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EUROPEAN BEE-EATER *MEROPS APIASTER* ON ROB BEN ISLAND

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EUROPEAN BEE-EATER *MEROPS APIASTER*
ON ROB BEN ISLAND

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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



Figure 1: Three European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* perched on a pole near the lighthouse on Robben Island. Photographer © María López Gómez

of each species, providing insights into frequency of occurrence, as well as the breeding/migratory status of each of these species.



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

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

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