

LANIOTURDUS

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and
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while attending to the nest shaded the chicks for long periods by standing in the nest and spreading its wings, no such shade was available when it went "off duty".

By now the chicks started to climb out of the "egg cup" and onto the almost level part of the rim of the nest. During one lunchtime (one chick was ten days old, the other six) both of them clung to the outer rim of the nest and appeared to hang on for dear life, but managed quite easily to crawl up onto safer positions each time it became too hair-raising. The reason might have been primarily to seek shade and secondly growing up and experimenting. Two hours later Patty reported that the small chick had dropped to the ground and was dead. That left us with the first and only hatchling.

The suspected fledging time approached but we had to be away from home. We gratefully accepted Dieter Ludwig's offer to take over watch for a few days. On 3 November 1992, the eighteenth day after the first egg to hatch from a clutch of four and being the only chick to survive it took to flight. This appears to be new information, apparently not previously recorded as far as our knowledge goes.

Until the chick started to fly it was attended to by only two birds, presumed to be its parents, throughout. During the day without exception only one adult was present and during the night only two adults, usually sitting side by side facing the same or opposite directions. One particularly cold night we observed the adults to sleep on top of each other in the nest. We are particularly lucky that we could observe the nest virtually for 24 hours every day because of its position in relation to our house. Not only could we see it from the ground, climb up to it by way of a ladder but we could also look into the nest at any time, day or night, which was only three meters away from our study window and slightly below it. On the second day of the chick taking to flight it left the nest permanently during the day and only came to roost with its parents for the night. That same evening one "outsider" mousebird shared the nest with the family during the night and the following evening another one. The nest was now shared by five mousebirds, the family and two "strangers". From here onwards it was not possible to observe accurately who was feeding the young bird as none of them was ringed.

On 12 November 1992, the young bird was 27 days old and looked like any other mousebird, except not quite as big and had a shorter tail and its beak had not turned completely white. An attempt was made at about 21h00 to ring them. However, the disturbance made the birds move off the nest prematurely. One lost itself in the house where it could be caught and ringed. Another attempt on 15 November 1992 ended in complete failure. Although we were all better prepared and slipped the net easily over the nest all five of them sneaked out between nest and the ring of the net unnoticed. This was not anticipated and we could not see either, because we worked with a minimum of light.

Since then the birds did not roost in this tree again. What a disappointment since we anticipated further breeding activity. From that day on the mousebirds have become somewhat scarce at our place with one interesting exception. Towards the end of November, mousebirds partly demolished the old nest and took the material to build their altogether own nest in the same tree, directly opposite, much more protected and difficult to access. Nevertheless this was a short-lived consolation, because after construction was achieved the bird stayed away. Maybe they will come back at some later stage, after the long awaited rains have set in. From time to time we still see them slipping through the trees seemingly calling: "Oh catch me if you can" and presently showing us their backs!

NOTES ON CAPTIVE ORANGE RIVER FRANCOLIN

CONNIE SCHOLZ

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During the period March 1989 to March 1992, data were collected on aspects of the ecology of Orange River Francolin (*Francolinus levaillantoides*). Two noteworthy events took place during the last two weeks of observation of captive birds.

Firstly, a case of double nesting (the first recorded for Orange River Francolin?) occurred and secondly, viable eggs of this double clutch were removed from the stomach of a Western Barred Spitting Cobra (commonly known as a Zebra Snake, *Naja nigricollis nigricincta*). Details of the double nesting will be submitted as a short note to "Ostrich", while the second event is described below.

Direct field observation of the cryptically coloured Orange River Francolin proved very frustrating in the Highland Savannah (mostly mountainous grass veldt with scattered trees and shrubs) of the study area (Farm Hoffnung #66, Windhoek). To facilitate observation of behavioural aspects, a pair of wild Orange River Francolin was therefore kept in a 9,1 x 3,61 x 1,5m enclosure, bordered on the one side by our garden, and on the other by the farm.

The male francolin, one of a pair, was captured approximately 0.6km from the enclosure at 11h40 on August 7 1989. By 18h20 a female francolin, presumably his mate, had arrived at the back of the aviary. She was again observed on August 11 and finally captured on August 13.

The pair, named Romeo and Juliet, subsequently successfully raised three broods between March 1990 and February 1991. (A fourth clutch was lost in August 1990 and replaced in October). The male died on February 17 1991 and was replaced by another wild male on August 6 1991. The latter male arrived to the calling of the by then very restless female and stayed in the vicinity of the female until captured 49 days later. The first chicks of this pair hatched on November 11, 1991. The two adult birds and their three surviving chicks shared the aviary with a year-old female, the offspring of Juliet and Romeo.

On February 14 1992, the year-old female started laying until the clutch of five eggs was completed on February 18 and incubation started. On February 24, Juliet started incubating in the same nest and only on February 27 was it discovered that the nest now contained ten eggs.

On February 27, the agitated "chuuups" of Orange River Francolin in distress were heard and, on investigation, I discovered a 1,2m zebra snake at the nest (a scrape of grass). The snake's head was in the nest and the body curled around and under an adjacent rock. Only six eggs were left in the nest.

All six francolin (three adults and three 15 weeks of age) were moving about close to the nest, harassing the snake by making a lot of noise and moving close to it. On approaching, I thought the disturbance was once again caused by one of the two females attempting to dislodge the other from the nest and, on seeing the snake, was interested only in removing it as soon as

possible to save the remaining eggs. Thus, more detailed observation of their anti-predator behaviour was not possible in this case. (This was done when they were attacking me when trying to remove their eggs!).

After approximately five to eight minutes the snake was killed and removed to be measured and identified. During this process my husband, Arthur, noticed three bulges on the ventral side and, on dissection, three eggs were removed from the snake's stomach. Two were unharmed while the third had a bit of the outer shell removed at one end. Not really believing the eggs still viable but having learnt to expect the unexpected from nature (and to humour the ever-optimistic Arthur), we rinsed the eggs, marked them with a permanent koki-pen and replaced them in the nest. This was done 30 to 45 minutes after having sighted the snake.

Before the hatching date, the enclosure had to be removed as we were moving to Tsumeb. Joris Komen of the State Museum kindly agreed to remove the eggs to his incubator where, in March, one of the eggs removed from the zebra snake's stomach actually hatched. One egg was infertile while the third failed to hatch. At the time of writing, April 30, the chick and its family are thriving at NARREC.

Does anyone know of similar experiences? Please let me know. I would also very much appreciate any information on cases where more than one bird used the same nest simultaneously.

UNUSUAL FEEDING BEHAVIOUR OF TERNS

A. WALTER

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It was about sunset on 9 March 1992 when I drove to the thatched cottages along the lagoon. Although a heavy cloud of fog hung over the town was it balmy and warm and absolutely wind-still. From some distance already I noticed a lot of activity in the air, mainly between the long row of cottages and the Esplanade, the road running all the way parallel along the lagoon. There was a very large flock of European Swallows mixed with Little Swifts and a few unidentified Martins, all in a feeding frenzy as I never have seen before. And in between were terns: Damara and Whitewinged and the third species possibly Black Terns (not 100% sure). The terns were hunting in good swallow fashion from as low as 50cm above the ground up to some 3m above the cottage roofs, flitting to and fro almost colliding with the many onlookers who had stopped to watch this rare spectacle. This frenzy stopped when the street lights came on. First the swallows and swifts dispersed, the terns being the last to leave the scene.

A FIVE-TOED EUROPEAN NIGHTJAR

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A female European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, killed by a car, was recovered some 40 kilometres north of Otjiwarongo on 23 February 1992 by Dalton Gibbs and handed to me for onward transmission to the comparative avian osteology collection at the South African Museum, where it now is. This record would not be worth writing about in itself, since the state of the specimen precluded an attempt to place it to subspecies, of which five have been recorded in southern Africa.

However, the right leg is aberrant in that it has two hind toes instead of one. In addition to the normal hind toe there is a smaller and shorter hind toe with claw immediately above it. This last is clearly not functional.

Some years ago I examined a juvenile female specimen of the Yellowbilled Kite *Milvus migrans parasitus* in the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe, Bulawayo, in which one leg had two hind claws and the other three, making eleven toes in all. All three additional hind toes were placed above the main hind toes, and would not have interfered with the normal functioning of the toes. The matter is described and illustrated in the 1975 *Honeyguide* 82: 38-39.

KITTLITZ'S PLOVERS IN TOWN

A. WALTER

P.O. Box 1163, Walvis-Bay

During our yearly bird counts in the Walvis wetland the Kittlitz Plover is rarely encountered. Yet, a few birds are present year round keeping more to the larger lawns of sports fields and parks. They even breed with success in not too densely built up areas in town. October 1991 a pair led their two chicks every day onto the freshly planted lawn at my son's house to feed. At sunset they retreated behind the shelter of a sewage manhole built high above the flat terrain on a vacant plot. There they had a shallow scrape with bits of broken shells. Of this clutch one chick fledged end of October. Both parents were present until fledging.

Then, on 15th February 1992 two eggs were discovered in the very same nest-scrape suggesting that the same pair made a second attempt within three and half months, contrary to what every bird book is saying. Ten days later the chicks hatched and soon afterwards the male disappeared. The female led the chicks onto the lawn daily. My granddaughter had placed a little boiled rice on a bare patch in the lawn. Although the chicks were never observed feeding on rice, the female did regularly and could be photographed doing so.