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NEST CONSTRUCTION BY BARRED WREN WARBLER IN CENTRAL NAMIBIA

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Barred Wren Warbler *Calomonastes fasciolatus* are known secretive breeders tailoring elaborate nests from leaves of a variety of plant species ranging from forbs to broad bladed grasses to shrubs and trees throughout their range (Steyn 1996, Tarboton 2001, Hockey et al. 2005).

During late February 2013 a nest, of the Barred Wren Warbler was observed constructed in a juvenile Namib Coral-tree *Erythrina decora*, which is endemic to central and central-north Namibia (Mannheimer and Curtis 2009), in a Windhoek garden. The bird was not actually seen, but nest dimensions and previous confirmed nesting records in the same garden support Barred Wren Warbler although a similar nest builder, Grey-backed Camoroptera, also occurs in the area

On 1 April 2013 the nest was more closely investigated as it was observed to be deserted. The nest was located at a height of 1.2 m, and construction using 3 leaves, expertly sewn – even tucked together at the corners in places. It was suspended by being "pop riveted" to neighbouring green leaves.

Fig 1 - Barred Wren Warbler nest, using 3 leaves, in a Namib Coral-tree *Erythrina decora* in central Namibia.

The inner nesting material was "pop riveted" to the outer leaves in numerous places (Figures 1 and 2). The 3 leaves forming the outer protective layer of the nest were either nipped off at the petiole (leaf stalk) or became detached during construction. Either way; the leaves were not joined to the living tree anymore, resulting in a suspended nest structure. Namib Coral-tree leaves are trifoliate, spirally arranged and 140-190 mm in length, probably indicating the convenience of the 3 leaves used during the nest construction. Large green leaves measured *in situ* were 17 cm x 13 cm (hxw). The dry nest dimensions were 11,5 cm x 9 cm x 7 cm (hxwxd) with the opening being located on top to one side, measuring 4 cm x 2 cm (hxw).

Fig 2 - The elaborate tailoring and "pop riveting" clearly visible.

The entire nest lining consisted of fine white silky plant down, similar to the down associated with the seeds of the near-endemic Elephant vine *Strophanthus amboensis* found in central Namibia. Seeding of this plant coincides with the general nesting period of the Barred Wren Warbler – i.e. September to April. Hairs associated with the seeds of Milkweed *Gomphocarpus fruticosus* could possibly be used in the nesting material as well. Both plants are from the Apocynaceae family (Mannheimer and Curtis 2009).

Previous confirmed nests of Barred Wren Warbler, in the same garden, were made in Knobbly Creeper *Combretum mossambicense* and the alien Kumquat *Citrus japonica* at heights of 0.5 m and 1.2 m respectively. Two of the nests were higher – albeit slightly – than the 1 m suggested by Tarboton (2001) although within the range – 1-3 m and up to 4 m – as suggested by other authors (Roberts 1928, Steyn 1996). The number of leaves used is fewer – usually 10 to 15 – than suggested by Tarboton (2001), but probably due to the larger size of Namib Coral-tree leaves. Nest dimensions are also slightly larger than that presented by Tarboton (2001), but probably also due to the measurements of the leaves used.

The nesting period falls within the range – November to March (Tarboton 2001) – although slightly later than – December to January – as suggested for Namibia (Maclean 1985). The distinctive nest entrance hole, usually used to confirm Barred Wren Warbler, was however missing as the nest was observed to be unused, and thus incomplete.

This sighting adds to the knowledge of Barred Wren Warbler nest construction and site selection from central Namibia.

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