

Ornithological Observations



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Ornithological Observations accepts papers containing faunistic information about birds. This includes descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and plumage. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, and any other interesting or relevant material.

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BLACK SPARROWHAWK LOST BATTLE AGAINST EGYPTIAN GEESE

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The Black Sparrowhawk Project has been running on the Cape Peninsula in the Western Cape for 11 years. The nesting territories are scattered in the pine plantations along the edges of the mountain range, green belts, cemeteries, golf courses, vineyards and large leafy gardens. Since the project started 248 birds have been ringed with unique colour combinations. Fearsome hunters, these birds target mainly doves and pigeons and find rich pickings in the suburbs where many people feed birds.

On the 26 July 2011 Prof. Les Underhill alerted me to the fact that a Black Sparrowhawk had been killed by Egyptian Geese at a block of flats in Wynberg. I was amazed that a male Sparrowhawk with a mass of about 560 g would take on two Egyptian Geese (1800-2300 g each).

When I picked up the body from one of the residents at the flats I recognised it as a male which I had ringed at Glen Dirk, a vineyard near Bishops Court on 18 August 2008. That male had been nesting in 2011 on the Zonnestraal Wine Estate.

It seems as if the Sparrowhawk tried to snatch a gosling and was then attacked by the Egyptian Geese. The altercation happened at a block of flats which has a large open expanse of tarmac and lawn.



Fig 1 – Close up of Black Sparrowhawk

The fight in this open area was witnessed by some of the residents. When I arrived to collect the body the following day, the Geese were guiding their brood of goslings around. The male had all his neck feathers erect. The residents of the flats have learnt to be very careful of the Geese because they are very aggressive and attack people if they got too close.

When the male sparrow hawk was killed, he had one chick in the nest. We ringed the chick the week before. I visited the nest site at Zonnestraal to establish the impact of this death on the female and chick. Fortunately the female was observed perching very relaxed in a tree near the nest and the chick was busy eating something on the nest. The chick fledged not long after this incident. It is assumed it has been seen hunting with its mother in Wynberg. It was reported



by observers that two Black Sparrowhawks were seen, “One was sitting in the road and the other trying to get into a hedge, while Pied Crows were frantically trying to scare them off.” Although this is inconclusive evidence, it sounds like the behaviour being witnessed of youngsters learning to hunt for themselves.

In our experience with this project this is the first time Egyptian Geese have been seen to kill a Black Sparrowhawk. It is not surprising to us as Egyptian Geese are known to be aggressive when breeding.

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