

Ornithological Observations



An electronic journal published by BirdLife South Africa and the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town



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Editor: Arnold van der Westhuizen

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Recommended citation format:

Leshoro TM, Underhill LG, Dyer BM 2010. First recorded breeding record of feral Common Peacock *Pavo cristatus* in Africa. Ornithological Observations 1: 1–2

URL: <http://oo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=1>

Published online: 31 August 2010

- ISSN 2219-0341 -



FIRST RECORDED BREEDING RECORD OF FERAL COMMON PEACOCK *PAVO CRISTATUS* IN AFRICA

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The only self-sustaining population of the Common Peacock *Pavo cristatus* on the continent of Africa is on Robben Island (33°49'S, 18°22'E), Table Bay, South Africa (Hockey *et al.* 2005). Brooke and Prins (1986) reported 1968 as the year of introduction, based on a letter from NH Pietersen, of the then South African Department of Prisons. It is extremely unlikely that additional birds were taken to the island. We are not aware of any other mention of this species on Robben Island between the date of introduction and the paper by Brooke and Prins (1986). Crawford and Dyer (2000) estimated that the population size in 1999 was about 16 birds; TML estimated that the population in summer 2007/08 was c. 80 birds.

Broods accompanying Peacocks are frequently encountered during the summer months (TML pers. obs). However, four decades after the introduction of this species to Robben Island, no active nests had been found. This note reports the first nest. It was found at 08:30 on 12 February 2008. TML's attention was drawn to the incubating Peacock when he disturbed a Steenbok *Raphicerus campestris* while driving along a gravel track in the area of Robben Island behind the High Security Prison. The Steenbok was less than 2 m from the nest when it started running, and it passed close to the bird, which moved slightly. The bird remained motionless on the nest until the observer was within 2 m of the nest. The nest contained four eggs when found and still had four eggs on 14 February 2008.



Figure 1 - General view of Peacock nest, Robben Island, South Africa, 16 February 2008.

Although the general area in which the nest was found consisted of a thick copse of alien shrubs and trees, the nest was in a relatively open locality. It was less than 1 m from a seldom-used track, and 2,5 m from the trunk of a dead tree. It consisted of a simple scrape in the sand with a few dried sticks in the vicinity (Figs 1 and 2).

When the nest was visited at 08:30 on 16 February 2008, it contained three eggs, and these had clearly been deserted, because the eggs were cold and the female was not in the vicinity.

The three remaining eggs measured (and weighed): 65,2 mm x 49,3 mm (60,5 g), 67,2 mm x 50,9 mm (68,5 g), 65,9 mm x 49,6 mm (62,6 g).

The three eggs were all slightly smaller than the mean egg size for the species, 69,7 mm x 52,1 mm (Ali and Ripley 1983).



Figure 2 - Common Peacock nest, Robben Island, 16 February 2008

Also in the nest was the bleached shell of a snail.

The eggs were removed, and have been deposited in the collection of the South African Museum.

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Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge support from their respective institutions and the Earthwatch Institute; in addition, LGU acknowledges support from the Seachange Programme of the National Research Foundation, Pretoria.

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