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.

Lead Editor: Arnold van der Westhuizen – Paper Editor: Les G Underhill

EUROPEAN BEE-EATER *MEROPS APIASTER* ON ROBBEN ISLAND

Bukola Braimoh and María López Gómez

Recommended citation format:


Published online: 31 December 2016
EUROPEAN BEE-EATER MEROPS APIASTER ON ROBBEN ISLAND

Bukola Braimoh1* and María López Gómez1,2

1Animal Demography Unit, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7701 South Africa

2Global Training Programme, University of the Basque Country, Gipuzkoa Campus, Donostia, San Sebastián, 20018 Spain

Email: bukola.braimoh@gmail.com

Robben Island (33°48’S, 18°22’E) located in the Western Cape, South Africa, is a World Heritage Site. The island is c. 11 km from the port of Cape Town, has an area of 507 ha and a perimeter of c. 12 km (Sherley et al. 2011). 167 species of birds have been recorded on Robben Island (164 listed in Sherley et al. 2011, with three species added subsequently: Pied Avocet Recurvirostra avosetta (Sherley & Robinson 2012), Black-winged Stilt Himantopus himantopus (Rueda & Sherley 2013) and African Spoonbill Platalea alba (van der Westhuizen et al. 2014).

The baseline bird list for the island was compiled by Crawford & Dyer (2000), and can be considered as a basic list of species recorded on the island to the end of the 20th century. It contained 143 species. Using bird data mainly from the Birds in Reserves Project (BIRP) and the Second Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2), Sherley et al. (2011) added 21 species to the Crawford & Dyer (2000) list.

Sherley et al. (2011) not only provided a comprehensive bird list for the island but also wrote species accounts for each of the 129 species recorded on the island since 2000, capturing the history of occurrence of each species, providing insights into frequency of occurrence, as well as the breeding/migratory status of each of these species.
Of the 164 species recorded listed by Sherley et al (2011), 35 had not been observed on the island since January 2000. One of these species was the European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*, so it does not have a species text in Sherley et al. (2011). It was listed as a vagrant species by Crawford & Dyer (2000) who provided no information about when this species was recorded or how many times it had been recorded. This short note reports that the European Bee-eater is the first of the 35 species to be recorded.

On 29 December 2016, we observed six European Bee-eaters on Robben Island close to the lighthouse in an area with buildings and trees. Three individuals were perched on a pole underneath a tree (Figure 1), two others were flying from tree to tree, and another was perched on a cable (Figure 2) where two Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* (Figure 3) were also perched. The bee-eaters in flight appeared to be hunting for insects.

This observation brings the number of species recorded on Robben Island since 2000 to 133, the 129 species listed by Sherley et al. (2011), the three new species added subsequently, plus the European Bee-eater.

Figure 2: European Bee-eater perched on a cable. Robben Island. Photographer © María López Gómez.

Figure 3: Two Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* perched on the same cable as the European Bee-eater in Figure 2. Photographer © María López Gómez.
Acknowledgements

The authors deeply appreciate the logistics provided by the Robben Island Museum and the Animal Demography Unit, University of Cape Town. BB is supported by the Leventis Foundation and MLG is supported by the Basque Government and the Basque University. Many thanks to Les Underhill for providing mentorship, encouraging the write up of this observation and for reading the draft.

References


