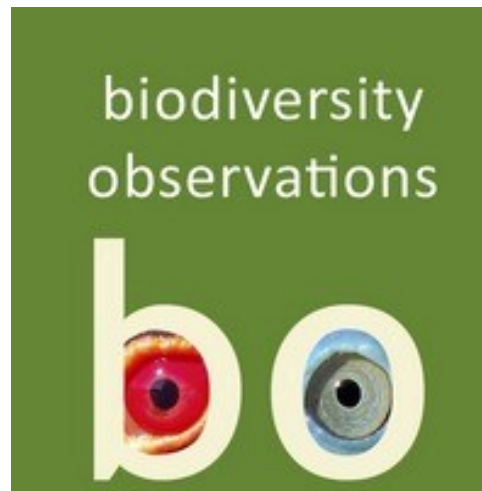


# Bathing in the Southern Brown-throated Weaver

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**Oschadleus HD** 2024. Bathing in the Southern Brown-throated Weaver. Biodiversity Observations 14: 60–61.

30 May 2024

DOI: 10.15641/bo.1569

## Ornithology

### Bathing in the Southern Brown-throated Weaver

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#### Abstract

The first record of bathing in the Southern Brown-throated Weaver *Ploceus xanthopterus* was made on 18 September 2021 in Katima Mulilo (17° 29' 42.07" S, 24° 19' 26.36" E), Namibia.

#### Introduction

Several weaver species are common in gardens and may be observed feeding, drinking, or nesting. Gardens with bird baths may provide entertainment as weavers and other birds bathe vigorously.

Many weavers are known to bathe, e.g. Roberts 7 lists Cape Weaver *Ploceus capensis*, Red-headed Weaver *Anaplectes rubriceps*, Thick-billed Weaver *Amblyospiza albifrons*, Yellow-crowned Bishop *Euplectes afer* and Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea* (Hockey et al. 2005).

None of the standard texts on the Southern Brown-throated Weaver *Ploceus xanthopterus* mention drinking or bathing in this species. This includes Roberts 7, Birds of Africa (Fry & Keith 2004), and Birds of the World (del Hoyo et al. 2010). The most important study on this species was conducted by Dale Hanmer who studied moult and measurements, with some breeding notes, in Mozambique and Malawi (Hanmer 1984). An extensive literature search in standard journals about African birds and bird club newsletters yielded no mention of drinking or bathing in the Southern Brown-throated Weaver.

#### Observations

On a bird trip to Namibia, a bird photographer and I visited the well known Caprivi Houseboat Safari Lodge, Katima Mulilo (17° 29' 42.07" S, 24° 19' 26.36" E), for half a day on 18 September 2021. There was a bird feeder and bird bath close together and next to dense vegetation that provides shelter for visiting birds. A sprinkler was on over the lawn for a while, but no birds were seen to bathe under the sprinkler on this visit. From about 11h20 a small group of Southern Brown-throated Weavers was seen feeding on the lawn (probably on fallen bird seed) and at the bird feeder for about 10 minutes. They were all in non-breeding plumage. Some were seen feeding again at 1pm and were observed for an hour. From 13h34 to 13h47 at least three individual weavers came to the bird bath and bathed, sometimes two at a time but usually one at a time, although others arrived at the edge to await their turn while one bird was bathing. (Figure 1).

From three short video clips, the following bathing behaviour of the Southern Brown-throated Weaver was determined. Birds usually perched on the rim, looking around for danger, and often hopping sideways on the bird bath edge. Sometimes birds made a brief flight from the edge to the centre, dipping the toes in the water but then alighting somewhere else on the edge. When bathing occurred, the usual method was used – the breast was emerged in the water and wings flapped into the water a few times at a very fast rate to splash water onto the back. Each bout of splashing lasted about 1-2 seconds, the bird looked up for danger and either had another splashing

bout or flew to the edge of the bird bath. Here the weaver usually shook the water off its body once and then flew off, or occasionally bathed again. In one case, a weaver flew off directly from bathing, probably due to getting a fright. The edge of the bird bath was too shallow for effective bathing. Once a weaver perched at the edge and bent far forward to just touch the water and managed to splash a little water. In all other cases the weaver hopped or flew several centimetres to a deeper spot where it could bathe with the belly touching water.

A male and a female Holub's Golden Weaver *P. xanthops* came to the bird feeder, and the male visited the bird bath to drink at the bird bath. Other species that visited the bird bath included a Yellow-bellied Greenbul *Chlorocichla flaviventris* that came to bathe, and Arrow-




**Figure 1:** Southern Brown-throated Weaver at bird bath in Katima Mulilo, Namibia, getting ready to bathe (note sprinkler is on in foreground). See bathing sequence on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/qHzMxXWVXXY>.

marked Babblers *Turdoides jardineii* and a pair of Schalow's Turacos *Tauraco schalowi* that came to drink.

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*Paper edited by Megan Loftie-Eaton  
Biodiversity and Development Institute*



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