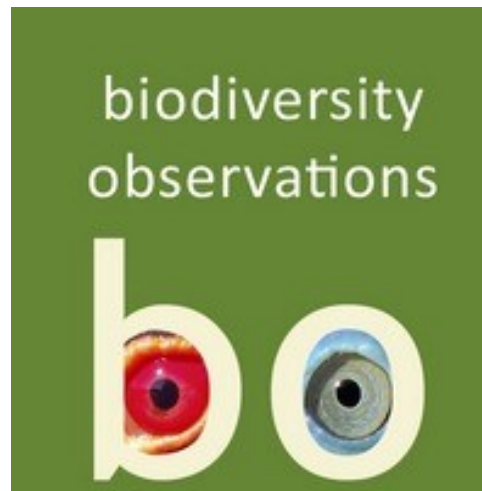


Cape Rock Thrush *Monticola rupestris* kills and eats a snake

Bruce M Dyer & Madeleine Dyer



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Cape Rock Thrush *Monticola rupestris* kills and eats a snake

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Abstract

Cape Rock Thrush *Monticola rupestris* was observed to kill and eat a Spotted Skaapsteker *Psammophylax rhombeatus* at Rooi Els, Western Cape South Africa. This is the first record of the diet of this bird species including a snake.

Observation

A track running south from the holiday village of Rooi Els, Western Cape, South Africa, is a well-known birding locality in the region. While birdwatching here on 21 July 2018, we noticed a Cape Rock Thrush *Monticola rupestris* perched on a rock. While we were watching it, it swooped down to the ground quite suddenly and appeared to be bothered by something on the ground. It rapidly grasped what appeared to be a twig, but when the “twig” started to wriggle violently, we realized the rock thrush had caught a small snake (Figure 1). From the photograph, we identified the snake as Spotted Skaapsteker (or Grass Snake) *Psammophylax rhombeatus*. We estimated its length to be c. 15 cm. The bird flew to a nearby rock, against which it repeatedly beat the snake for some time before it ceased moving and was presumed dead. It then swallowed the snake head-first.

Discussion

Cape Rock Thrushes have been recorded eating quite a diverse range of invertebrates, a frog, a lizard as well as seeds, fruit and scavenging various types of scraps (Hockey et al. 2005). Of the four species of rock thrush of the genus *Monticola* occurring in Southern Africa, only the Miombo Rock Thrush *Monticola angolensis* has been reported to have eaten a snake (Hockey et al. 2005). This record represents the first account of Cape Rock Thrush killing and eating a snake.

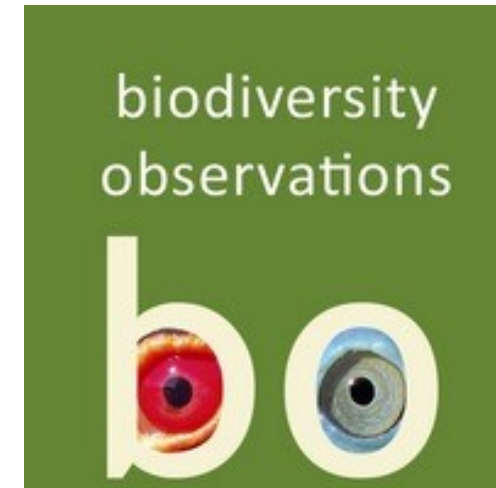
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Hockey PAR, Dean WRJ, Ryan PG (eds) 2005. Roberts birds of southern Africa 7th ed. Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.



Figure 1: Cape Rock Thrush *Monticola rupestris* with Spotted Skaapsteker *Psammophylax rhombeatus* at Rooi Els, Western Cape South Africa, on 21 June 2018. Photograph by BM Dyer .

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