Jubb writes:

In November 1947, the Mazowe Dam reached a very low level, and on the day I visited it, several hundred Abdim's Storks were on the mud banks, hunched up and looking really miserable. Simultaneously with a rushing sound overhead the entire flock alerted and took to wing; I was amazed to see a Fish-eagle, wings curled back, come hurtling out of the sun straight at the storks. One stork, late in getting airborne, was singled out, and the ensuing battle was so exciting that my wife told me to "stop shouting — the stork could not hear me anyway". The evasive action taken by the Abdim's had to be seen to be believed, and it got away. The Fish-eagle then soared high and gave its characteristic call. One was left with the suspicion that this was all done in fun, but the eagle may have been driving intruders from its fishing area.

In June 1950 a pair of Fish-eagles had a nest, with young, in a tree on an island just above the Chirundu Bridge, and one parent bird was seen to stoop and collect a young fowl feeding near some huts. I asked the natives about this and they said the Fish-eagle did this only when a youngster was being fed in the nest.

On the above occasions the stoop was typical of a falcon; head forward and wings folded. When fishing, the Fish-eagle approaches its prey from behind, from which quarter the field of vision of a fish is very poor, and glides down, talons outstretched and forward; the wings used as an air brake, being open and thrown well back. The Fish-eagle does not intentionally become submerged, but grabs its prey from just below the surface of the water. The Osprey, on the other hand, plunges beneath the water.

-2-

Mrs. M.L. Snell sends some interesting observations from Marandellas and Inyanga. She writes:

Among a number of interesting experiences which have come my way recently was the sight of a Cardinal Woodpecker, which had been pecking at the bark of a msasa tree, changing its tactics, and "hawking" insects in the air from a perch on the same tree.

In May 1955, I came upon three Wattled Cranes stalking majestically about a piece of high open land at Inyanga. They seemed to be all of the same size, but I assumed them to be father, mother and offspring. I was, however, considerably surprised to find the same trio in the same place in the first week of January 1956! When is the grown-up son or daughter going to leave home and when, incidentally, do they breed?

Also at Inyanga, I was told of the existence of a Blue Swallow's nest. While looking for it, I found a second as well. Both were in holes in the ground, resulting from subsidence from underground streams, and at the time (Dec. 21<sup>st</sup>) neither contained eggs. Two eggs were laid in each nest, in one between Dec. 21<sup>st</sup> and Jan 2<sup>nd</sup>; in the other between Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. One egg hatched in the first nest on Jan 14<sup>th</sup>, and when visited again on the 4<sup>th</sup> Feb. there were two lusty young swallows. The following morning they were being taught to fly. The young birds were distinguishable by their wide gaping mouths, shorter tails, and being "sooty" black with a few flecks of white or paler colour amongst the feathers on their backs, instead of a real iridescent blue-black like their parents.

The other nest still had two eggs and appeared to have been deserted. I have previously seen these birds only at Otto's Bluff, Natal. They are nowhere common, but there are a number nesting at Inyanga at present. I saw other pairs, but was unable to find their nests.

In my own garden at Marandellas, I have seen two apparently new arrivals. One is the Spotted Creeper, which I watched for twenty minutes, as it methodically searched tree after tree from the bottom upwards, covering every major branch. The other is the African Cuckoo, which also seemed extremely tame and actually followed me when I became tired of watching it and walked away! I saw it swallow a very large and very hairy caterpillar.

The (South) African Golden Orioles have raised such a large brood this year that there are sometimes three or four of them in one msasa tree, so close to the house that its branches almost touch the walls.

A migrant visitor is the Pallid Harrier. I think the male is one of the most beautiful birds I know, and I never tire of watching him hunting. The female is so unlike him that in spite of observing them one day carrying out almost a "joint operation" I should not readily have identified her but for the excellent description in Winterbottom's *More Birds of the Bush*.

Also from Marandellas, Mr. Neuby-Varty sends some remarks on the occurrence of birds in Southern Rhodesia, and a plea for information on parasitic birds. He says:

There are three birds I am positive occur in Southern Rhodesia; two in the northern part of the Banket area, and the third all over Southern Rhodesia. The first is a type of flycatcher very similar to the Chat Flycatcher (*Roberts 663*), which lives on the borders of open vleis and builds its nest in the overhanging branches of the wild Bauhinia. It is NOT *Bradornis pallidus murinus*, but twice its size. Second is the Three-streaked Bunting [Cabani's Bunting] *Emberiza orientalis* (No. 1468 Praed and Grant), and last is *Caprimulgus natalensis*, Natal Nightjar [Swamp Nightjar]. I would be very grateful if members would look out for these birds, and I am sure Mr. Smithers would be very pleased to get specimens of them all.

I have had a letter from Dr. Friedmann and he wants all the information he can get on the Parasitic Widow Birds (Subfamily Viduidae), especially paradise-whydahs, Cuckoo Finch, of which he wants mummified specimens, Black, Purple and Steel-blue Widowfinches, especially if the last three can be separated. They can either send the information to me here (Torre, P.O. Marandellas) or direct to him as follows:

Dr. Herbert Friedmann,  
Curator, Division of Birds,  
U.S. National Museum,  
Washington 25. D.C.  
U.S.A.

He also requires live honeyguides, *Indicator major* (young of *I. indicator*) *I. minor* and *I. variegatus*. I will let anyone interested know how to send them alive.

Incidentally, Dr. Friedmann's book on Honeyguides has recently been published. The other important publication in recent months, involving African birds, is of course Series I Volume 2 of *Birds of Eastern and North – Eastern Africa* by Mackworth-Praed and Grant. Members will be even more interested to hear that work on Series II of the handbook, *Birds of the Southern Third of Africa* is well advanced. In addition to the area covered by *Roberts*, this will include Angola and Northern Rhodesia and thus the whole of the Federation except for a small part of Nyasaland east of the Shire River (included in Series I).

### **MINUTES OF THE FIFTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE RHODESIAN ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY HELD IN THE NATURAL RESOURCES BOARD ROOM, SALISBURY, ON FRIDAY 4<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 1955, AT 5 P.M.**

PRESENT: Mr. R.H.N. Smithers (President), Miss M. Paterson (Hon. Secretary), Dr. M.L. Westwater, Mr. B.V. Neuby-Varty, Major P. Freeland, Mr. A.A.F.G. Farmar, Mr. C.S. Mitchell, Miss C. Birley, Mrs. P. Hiller, Mr. F.D. Matthyser, Mr. P. Linton, Mr. W.T. Miller, Mr. C.P. Forder, Mr. R.A. Jubb, Mr. M.P. Stuart Irwin, Mr. R.W. Rankine, Dr. W. Gilges, Dr. R.M. Harwin, Mrs. L. Gilges, Mrs. J. Harwin, Mr. H. Miles, A. Hyslop (Jnr.), D.A. Byrom (Jnr.), J.R. Peters (Jnr.), D. Beer (Jnr. Guest).

APOLOGIES: Dr. E.H. Ashton, Mr. A.B. Fletcher, Capt. R.H.R. Stevenson, Major E.L. Haydock.

1). MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING.

The minutes of the previous annual general meeting were read and confirmed.

2). MATTERS ARISING OUT OF THE PREVIOUS MINUTES.

(a). The amendment to Section 7 of the Constitution was confirmed.

(b). The statement that no letter of thanks had been received from the SAOS for the £50 sent to them for publication was found to be incorrect, as Mr. Fletcher had received a letter from Mr. Rowan conveying the Council's thanks.

3). PRESIDENT'S REPORT.

Mr. Smithers read that our membership was now 158 ordinary, 25 junior and 4 institutional members, and was one of the few, if not the only, societies that flourishes in Southern Rhodesia. He stressed that there is no room for complacency, and that the Society will only flourish if we can give our members rallying points in the form of lectures, outings and organised programmes to keep them interested and make them feel that they belong to a useful and active Society.

The *Bulletin* was now in its 17<sup>th</sup> issue, is a useful medium of reminding members of the activity of the branches. It was hoped that the *Bulletin* would become even more regular in the future.

Attention was drawn to the tremendous work of the Organiser of the SAOS Ringing Scheme, Dr. E.H. Ashton, and to the fact that the ROS is so far behind in this respect. Ways and means should be devised to develop the scheme here under Dr. Ashton's direction.

Mr. Smithers congratulated Dr. Miles on his work on the Nest Record Cards, which are now providing very useful information for the new Check List, which is nearing completion.

A special debt of gratitude was due to Mr. A.B. Fletcher, who had put the Treasury on a sound footing for future years.

4). HON. TREASURER'S REPORT

This report was read by the Secretary, owing to Mr. Fletcher's absence.

The period for which accounts were presented was from 21<sup>st</sup> Dec., 1954 to 15<sup>th</sup> Oct 1955.

The financial affairs of the Society had proceeded smoothly. The Revenue and Expenditure account showed that we started the period with a balance of £64.6.6., and closed it with £51.9.0. in hand. £4.7.6. was due to the ROS by the SAOS for subscriptions that had been paid direct to them. £50 was donated to the SAOS towards the cost of publications. 41 members were in arrears with subscriptions, some of them for two years.

It was proposed by Mr. Mitchell and seconded by Mr. Neuby-Varty that Mr. Fletcher's report be accepted, and Mr. Fletcher be thanked for his work.

The Balance Sheet was passed round and approved.

5). ELECTION OF OFFICERS.

The following Committee was elected to serve for the coming year:

|                      |  | <u>Proposed</u> | <u>Seconded</u> |
|----------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| President            | Mr. Mitchell   | Mr. Irwin       | Mr. Neuby-Varty |
| Vice-President       | Dr. Harwin   | Dr. Gilges      | Dr. Westwater   |
| Hon. Secretary       | Miss M. Paterson   | Mr. Mitchell    | Mr. Rankine     |
| Hon. Asst. Secretary | It was agreed not to appoint an Assistant Hon. Secretary |                 |                 |
| Hon. Treasurer       | Mr. Fletcher   | Mr. Smithers    | Mr. Rankine     |
| Central Committee    | Dr. Smithers   | Mr. Neuby-Varty | Mr. Rankine     |
|                      | Mr. Stuart Irwin   | Dr. Westwater   | Dr. Harwin      |
|                      | Dr. Ashton   | Mr. Smithers    | Dr. Westwater   |
|                      | Dr. Gilges   | Dr. Harwin      | Mr. Miles       |
|                      | Mr. Rankine  | Mr. Irwin       | Mr. Neuby-Varty |
|                      | Mr. Plowes   | Major Freeland  | Mr. Linton      |

6). REPORTS FROM BRANCHES AND THE EDITOR OF THE BULLETIN

Matabeleland. Dr. Westwater reported that 10 field meetings had been held, one of which was spent camping, the average attendance being between 10 and 15. Nine evening meetings had been held, six of which were advertised to the public and were embarrassingly popular, the audience frequently exceeding the seating accommodation. These public meetings make a small profit and frequently provide new members. 5 local committee meetings had been held during the year. Three important persons had been entertained, namely, Mr. C.W. Benson and Dr. and Mrs. Chapin. Seventeen new members joined the branch during the year.

Mashonaland. Mr. Miles reported that there had been a number of new members in the Mashonaland branch. He referred to the death of Captain Priest and stated that Mr. Rankine and Mr. Neuby-Varty had attended his funeral on behalf of the Society. Mr. Miles said he had decided to resign as secretary of the local branch on account of health reasons, and at a meeting of the Mashonaland branch, Mr. R.K. Brooke had been appointed his successor.

Mr. Mitchell reported with regret the resignation of Mr. Miles and hoped it would not in any way affect the Nest Record Cards. Mr. Miles informed the meeting that he would continue to maintain these records for the Society, and asked for the support of members.

Selukwe. Captain Stevenson reported that only two meetings were held in Selukwe during the year. One had been a quiz, and the other a film show by Mr. Smithers of his Kalahari expedition. Two outings were held, one of which was attended by the Bulawayo branch as well. 412 bird skins had been collected for the Museum since the last Annual General Meeting, and a lot of new species added to the list for the Midlands.

Editor of the Bulletin. Dr. Harwin reported that three numbers of the *Bulletin* had been produced during the past year, and it was hoped to produce another fairly soon. He thanked all those who had contributed, and pointed out that there was no need for members to be apologetic about their contributions. He stressed that the *Bulletin* was not a scientific journal, but was meant for people to get to know other members of the society, and what was happening in other parts of the Federation.

The meeting stood in silence for a few moments in memory of Peter Ellenberger and Captain Priest.

7). REPORT ON NEST RECORD CARDS

Mr. Miles said that many more could contribute to the Nest Record Cards, and he was not getting enough of the common species like the bulbuls, which were badly needed. He congratulated the Plumtree, Guinea Fowl and Prince Edward schoolboys, who were sending in records of the common species. As this work had been done for 4 years, it was now possible to establish the breeding seasons of our common birds for the first time. All the records were to be included in the Check List in the form of breeding tables. There were approximately 6000 records in all. The cards are housed in the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria, where the central collection is being kept.

8). RINGING REPORT

This was read by Mr. Smithers, as Dr. Ashton could not be present. Dr. Ashton said there was a necessity for the ROS to take a more active part in ringing, as the only operative members at the present were D.C.H. Plowes and D.H. Cummings. A number of interesting returns were read out. There was a need for organised ringing within the Society's branches and publicity to ensure that rings were returned to the Organiser.

Mr. Mitchell proposed a vote of thanks to Dr. Ashton, and suggested that each branch form a Ringing Committee.

9). PAN AFRICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS, 1957

No further information had been received about this congress. Mr. Smithers drew attention to the sections into which papers were to be divided: — Systematics and Anatomy, Conservation, Breeding and Behaviour, Migration, Ecology and Distribution.

10). ESSAY COMPETITION

A memo was read from Mr. D.C.H. Plowes suggesting that the ROS organise an essay competition for school children, the subject to be the life history of any one bird, the prizes to be £5, £3, and £2 and the winning essay to be printed in the *Bokmakierie*. Mr. Rankine proposed, and Mr. Forder seconded, that funds be made available for this purpose.

Dr. Gilges suggested that we should include African school children on a parallel basis and this was agreed to. Mr. Miller said he thought the standard was too high for either European or African children, and suggested the secretary write to the Federal Ministry for Education to have this circulated among schools.

Miss Birley proposed and Mr. Farmar seconded, that we set aside the sum of £15 for prizes for both sections. This was carried.

It was decided that the organisation of this competition be left to the Matabeleland branch this year.

11). OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. [no name] proposed, and Mr. Rankine seconded, that we set aside £10 for ringing costs.

It was proposed by Mr. Smithers, and seconded by Mr. Rankine, that Mrs. M. Rowan should remain our representative on the SAOS Council.

The Hon. Secretary was asked to write to the Natural Resources Board and thank them for allowing us to use their boardroom.

Mr. Mitchell proposed a vote of thanks to the retiring President, Vice President and Hon. Secretary.

12). DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING

To be held in October, 1956, the place to be decided by the Selukwe branch.

The meeting closed at 7p.m., and at 8 p.m. there was a film show by Mr. Miller and Mr. Wightman.

Once more the Editor appeals to members for contributions to the *Bulletin*. You would all like to see it appearing more regularly (or so I hope), but it cannot be produced without material. So please don't be backward in coming forward.