

Eleventh Report of the BirdLife South Africa Rarities Committee

P.A.R. Hockey and the Rarities Committee

This report has continued the tradition of the previous 10 in being able to report a new addition to the South African bird list. This year's candidate achieved not only this distinction but, at the same time, was new to both Africa and the Atlantic Ocean! Unfortunately, however, the Buller's Albatross photographed off the Cape Peninsula was not seen by a single South African birder, as you will discover below. Another new seabird for Africa, Magellanic Penguin, is currently under review by the Committee. This report also includes the second record of Red-throated Pipit in South Africa and the fifth records of White-rumped Sandpiper and Golden Pipit.

Over the years, the standard of submissions to the Committee has undoubtedly increased as birding skills and note-making standards improve. However, we are still certain that several 'good' records are turned down annually because insufficient details of the sightings are

provided. Indeed, this is a much more common reason for rejection of records than is obvious misidentification. Accepted records have to be of a quality that a committee reviewing them in 10 or 20 years' time would independently arrive at the same conclusion we reach now. This is an important point to bear in mind when submitting a record: the more information you provide, the more the Committee has to go on and the better the chances of the scales being tipped in favour of acceptance.

Present membership of the Committee is Richard Grant (Secretary), Phil Hockey (Chairman), Clive Hopcroft, John Isom, Mostert Kriek, Peter Ryan, Ian Sinclair and Tony Tree. The Committee's two office-bearers, Phil Hockey and Richard Grant, both plan to relinquish their posts at the end of 1998. Hockey has been Chairman since 1986, and Grant Secretary since 1991: both feel they have earned a break!

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF ACCEPTED RECORDS

**XXX Buller's Albatross**

*Diomedea bulleri*. Surely one of the most unexpected seabirds to be added to the African list, a subadult Buller's Albatross was photographed at close range among a large flock of seabirds attending a trawler off the Cape Peninsula on 10 August 1995 (R. Ertel). At the time, the bird was dismissed as a Yellow-nosed Albatross, and it was only subsequent examination of the photographs that yielded a first for Africa. Buller's Albatross breeds at a

few islands around New Zealand, from where it normally moves only as far as the coasts of south-eastern Australia to the west and the Humboldt Current region of western South America to the east. There are no previous records from the Atlantic Ocean.

**015 Dark-mantled Sooty Albatross** *Phoebastria fusca*. One subadult found weak and dehydrated adjacent to the Royal Cape Yacht Club in Table Bay, Cape Town on

19 May 1997 (A. Crane et al.). The bird was rehabilitated at the SANCCOB centre and released off Robben Island on 3 June 1997: it now carries the ring number 8-56705.

**041 Wedge-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus pacificus*.

One inside territorial waters on the Agulhas Bank on 21 May 1996 (B. Dyer, N. Klages). This species occurs as both a dark and a pale morph. The Agulhas Bank bird was the pale

morph (the rarer of the two): as far as we are aware this is the first record of this morph in southern African waters.

**043 Leach's Storm Petrel**

*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*. In October and November 1995, at least 17 birds were present and calling on Dyer Island (P. Whittington, B. Dyer, K. Barnes). Calling birds have also been heard on two west coast islands, suggesting that the breeding range of the isolated local population is larger than previously thought. The only other record in 1997 was of a beached (dead) bird at

St Francis Bay village on 6 June (D.M.V. Brown). This is the first winter record of this species in South Africa since the Rarities Committee's inception in 1981. In early May 1988, however, one was found freshly dead at Cape Recife. Perhaps the South African birds remain in the Southern Hemisphere throughout the year, moving eastwards in winter?

**047 Red-tailed Tropicbird**

*Phaethon rubricauda*. An adult was seen at Mondplaas (E. Cape) on 5 and 7

*Buller's Albatross*. First Atlantic record: Cape Peninsula, August 1995.



R. ERTTEL



*Red-footed Booby*. Bazaruto Island, Mozambique, 24 January 1997.

December 1994 (A.E. Bateman, A. Nixon, A.J. Dechant): presumably both sightings refer to the same bird. Another Red-tailed Tropicbird also performed a 'double' in the Eastern Cape. One seen circling over Baakens Valley in Settlers Park, Port Elizabeth on 31 May 1997 (T. & I. Hops) was seen again on 5 June 1997 (S. Brunette). Given that this site is 5 km inland, the chances of two different birds being involved is negligible. In the past, Red-tailed Tropicbirds in South Africa have mostly been 'five-minute wonders'. Recently, however, there have been a few cases of birds remaining for longer – notably two at Port Alfred for 12 days in 1981–82, and one at Cape Point for nine days in 1995.

**070 Slaty Egret** *Egretta vinaceigula*. One at Ndumu Game Reserve on 20 December 1997 is the most southerly record of this species in Africa (G. Cooke, P. & C. Ruinard). The type specimen was collected at Potchefstroom last century, but the first record of Slaty Egret in South Africa this century was one on the Nyl floodplain in 1989. Since then there has been a sight record from Vaalkop Dam (1993) and a breeding record from the Nyl floodplain in 1996 (see Africa – Birds & Birding, Vol. 1, No. 2: 8).

**110 Garganey** *Anas querquedula*. One at Vogelfontein, Nylsvley Nature Reserve, 20 to 26 April 1996 (F. & I. Honiball, S. & F. Hugo).

**120 Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus*. One immature at Lichtenburg Nature Reserve on 29 and 30 December 1996 (B. Ryan).

**130 Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*. One at Ben Lavin Nature Reserve on 26 March 1996 (J. Claassen). One at Tembe Elephant Park, KwaZulu-Natal on

**164 European Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*. One female at the Komatidraai Dam (near Komatipoort) from 23 November to 3 December 1996 (M. Mills). One male at Nylsvley Nature Reserve from 1 to 4 January 1997 (J. Wilson). One, possibly two, females at Marievale Bird Sanctuary on 6 December 1997 (D.S. Peacock). This species has been reported regularly over the last 10 years, with the summer of 1987–88 producing record numbers.

**202 Blue Quail** *Coturnix adansonii*. Three males and three females 20 km north of Dondo, Mozambique, on 14 July 1997 (A. Marchant et al.). This species is not a South African rarity, although the paucity of recent records (for example in The Atlas of Southern African Birds) suggests that it has experienced a substantial range reduction in southern Africa in the past 30 years and may be working its way back on to the rarities' list. This record is included because of our poor knowledge of the species' current status

**253a American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica*. One at Mossel Bay sewage works on 26 December 1996 (M. Killeen, R. McLaren et al.). A sighting at the same place on 2 January 1997 is accepted as a 'lesser' Golden Plover but almost certainly refers to the same bird (G. Simpson).

**253b Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva*. Three on the Krom River estuary on 8 January 1997 (R. Searle). Two 'lesser Golden Plovers' seen at the nearby Seekoei River estuary on 7 January 1997 (also by R. Searle) may have been part of the Krom River trio.

**265 Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*. One near Fontana Pan, Ndumu Game Reserve, on 17 November 1995 (J. Norman, M. Zucchini). One seen from the Kubube Hide, Mkuze Game Reserve,

19 December 1997 (G. Cooke).

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*Slaty Egret*. Ndumu Game Reserve, 20 December 1997.



G. COOKE



Golden Pipit. Kruger National Park, 26 December 1997.

on 4 November 1997 (S. Terblanche, T. Woodage, R. Swain, P. Robinson).  
**268 Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus*. One in almost full breeding plumage 3 km from the mouth of the Great Fish River on 8 January 1998 (A.J. Tree). This may well be the same bird reported at this site in October 1996 and seen subsequently on 29 January 1997.  
**277 White-rumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis*. One at the southern end of Langebaan Lagoon on 20 March 1997 (T. Hardaker, C. de Wit). This is the first South African record of this species since October 1986, and only the fifth since the species was added to the national list based on a specimen found in December 1979. Three of the five records are from within 150 km of Cape Town.  
**287 Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*. Four birds at a pan fed with water from the Vaalharts irrigation scheme (27°54'S, 24°46'E) on 16 January 1997 (M. Anderson, E. Oosthuysen). By 18 January, numbers had risen to nine (M. Anderson, W. Sinclair), and six, possibly seven birds were still present on 25 January (B. Hawthorne).

**296 Crab Plover** *Dromas ardeola*. Two adults or subadults at Richards Bay Sanctuary on 5 February 1997 (P. Outhwaite).  
**331 Black-naped Tern** *Sterna sumatrana*. One at the Umvoti River estuary on 17 November 1996 (S. Jex, D. Morran et al.). Most South African records of Black-naped Tern are from this locality.  
**535 Mascarene Martin** *Phedina borbonica*. More than 20 birds seen flying over degraded forest 20 km north of Dondo, Mozambique on 14 July 1997 (A. Marchant et al.). Up to 100 Mascarene Martins had been reported in this area a few days previously (Africa – Birds & Birding, Vol. 2, No. 4:14). These sightings are only the second published record of this species in southern Africa. Clancey (1971 – Handlist of the Birds of Southern Mozambique) implies that the bird is commoner and more widespread in Mozambique than these two records suggest. Increased coverage of Mozambique by birders will almost certainly prove this to be the case.  
**623 Yellow-breasted Hyliota** *Hyliota flavigaster*. A male and a female were seen together in

Chinizua Forest, Mozambique, on 16 July 1997 (A. Marchant et al.). Acceptance of this record lends support to a previously unaccepted record between Dondo and Chinizua on 10 January 1996 (the Committee could not reach consensus on this latter record). The status of this species in southern Mozambique is very poorly known. Mashona *Hyliota* *H. australis*, with which this species could easily be confused, is common in miombo woodland, so great care needs to be taken in identifying the much rarer Yellow-breasted *Hyliota*.  
**626 Olive-tree Warbler** *Hippolais olivetorum*. One at Tshokwane, Kruger National Park on 29 November 1994 (G.H. Patten). One at Seven Hills Farm, near Broederstroom, from 15 to 30 January 1995 (A.R. Jones). Two at Tshipise, near Messina, on 9 February 1997 (C.A. Brewster). All of these records were submitted prior to Olive-tree Warbler being removed from the national rarities' list (see Africa – Birds & Birding, Vol. 2, No. 5: 64–67). All future records of this species should be sent to the appropriate local rare birds panel.  
**903 Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus*. One at the

Umvoti River estuary on 2 January 1998 is the second South African record (A. Marchant). The other South African record was from the same locality in March 1983.  
**726 Golden Pipit** *Tmetothylacus tenellus*. One adult male 6 km from Nwanetsi, Kruger National Park, on 28 December 1997 (L. Bramwell, K. Winter). This is the fifth South African record: three of the five records have been from the Kruger National Park. All five records have been of adult males – does this mean that we are overlooking females and juveniles?

RECORDS ACCEPTED AS ESCAPED BIRDS

**Black-bellied Whistling Duck** *Dendrocygna autumnalis*. This species is a resident of tropical Central and South America and only the most northerly breeders are partially migratory. It is a popular ornamental bird. Three of these ducks were present at the Vaalkop Dam on 29 November 1997 (H.G. Kruger, E. Prins).  
**European Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*. A pair at the O.P.M. Prozesky Bird Sanctuary, Potchefstroom, on 22 and 23 October 1995 (F. de Beer, F. Donaldson et al.). This species breeds at fairly low latitudes in the western and central Palearctic. Birds undergo some southward movement at the end of the breeding season, with some reaching as far south as wetlands along the North African coast. It is a popular ornamental waterbird.  
**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*. A common duck with a very large Palearctic breeding range, this species occurs regularly as a migrant in Africa as far south as central Kenya. A single male was at Diepsloot Nature Reserve on 29 and 30 November 1997 (N. & R. Ebedes, T. & L. Metelekamp). Whilst it is not impossible that a genuine vagrant Tufted Duck could reach South Africa, it will always be difficult to separate such vagrants from escapees. Until some strong

evidence to the contrary is supplied, all Tufted Duck records in South Africa should be treated as escapees.

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED

**Short-tailed Shearwater** 90 km south-east of Mossel Bay, 29 November 1996.  
**Red-tailed Tropicbird** St Francis Bay, 1 August 1991.  
**Madagascar Squacco Heron** Hartebeespoort Dam, 20 June 1996.  
**Garganey** Two: Hlamalala Dam, Kruger National Park, 29 March to 8 April 1997.  
**European Marsh Harrier** Male: Mkuze Game Reserve, 13 November 1995; female: Nylsvley Nature Reserve, 1 January 1997; male: 60 km south of Nossob camp, Kalahari Gemsbok National Park, 1 January 1997; one male, one female: New Holme Farm, near Hanover Road, 15 January 1997.  
**Eleonora's Falcon** Bazaruto Island, Mozambique, 26 January 1997.  
**Striped Crake** Female: Nylsvley Nature Reserve, 16 February 1997.  
**Pacific Golden Plover** Two: Keurbooms River estuary, 19 March 1997.  
**Green Sandpiper** Northern sewage works, Durban, 10 to 12 January 1997.  
**Common Redshank** Springs Bird Sanctuary, 5 February 1995.  
**Spotted Redshank** Borakalalo Reserve, 16 October 1995.  
**Red-necked Stint** Umgeni River estuary, 24 and 25 September 1997.  
**Lesser Black-backed Gull** Immature: Spitzkop Dam, 17 January 1997; adult: Umgeni River estuary, 15 February to 23 April 1997. Note: although most inland records of large gulls in South Africa are likely to refer to this species, it is essential that enough details are provided in

the description to eliminate both Kelp and Herring gulls.  
**Black-headed Gull**  
**Black-headed Gull** Strandfontein sewage works, Cape Town, 9 March 1997.  
**Pallid Swift** Storms River bridge, 17 November 1996. Note: this species is extremely difficult to separate in the field from African Black, European and Bradfield's swifts. Its occurrence south of the Zambezi River is based on a single specimen; for a sight record to stand a reasonable chance of acceptance, it will need to be accompanied by very detailed field notes.  
**Whinchat** One male, one female: Vernon Crookes Nature Reserve, 9 March 1997.  
**Western Violet-backed Sunbird** One male, one female: Buffelsbed lookout, Kruger National Park, 30 September 1996.

RECORDS PENDING

**Mascarene Shearwater**

15 km south-east of Durban, 4 August 1996.  
**Rüppell's Vulture** Potsberg, 25 August 1989.  
**Crab Plover** Umgeni River estuary, 17 April 1996.

Green Sandpiper. Mkuze Game Reserve, 4 December 1997.

