

inbox

We'd like to hear from you, and you are welcome to send us your birding questions, observations or sightings for inclusion in these pages. Accompanying images should be sent as high-res jpgs (ie at 300 dpi) and be between 1 and 3MB in size. Send your contributions to editor@birdlife.org.za. Letters may be edited for clarity or length. The opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the policies of BirdLife South Africa.



A Swift Tern carrying a bluebottle fish and entangled in a bluebottle jellyfish.

DAVIDE GAGLIO

ALL WOUND UP

In 2012, Graham Russell photographed a Swift Tern trailing a bluebottle or Portuguese man-of-war jellyfish at Kommetjie (*Africa – Birds & Birding*, April/May 2012). The tentacle was wrapped from the tern's beak around its back and wings, suggesting that the bird had become entangled while diving for a fish. My study of Swift Terns' diet, based largely on adults delivering prey to their breeding colonies, confirms that this was not an isolated case.

I have photographed several individuals flying with a bluebottle attached to their body. Seeing what prey they were carrying gave some clue as to how the birds probably became entangled. In most instances, the prey was juvenile bluebottle fish *Nomeus gronovii*, also known as the man-of-war fish. Adult bluebottle fish are generally found at depths greater than 200 metres, but their juveniles occur near the sea surface, where they are often found in association with bluebottles, feeding on their tentacles and gonads.

When winds blow the jellyfish into coastal waters, the fish associated with them may be targeted by Swift Terns. I found that about five per cent of terns carrying a bluebottle fish were entangled with a jellyfish, which possibly occurs when they dive-bomb their prey. Not all entangled terns were carrying juvenile bluebottle fish; one was carrying what appeared to be a larval dolphinfish *Coryphaena hippurus*. It is impossible to know whether the tern became entangled while catching the dolphinfish, but it would not be surprising if that were the case, seeing that the bluebottle tentacles can grow up to 10 metres in length.

DAVIDE GAGLIO



ODD BALLS

My wife Ermien and I love to go to West Coast National Park for birding. In January at Abrahamskraal we noticed strange 'growths' around the lower legs of an African Sacred Ibis. They appeared to be wrapped around its legs and not to be part of the legs, as the colour and structure did not seem to match that of the legs. These odd 'balls' did not seem to bother the bird while it was standing because it was not pecking at them or paying them any attention. However, after a while it flew off in a lumbering flight, which led us to think that the weight of these 'appendages' might be

hindering the bird when in flight. We also noted that it flew off alone and not as part of a group.

Can anyone shed some light on this?

DICK BOS

CAPE TOWN

DIPPED OUT

In August 2016, while we were having sundowners on the banks of the Limpopo River, this Brown-hooded Kingfisher landed in a tree a few metres away from us. It flew away a couple of times but always came back to the same perch. We were fortunate to watch the bird for the best part of 20 minutes, and I managed to



photograph it after it returned from what looked like an unsuccessful fishing trip.

FRANZ HAGEMANN

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