

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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NEVER GIVE UP – COMMON FISCAL AND CHAMELEON ENCOUNTER

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NEVER GIVE UP – COMMON FISCAL AND CHAMELEON ENCOUNTER

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On 23 July 2012 at about 18:15, whilst walking in the wetlands area at the eastern edge of Tokai Forest, Cape Town, I heard a rustling in the tall reeds.

On closer inspection I found a Common Fiscal *Lanius collaris* (Dean 2005) hanging from a tall reed about 1,5 m from the ground. Its bill appeared to be entangled in the reed. The bird did not move – it was just hanging by its bill. I approached it and took hold of it to release it. I was certain I was going to get a nasty bite once I had freed it, as these birds can be very aggressive.

However I found that it was not entangled but had grabbed a Cape Dwarf Chameleon *Bradypodion pumilum* by the head (Tolley and Burger 2007). The Fiscal was trying to use its weight to tire the chameleon out in order to pull it off the reed. The bird did not release the chameleon even when I was holding it firmly in my hand.

The reed was bent slightly and the chameleon was on the upper side of the reed and clinging on with all four feet firmly grasping the reed stem. It was about 200 mm from the top of the reed.

I released the bird and watched it for a while. After another 10 minutes I thought it must be stuck with a dead chameleon in the

reeds and it was getting dark quickly now. As I approached closer to confirm, the Shrike let go and flew off.

The chameleon, very much alive, puffed itself up and showed none the worse for wear. It showed aggression towards me, by puffing up and opening its mouth. The resilience of the reptile was remarkable.

Chameleons move to the thin ends of vegetation to spend the night – maybe attempting to stay out of reach of predators using the plants to get to the chameleon as prey (Tolley and Burger, 2007). The chameleon in this case did not consider airborne predators and was almost a late night snack for the Fiscal.

Unfortunately I did not have a camera at hand to capture photographic evidence of this observation.

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References

Dean WRJ 2005. Common Fiscal *Lanius collaris*. In: Hockey PAR, Dean WRJ, Ryan PG (eds). Roberts - Birds of Southern Africa. VIIth edition. Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.

Tolley K, Burger M 2007. Chameleons of southern Africa. Struik Nature: Cape Town.