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FIRST OBSERVATION OF CAPE BATIS *BATIS CAPENSIS* ON ROBBEN ISLAND

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AVIAN RECORDS

FIRST OBSERVATION OF CAPE BATIS *BATIS CAPENSIS* ON ROBBEN ISLAND

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Robben Island (33°48'S, 18°22'E) is a World Heritage Site best known for the incarceration of former South African president, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (RIM, 2006). The island is located in Table Bay, Western Cape, 11 km north of Cape Town and 7 km west of Bloubergstrand. The island has an area of 507 ha and a perimeter of c. 12 km (Sherley et al. 2011), and provides habitat to a variety of fauna and flora (Crawford & Dyer, 2000; RIM, 2006).

Expanding on the bird list by Crawford & Dyer (2000) (143 species), the Birds in Reserves Project (BIRP) and the Second Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2) have added some additional species, bringing the total reported species to 164 (Sherley et al. 2011). This has grown further to include four previously unreported species (bringing the total to 168 avian species), including; Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* (Sherley & Robinson 2012), Black-winged *Stilt Himantopus himantopus* (Rueda & Sherley 2013), African Spoonbill *Platalea alba* (van der Westhuizen et al. 2014) and European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* (Braimoh & López Gómez 2016).

Yet another unreported species was discovered on the 22 July 2017. Three Cape Batis *Batis capensis* were seen foraging on the outskirts of a eucalypt plantation (exact coords: 33°48'46.6"S 18°22'12.8"E; Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Site where three Cape Batis were seen on Robben Island.*

The Cape Batis (Figure 2) is a common resident in most warm temperate regions across South Africa (Figure 3), inhabiting natural Afromontane and lowland evergreen forest, bushveld and acacia patches (Hockey et al 2005). They are absent from arid or very cold locations and are known to be altitudinal migrants between May and September (Hockey et al 2005). Migrants do not travel far from their breeding ranges (Hockey et al 2005), with a maximum reported displacement of 50 km (SAFRING unpublished data; Ring AR79788).

Figure 2. *Cape Batis* by F. Rautenbach (http://vmus.adu.org.za/?vm=BirdPix-440)

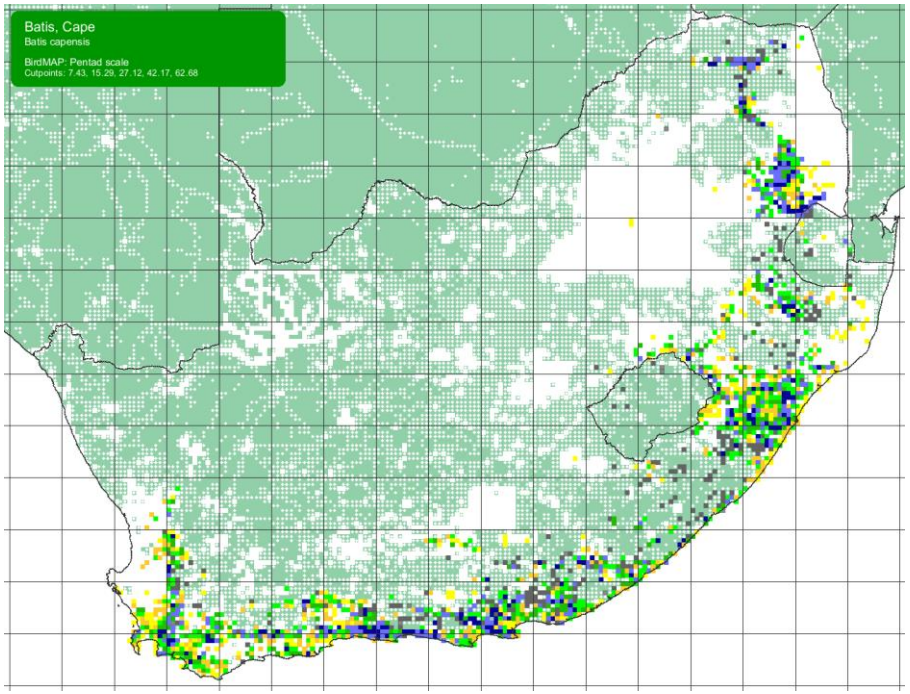

Figure 3. *SABAP2 distribution map for the Cape Batis, downloaded 2 August 2017. The detailed interpretation of this map is provided by Underhill & Brooks (2016). Pentads with four or more checklists are either shaded white, species not recorded, or in colour, with shades based on reporting rate: yellow 0-7.4%, orange 7.4–16%, light green 16–28.3%, dark green 28.3–44.3%, light blue 44.3–64.7% and dark blue 64.7–100%.*

As this species is known to migrate up to 50 km it could quite easily travel the distance from Bloubergstrand (where it is known to occur) to Robben Island. Due to its inconspicuous nature and choice of habitat (dense vegetation) it may easily be missed by most people. Cape Weavers *Ploceus capensis* are also known to make a similar journey (Oschadleus 2003).

The sighting of the Cape Batis was made when viewing a group of Cape Weavers feeding on the ground and in the eucalypts. The group of three Cape Batis, possibly females, were foraging in the low branches of the same eucalypt. It was not possible to take any photos and the batis retreated as soon as the weavers fled. The same site was visited the following day in an attempt to photograph the batis. They were seen again, feeding on the ground, just a few meters west of the first location. Again, they were in the presence of the Cape Weavers and fled as soon as the weavers retreated to the opposite side of a fire break. Although no photos were taken at either visit, this species was clearly seen, and due to its characteristic appearance (Figure 2), it is unlikely to have been mistaken for another species of bird.

With the addition of this observation, the total number of avian species recorded on Robben Island is now 165, and the number reported since 2000 is 134.

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