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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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SURPRISE IN THE NEST BOX: GREAT SPOTTED CUCKOO

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SURPRISE IN THE NEST BOX: GREAT SPOTTED CUCKOO

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On 26 December 2012 on a cloudy day, two A-ringers from Birdlife Northern Gauteng (BLNG) visited our plot situated 30 km north of Pretoria for a morning of close-up birding. As the day progressed, we were eager to catch and ring the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* that was breeding in the nest box situated in a Fever Tree in our garden. When we finally decided to remove the breeding bird from the box and ring it, we were all surprised by our discovery. In the box there were 5 light-blue eggs – one approximately 30% larger than the others. It also had fine brown speckles, while the other eggs had no markings. We assumed that this was a Cuckoo-infested nest, and at that time our best guess was that the imposter was a Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius* as it was calling all day. I was assigned to monitor this nest throughout the course of the breeding season.

I decided to check on the nest every few days. On 30 December 2012, I discovered that there were only 4 eggs remaining - 3 pale blue eggs and the larger blue speckled egg. It is unknown what had happened to the 5th egg. During my inspection on 7 January 2013 I found two naked chicks – one Myna and one that was presumably the Red-chested Cuckoo. As time passed, both chicks grew quickly in size and both donned a considerable feather cover. The smaller chick was obviously the Myna with its brown plumage and yellow bill and face. The second chick, however, was not as previously believed, a Red-chested Cuckoo, but a Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* instead. This was evident from its buff throat, breast and underparts, spotted back and reddish-brown eye ring.

Both chicks remained in the nest box for the following few days. The remaining two eggs never seemed to hatch. The chicks quickly grew to a considerable size and from then onwards I noted that the adults visited the nest less frequently.

On 20 January 2013, the ringers returned to put a ring on the very special Cuckoo for it was now an appropriate size. I ringed the bird with great enthusiasm and released it back into the nest for further development. The very same day, I observed that the Cuckoo made a few attempts to exit the nest box, but seemed not yet ready for the adventure.

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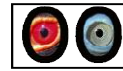


Fig 1 - The 3 Myna eggs clearly smaller than the speckled Great Spotted Cuckoo egg.

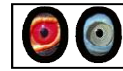


Fig 2 – Great Spotted Cuckoo chick on the left and Myna chick on the right

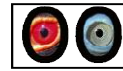


Fig 3 – Great Spotted Cuckoo (left) much larger than Myna (right)



Fig 4 - The ringed Great Spotted Cuckoo on 20 January 2013