The open-access journal Biodiversity Observations: report for 2023

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Report

The open-access journal Biodiversity Observations: report for 2023

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Volume 13 of Biological Observation, published in 2023, contained 39 papers (Table 1, listed in full at https://journals.uct.ac.za/index.php/BO/issue/view/76). This is the largest number of papers in a single year since 2017, when Volume 8 contained 53 papers (Underhill & Navarro 2023). But the largest number of papers in a single volume was in the previous year, 2016, when Volume 7 contained 103 papers (Table 1).

The total number of papers published in the journal since Volume 1 in 2010 is 429 (Table 1). 35,000 PDFs of papers were downloaded in 2023, of which 21,000 (59%) were from Volume 13 (Table 1). At the end of 2022, the number of downloads of papers from Volumes 1–12 was 462,000 (Underhill & Navarro 2023); adding the downloads in 2023 gives a grand total of 497,000 PDF downloads of papers in Biodiversity Observations since the inception of the journal in 2010.

Table 1: Numbers of papers published online in each volume of Biodiversity Observations, 2010 to 2023, and the numbers of downloads of the papers in that volume in 2023.

Year	Volume	Papers	Downloads
2010	1	12	399
2011	2	21	535
2012	3	39	909
2013	4	33	1,013
2014	5	55	2,000
2015	6	31	810
2016	7	103	3,375
2017	8	53	1,614
2018	9	13	781
2019	10	14	844
2020	11	6	303
2022	12	10	1,661
2023	13	39	20,733
Total	**-**	**429**	**34,977**

The paper with the most downloads in 2023 was *A guide to the common garden birds of Cape Town, South Africa* (Daniel & Loftie-Eaton 2023), which was downloaded 1,573 times. This paper provides an innovative approach to learning birds; it simplifies the process of bird identification by limiting itself to the 32 most frequently encountered species in the suburbs of Cape Town. The approach is illustrated by Figure 1, and the QR code points to the text for the species on the website of the Biodiversity and Development Institute (in this case to https://thebdi.org/2022/03/30/cape-bulbul-pycnonotus-capensis/).

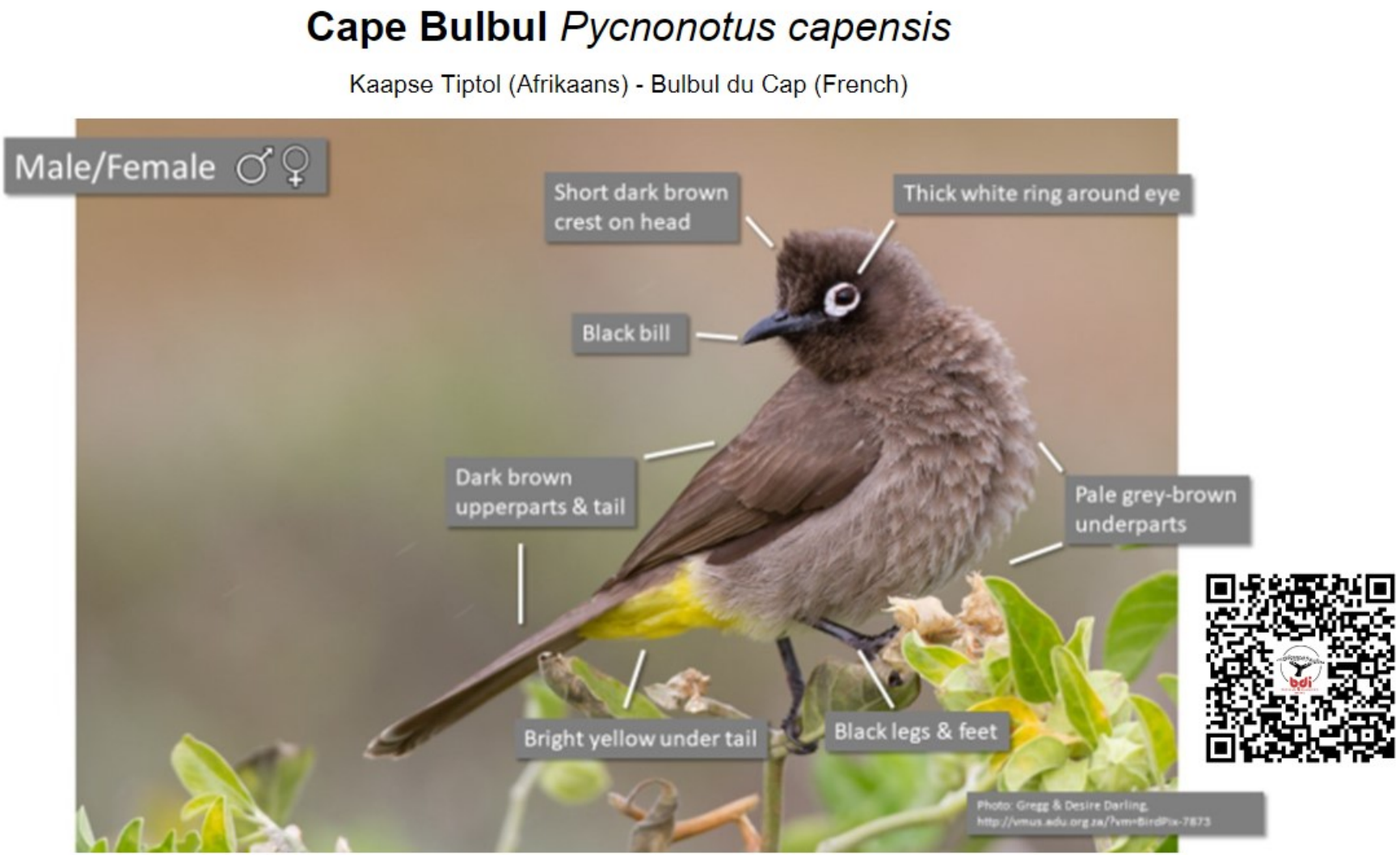

Figure 1: The annotated image for the Cape Bulbul *Pycnonotus capensis* in the guide to the 32 common species in the gardens of the suburbs of Cape Town (Daniel & Loftie-Eaton 2023). The QR code points to the species text on the BDI website: https://thebdi.org/2022/03/30/cape-bulbul-pycnonotus-capensis/.

Two other papers were downloaded more than 1,000 times in 2023. A paper on the prey of the Southern Fiscal in southern Namibia (Cunningham & Cunningham 2023) had 1,048 downloads, the second most in 2023. During a five-year period, 18 impalements of prey were recorded; 15 were on plants (e.g. on twigs) and three on fences. The paper discusses these observations in relation to a range of variables, making a valuable contribution to our understanding of foraging behaviour of this species.

A set of three papers by Mike Fraser covers the terrestrial vertebrates of the Cape Point section of the Table Mountain National Park (Fraser 2014, 2022, 2023). The checklist of reptiles and amphibians was published in 2023; this paper has had 1,033 downloads in the year (Fraser 2023). The checklist of mammals (Fraser 2022) had 683 downloads in 2023, the most downloads in 2023 for a paper published in 2022. The checklist of birds (Fraser 2014) had 100 downloads in 2023; prior to this it had 5,669 downloads in total. 2024 represents the 10th anniversary of this checklist, and it is due for an update in 2024.

According to Google Scholar, 186 (42%) of these papers have been cited at least once since 2018. At the end of 2022, 138 of 389 papers (35%) had been cited (Underhill & Navarro 2023). The total number of citations at the end of 2023 was 553, compared with 421 one year previously (Underhill & Navarro 2023). The Google Scholar query from which these statistics are derived is https://scholar.google.co.za/scholar?q=source:%22biodiversity+observations%22. Underhill & Navarro (2023) discussed the change in publication systems of the journal in 2018, and its implications for maintaining a record of citations.

One of the ways in which papers in the journal are cited is as examples to illustrate concepts. For example, an observation of a Cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* making use of a Sociable Weaver *Philetairus socius* nest published in Biodiversity Observations (Lowney & Charlton 2017) was subsequently used to illustrate the hypothesis that Sociable Weavers can be described as ecosystem engineers (Lowney & Thomson 2021). As another example, Jarret et al. (2020) used an observation of the reaction of a Common Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* to a drone in Maputo Bay, Mozambique (Allport 2014) to help motivate their study on the impact of drones on waterbirds.

Although Biodiversity Observations (and its predecessor, Ornithological Observations) never restricted their geographical range, all papers were initially from southern Africa. Of the 39 papers in Volume 13, 12 originated elsewhere (Algeria, Canada, China, Gabon, Iceland, India, Nigeria, St Lucia, Türkiye, and USA) (see the list of papers for 2023 at https://journals.uct.ac.za/index.php/BO/issue/view/76).

Biodiversity Observations will continue to publish papers containing information about biodiversity in general from anywhere in the world. This broad category includes, for example, descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, habitat, movement and measurements. The journal will also consider publishing other interesting or relevant biodiversity information, i.e. reports on projects and expeditions, summaries of conferences, guides to identification, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies and book reviews.

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