Biodiversity Observations

http://bo.adu.org.za

An electronic journal published by the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town

The scope of Biodiversity Observations consists of papers describing observations about biodiversity in general, including animals, plants, algae and fungi. This includes observations of behaviour, breeding and flowering patterns, distributions and range extensions, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and colouration/plumage variations. Biotic interactions such as pollination, fruit dispersal, herbivory and predation fall within the scope, as well as the use of indigenous and exotic species by humans. Observations of naturalised plants and animals will also be considered. Biodiversity Observations will also publish a variety of other interesting or relevant biodiversity material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, book reviews and any other appropriate material. Further details and guidelines to authors are on this website.

NEST USURPER - HANGING BY A THREAD

H. Dieter Oschadleus

Recommended citation format:
Oschadleus HD 2016. Nest usurper - hanging by a thread. Biodiversity Observations, Vol 7.40:1-2

URL: http://bo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=233

Published online: 25 July 2016

– ISSN 2219-0341 –

PHOWN (PHOtos of Weaver Nests) Ecology

NEST USURPER - HANGING BY A THREAD

H. Dieter Oschadleus

* Corresponding author: doschadleus@gmail.com

There are several Cape Weaver (*Ploceus capensis*) colonies in the parking areas of the Jack Muller Park, Bellville, South Africa. These colonies have resident Red-headed Finches (*Amadina erythrocephala*) that appear to roost in these nests year-round, and have laid eggs at least once (Oschadleus 2016). These Red-headed Finches are far out of range and their origin is not clear, but may originally have been escaped aviary birds. Peter Nupen wrote me an email on 23/07/2015: “For the last four years, I have had Red-headed Finches regularly at my bird feeders. I am probably one kilometre from the Jack Muller Park as the crow (Red-headed Finch?) flies. I have definitely noted juveniles at my feeders, so I guess that they are breeding already”. Thus they may be considered as feral, i.e. breeding in the wild for three generations. I have been checking this Cape Weaver colony nearly monthly since 3 July 2015 to monitor the Red-headed Finches present in this area.

On 15 May 2016, although still winter, there were seven green Cape Weaver nests in the colony while the rest of the approximately 100 nests were old, left hanging from the previous summer. Male Cape Weavers were actively building nests too, but it was likely weeks before the females start laying eggs. A male Red-headed Finch flew into a weaver nest to investigate it – finches regularly check nests during the day, possibly to check the condition before choosing one to roost in that evening.

It is then that I noticed a nest with a strange appendage quite high in the Fever tree (*Vachellia xanthophloea*). It was a Red-headed Finch, hanging lifeless from a noose around the head below a nest. The noose was a broad grass leaf or probably palm strip, i.e. natural nest material rather than a synthetic thread, that trapped the finch. The finch died either by strangulation, or hunger while being trapped.

Red-headed Finches regularly use the nests of other species, especially weavers, to roost and breed in. This saves the finches the energetic costs of nest building. But there are probably some costs to this behaviour, for instance, predators may find weaver colonies more easily than single nests, or parasites that persist in weaver nests after weavers departed may have a negative impact on the finches. The incident of the trapped finch is a clear cost, even if a very rare event.

This is the first record of a Red-headed Finch being trapped in a weaver nest causing death, as postulated may happen (Oschadleus 2012). Other species have suffered the same fate, including weavers in their own nests, as well as Diederick Cuckoos when laying eggs in weaver nests. Species documented to have been trapped in weaver nests are: Lesser Masked Weaver, Village Weaver, Southern Masked Weaver, Southern Red Bishop, Diederik Cuckoo (references in Oschadleus 1996), Sociable Weaver, Cape Weaver, Pygmy Falcon, and possibly a Cape Dwarf Chameleon (Oschadleus 2012).

References

Oschadleus D. 1996. Weaving death traps. Bird Numbers 6:30-31.

Oschadleus HD. 2012. Trapped! Weaver nests as death traps. Ornithological Observations 3:38-43.

Oschadleus HD. 2016. Red-headed Finches using Cape Weaver nests. Kite 111: 7.

See more details of the colony record:
http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown_vm.php?vm=19357

Fig. 1. The Cape Weaver colony at Jack Muller Park, showing the nest with a dead Red-headed Finch.

Fig. 2. Close-up of the Red-headed Finch, trapped by a noose of natural nest material of a Cape Weaver nest.

– ISSN 2219-0341 –