



Perched on a weaver's nest, the Black Crake reaches down (above), then extracts a chick and makes off with it (below).



## DARK RAIDER

On a visit to Bonamanzi Game Reserve in KwaZulu-Natal in November 2011, we observed interesting behaviour by a Black Crake. Inside the crocodile enclosure, in a small but dense patch of *Typha capensis* bulrushes, Thick-billed Weavers were busily building nests, while Yellow Weavers and Lesser Masked-Weavers were already breeding.

We heard a Black Crake calling from within the bulrushes and soon saw it walking out on a prostrate bulrush stalk, on the end of which was a weaver's nest. The crake investigated the nest for a while before starting to peck at it. At first we thought it was pilfering building material for its own nest, but the next moment it plucked a weaver chick from the structure. It walked back into a dense part of the bulrushes, carrying the chick in its beak, but about two minutes later it was back again. This time it tried for a while, but did not

get another chick. It was not clear if the previous chick was the last one in the nest or if the crake simply could not reach the remaining chick(s). The fact that the bird returned so quickly would seem to indicate that either it fed the weaver chick to its own brood and came back for more, or possibly that a different bird was involved.

According to *Roberts 7*, Black Crakes are known to prey on nestlings of *Ploceus* weaver species and also that they pull down bulrush leaves in order to gain access to prey items. It therefore seems likely that this Black Crake deliberately intended to gain access to the weaver nest (which we assume belonged to a Yellow Weaver) to prey on the chicks.

Although this behaviour might not be rare or unique, it was the first time that we had witnessed anything like this by a Black Crake, and we found it quite disturbing. We will never regard this species in the same way again!

**MARTIN & MELANIE POTGIETER**

**VIA E-MAIL**

## GO EASTERN HIGHLANDS

Many birders may be wondering when they can (or indeed should) go back to bird in Zimbabwe. Well, we drove to the Eastern Highlands in September 2011 and were pleasantly surprised that, once through the horrendous Beit Bridge border crossing (which passed without drama or hiccups but took oh so long), all went well. The roads were in good condition, so the three tolls of only US\$1 each were great value. There are security road blocks, but if you have your seatbelts fastened and approach slowly, the officers invariably wave you through. However, don't travel at night because of random livestock wandering on the roads.

We enjoyed four nights at the fully catered Aberfoyle Lodge in the Honde Valley. We had the lodge to ourselves which was fabulous, but hardly sustainable for the lodge. A super birding guide, Morgan Saineti, helped us find localised specials such as Anchieta's Tchagra,

Red-faced Crimsonwing, Red-throated Twinspot, Green-backed Woodpecker, Chirinda Apalis, Blue-spotted Dove and Singing Cisticola. Unfortunately the Lesser Seedcracker eluded us, but Morgan assured us that it is there. Visit [www.aberfoylelodge.com](http://www.aberfoylelodge.com) for information about the lodge and contact them at [aberfoyle@ehpl.co.zw](mailto:aberfoyle@ehpl.co.zw).

We then spent four nights at the comfortable self-catering Seldomseen Holiday Cottages in the Bvumba Highlands. Highlights there were Swynnerton's Robin, Roberts's Warbler, Red-winged Warbler, Short-winged Cisticola, Yellow-bellied Waxbill, Black-fronted Bush-Shrike and Ayres's Hawk-Eagle. We were amazed that two difficult South African birds, Orange Ground-Thrush and White-starred Robin, were on the lawns each day. Google 'Seldomseen' for details or e-mail them directly at [mhumbe@zol.co.zw](mailto:mhumbe@zol.co.zw).

Generally, the infrastructure, availability of fuel and attitude of the people were very positive, apart from electricity blackouts many evenings, which was

remedied by a generator at Aberfoyle and candles and lamps at Seldomseen. We notched up 183 species, including 21 southern African lifers for me, of which 14 were continental lifers. So do yourself and the birding facilities a favour and add the Eastern Highlands to your 'to do' list.

**ROB LITTLE**

**FITZPATRICK INSTITUTE**

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**



Yellow-bellied Waxbill

PETER RYAN