

# OCCURRENCE OF THE EUROPEAN OYSTERCATCHER *HAEMATOPUS OSTRALEGUS* IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

P. A. R. HOCKEY & J. COOPER

Received 1 December 1980

The European Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* breeds in the Palaearctic region and winters south to the coasts of Africa, the Arabian Sea, southeast China and Japan (Vaurie 1965, Moreau 1972, Dowsett 1980). We detail the seasonal and spatial distribution and age-classes of European Oystercatchers in southern Africa and consider their origins.

The 30 original records, representing 37 individual European Oystercatchers, are listed in Table 1. The seasonal distribution of the records in southern Africa is given in Fig. 1. Individuals recorded regularly for more than one month have been recorded for each month of their stay. Nos. 15 and 16 (Table 1) may refer to the same individual. Significantly more bird months were recorded during the austral summer (September—March) than at other times ( $\chi^2 = 6.78$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). The December and January peak is highly significant ( $\chi^2 = 16.53$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that European Oystercatchers arriving in southern Africa are migratory birds that have passed their normal wintering grounds and continued further south.

European Oystercatchers in southern Africa cannot be approached as closely as African Black Oystercatchers (pers. obs.) and detailed plumage descriptions that enable birds to be aged accurately have rarely been made.

Two of the three birds seen at Sandwich Harbour on 17 March 1975 (No. 3) were described as attaining breeding plumage; all were absent on 21 April 1975 (Becker 1977). It is likely that these birds were adults which had undergone northward migration by that time. Palaearctic waders leave Sandwich Harbour during April (Berry & Berry 1975). Seven individuals stayed for more than one month; of these, six were first recorded in December. The seventh was a juvenile bird first seen in May (No. 7, Table 1). A greater proportion of juveniles were recorded in the austral winter (April—September) than during summer (Table 1). Although the records are

few, this suggests a tendency for young birds to overwinter as occurs in other species of Palaearctic waders in southern Africa (Elliott *et al.* 1976, Summers & Waltner 1979).

Sixteen individuals were recorded from the south coast of South Africa between Plettenberg Bay and East London (Fig. 2). The concentration of records here, as well as further west in the southwestern Cape, may be a reflection of the distribution of observers. A record of the European Oystercatcher from Beira (Clancey 1971a) is uncertain. Haagner (1948) reported an African Black Oystercatcher *H. moquini* there but gave no details. Clancey (1971a) treated Haagner's record as a European Oystercatcher, presumably on distributional grounds. However, the African Black Oystercatcher has been recorded over 1000 km north of its normal range on the west coast of southern Africa at Lobito, Angola (Summers & Cooper 1977).

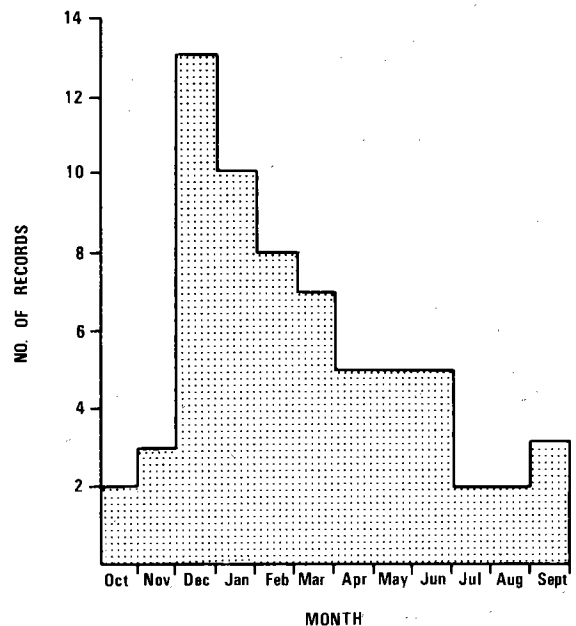


Fig. 1. Seasonal distribution of European Oystercatcher records in southern Africa.

Table 1. Records of European Oystercatchers in southern Africa

Record No.	Locality	Period of Observation	No.	Age	Assoc-iation	Source
1	Walvis Bay Lagoon	17 Jan 1978	1	—	+	Whitelaw <i>et al.</i> (1978)
2	Sandwich Harbour	Jan 1960	1	—	+	Prozesky (1963)
3	Sandwich Harbour	24 Feb 1975— 17 Mar 1975	4/3	—	—	Becker (1977)
4	Sandwich Harbour	10 Jan 1978	1	—	+	Whitelaw <i>et al.</i> (1978)
5	Langebaan Lagoon	Dec 1950—Mar 1951	1	—	—	Broekhuysen <i>et al.</i> (1958)
6	Langebaan Lagoon	Apr 1975	2	—	—	Cape Bird Club (1979)
7	Dassen Island	31 May 1971— 16 Aug 1971	1	Juv	+	JC
8	Kommetjie	13 Nov 1938	1	—	+	Cary (1939)
9	Strandfontein Sewage Works and adjacent coast	19 Dec 1979— 15 May 1980	1	Juv	+	P. Ryan, B. Rose (pers. comm.)
10	Plettenberg Bay	Dec 1953	1	—	—	Edwards (1970)
11	Keurbooms River Lagoon	Dec 1954	1	—	—	De Villiers (1955)
12	Gamtoos River mouth	11 Dec 1949— 29 Jan 1950	1	—	+	Shewell (1950)
13	Gamtoos River mouth	15 Oct 1972	1	—	+	McLachlan (1972)
14	Gamtoos River mouth	16 Sep 1980	1	Juv	+	PARH
15	Kabeljous River mouth	20 Mar 1970	1	—	+	Nixon (1970)
16	Maitlands River mouth	7 Dec 1969	1	—	+	Fisher (1969)
17	Van Staadens River mouth	26 Dec 1970	2	—	+	Edwards (1971)
18	Van Staadens River mouth	15 Dec 1978	2	—	+	Anon (1978), McLachlan <i>et al.</i> (1980), Underhill <i>et al.</i> (1980), G. J. B. Ross <i>in litt.</i>
19	Cape Recife Sewage works	4—12 Sep 1971	1	—	+	Blake (1976)
20	Sundays River mouth	9 Dec 1979	1	—	+	G. J. B. Ross ( <i>in litt.</i> ), A. L. Batchelor (pers. comm.)
21	Bushmans River mouth	30 Apr 1972— 1 May 1972	1	—	—	Tree (1979)
22	Kleinmonde	Feb 1892	1	—	—	Skead (1974)
23	Kleinmonde	Dec 1968—Jan 1969	1	—	—	Tree (1979)
24	East London	7 Dec 1968— 4 Oct 1969	1	Juv	—	Edwards (1970), Quickelberge (1971)
25	Durban	2 Nov 1975	1	Juv	—	Sinclair (1976)
26	Maputo	4—7 Jun 1957	1	—	—	Clancey (1971a)
27	Inhaca Island	Nov 1976	1	—	—	J. C. Sinclair (pers. comm.)
28	Inhambane	ca. 1845	1	—	—	Clancey (1971b)
29	Bazaruto Island	Jun 1950	2	1 Ad 1 Juv	—	Van Eyssen (1958)
30	Bazaruto Island	May 1960	1	—	—	Wheeler & Brooke (1961)

+ denotes association with the African Black Oystercatcher.

This is a comparable distance as Beira is from Natal where the African Black Oystercatcher occurs rarely (Summers & Cooper 1977).

Vaurie (1965) has recognized three subspecies of the European Oystercatcher: the nominate race breeding in the western Palaearctic, *H. o. longipes* in the central Palaearctic and *H. o. osculans* in the eastern Palaearctic. A specimen from Inhambane, Mocambique (No. 28) has been identified as *longipes* (Clancey 1971b). The bird at the Cape Recife Sewage Works (No. 19) was photographed and attributed to this subspecies (Blake 1976). The Strandfontein

Sewage Works and Gamtoos River mouth individuals (Nos. 9 and 14) showed characteristics of *longipes* (PARH pers. obs.). The Durban bird (No. 24) was thought to be *H. o. buturlini* (Sinclair 1976), a synonym of *longipes* (Vaurie 1965). The fact that all east and south coast European Oystercatchers that have been subspecifically identified are *longipes* shows that southern Africa is the southerly limit of this population's wintering range. However, records from the west coast of southern Africa may be attributable to the nominate race, which is known to occur as far south as Sierra Leone (Bannerman

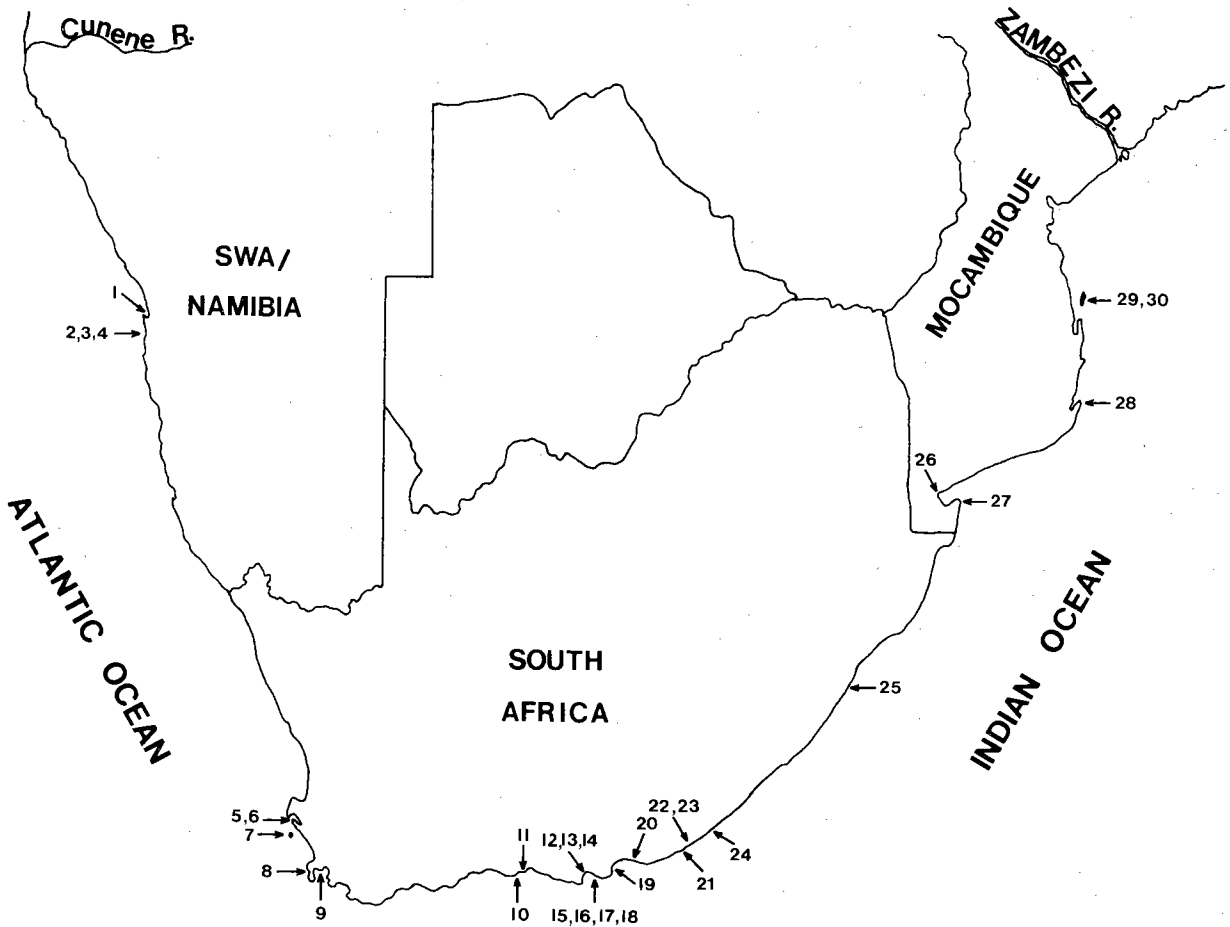


Fig. 2. Spatial distribution of European Oystercatcher records in southern Africa.

1951). Sight records of the species exist for Ghana (Bannerman 1951) and Nigeria (Smith 1966).

European Oystercatchers in southern Africa show a preference for sheltered areas with a sandy substrate such as river mouths and lagoons (Table 4). This contrasts markedly with the habitat preference of the African Black Oystercatcher which is most abundant at rocky offshore islands, and on the mainland prefers mixed (rocky and sandy) or rocky shores. This species occurs at a low density on predominantly sandy shores (Summers & Cooper 1977). However, on fourteen occasions, when details were given, European Oystercatchers were found in association with African Black Oystercatchers.

#### REFERENCES

- Anon. 1969. Black Oystercatcher. *Bokmakierie* 21: 97.
- Anon. 1978. A summary of records of the European Oystercatcher from the eastern Cape. *Bee-eater* 29: 26.
- Bannerman, D. A. 1951. The birds of tropical west Africa. Vol. 8. Crown Agents for the Colonies, London.
- Becker, P. 1977. Ornithologische Notizen von der Küste Südwestafrikas. *J. S.W. Afr. Sci. Soc.* 31: 65—82.
- Berry, H. H. & C. U. Berry. 1975. A check list and notes on the birds of Sandvis, South West Africa. *Madoqua* 9 (2): 5—18.
- Blake, E. 1976. Eurasian Oystercatcher. In: *New Distributional Data* 7. *Ostrich* 47: 214—222.
- Broekhuysen, G. J. 1955. Occurrence and movement of migratory species in Rhodesia and southern Africa during the period 1950—1953. Part 1. *Ostrich* 26: 99—127.
- Cape Bird Club. 1979. A guide to the birds of the S.W. Cape. Cape Bird Club, Cape Town.

- Cary, R. M. 1939. English Oystercatcher at the Cape Peninsula. *Ostrich* 10: 51.
- Clancey, P. A. 1971a. A handlist of the birds of southern Mocambique. *Mem. Inst. Invest. Cient. Mocambique ser. A. No. 10*: 1—303.
- Clancey, P. A. 1971b. On the race of the Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* occurring in South Africa. *Ostrich* 42: 72—73.
- Clancey, P. A. 1980. SAOS checklist of southern African birds. Southern African Ornithological Society, Johannesburg.
- De Villiers, J. 1955. European Oystercatcher and Bar-tailed Godwit on the Keurbooms river lagoon. *Ostrich* 26: 45.
- Dowsett, R. J. 1980. The migration of coastal waders from the Palaearctic across Africa. *Gerfaut* 70: 3—35.
- Edwards, K. 1970. European Oystercatchers near East London. *Ostrich* 41: 220.
- Edwards, K. 1971. Members observations. *Bee-eater* 22 (2): 6.
- Elliott, C. C. H., M. Waltner, L. G. Underhill, J. S. Pringle & W. J. A. Dick. 1976. The migration system of the Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* in Africa. *Ostrich* 47: 191—213.
- Fisher, J. 1969. In: *Bee-eater* 20 (4): 6.
- Haagner, A. K. 1948. A list of the birds observed in Beira and neighbourhood with some notes on habits etc. Part II. *Ostrich* 19: 211—217.
- Liversidge, R., G. J. Broekhuysen & A. R. Thesen. 1958. The birds of Langebaan Lagoon. *Ostrich* 29: 95—106.
- McLachlan, A. 1972. In: *Bee-eater* 23 (4): 3.
- McLachlan, A., T. Wooldridge, M. Schramm & M. Kühn. 1980. Seasonal abundance, biomass and feeding of shorebirds on sandy beaches in the eastern Cape, South Africa. *Ostrich* 51: 44—52.
- Moreau, R. E. 1972. The Palaearctic-African bird migration systems. Academic Press, London.
- Nixon, R. 1970. In: *Bee-eater* 21 (2): 3.
- Prozesky, P. P. M. 1963. Ornithological results of the Transvaal Museum Namib expedition May 1959, and the subsequent trip to Sandwich Harbour during January 1960. *Ostrich* 34: 78—91.
- Quickelberge, C. D. 1971. Protracted appearance of a European Oystercatcher near East London. *Ostrich* 42: 151—152.
- Shewell, E. L. 1950. Birds of the Gamtoos estuary. *Ostrich* 21: 97—102.
- Sinclair, J. C. 1976. Oystercatcher in Natal. *Bokmakierie* 28: 14.
- Skead, C. J. 1974. European Oystercatcher. In: *New Distributional Data*: 5. *Ostrich* 45: 133—138.
- Smith, P. A. 1966. Palaearctic waders in the Niger Delta. *Nigerian Orn. Soc. Bull.* 3 (9): 2—6.
- Summers, R. W. & J. Cooper. 1977. The population, ecology and conservation of the Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus moquini*. *Ostrich* 48: 28—40.
- Summers, R. W. & M. Waltner. 1979. Seasonal variations in the mass of waders in southern Africa. *Ostrich* 50: 21—37.
- Tree, A. J. 1979. European Oystercatchers in the eastern Cape. *Bee-eater* 30: 3.
- Underhill, L. G., J. Cooper & M. Waltner. 1980. The status of waders (Charadrii) and other birds in the coastal region of the southern and eastern Cape, summer 1978/79. Western Cape Wader Study Group, Cape Town.
- Van Eyssen, M. L. 1958. Some birds seen on Bazaruto Island. *Ostrich* 29: 14—18.
- Vaurie, C. 1965. The birds of the Palaearctic fauna. Non Passeriformes. Witherby, London.
- Wheeler, D. J. & R. K. Brooke. 1961. Some records from Bazaruto Island. *Ostrich* 32: 140—142.
- Whitelaw, D. A., L. G. Underhill, J. Cooper & C. F. Clinning. 1978. Waders (Charadrii) and other birds on the Namib coast: counts and conservation priorities. *Madoqua* 11: 137—150.

#### SAMENVATTING

#### Het voorkomen van de Europese Scholekster in Zuidelijk Afrika

Scholeksters uit Europa en West-Azië, *Haematopus ostralegus*, overwinteren zelden zo ver zuidelijk als Zuidelijk Afrika. De auteurs sommen alle hen uit dat gebied bekende gevallen op (Tabel 1): het zijn er 30, afkomstig uit de jaren 1938—1980, met één geval uit 1845 en één uit 1892. Het gaat vrijwel altijd om enkelingen. Verreweg de meeste komen voor in de noordelijke winter (Fig. 1) en ruien er van winter- naar broedkleed. Een enkele eerstejaars vogel blijft er ook de noordelijke zomer hangen. De in het oosten van Zuidelijk Afrika vastgestelde Scholeksters behoren tot de Midden-Palaearctische (Oosteuropese) ondersoort *Haematopus ostralegus longipes*; die uit het westen zijn Westeuropese *H. ostralegus ostralegus*. Laatstgenoemde komen lang niet zo vaak zo ver zuidelijk als *H. o. longipes* en blijven aan de kust. *H. o. longipes* daarentegen kan ook in het binnenland voorkomen. Beide ondersoorten worden soms samen met de inheemse Zwarte Scholekster *Haematopus moquini* aangetroffen, die overigens een echte rotskustbewoner is. — KHV.

P. A. R. Hockey and J. Cooper

Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa.