

### A new host for the Redchested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius* in southern Africa

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Rowan (1983, *The doves, parrots, louries and cuckoos of southern Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip) includes among the authenticated southern African hosts of the Redchested Cuckoo 13 turdids (thrushes, chats and robins), one muscicapid and the Cape Wagtail *Motacilla capensis*. She also tabled ten species of birds which are alleged to have been parasitized by this cuckoo (one bulbul, three turdids, one muscicapid, one monarchid, a shrike, a starling, a sunbird and the Cape Siskin *Pseudochloroptila totta*). Since her review of the southern African cuckoos, no further southern African hosts of the Redchested Cuckoo have been reported to our knowledge.

On 19 December 1992 we found the nest of a Longtailed Wagtail *Motacilla clara* inaccessibly placed on a wooden beam about 5 m above ground level under the thatched roof of a shelter in Game Valley, a nature reserve about 20 km north of Pietermaritzburg, Natal. The nest could then have contained eggs, since the parent birds

were in attendance and showing anxiety. On 16 January 1993 when we looked at the nest again, it could barely contain a large, fully feathered Redchested Cuckoo chick which looked to be within just a few days of being able to fly and could be seen easily from the ground. A Longtailed Wagtail adult brought food to the cuckoo chick while we watched. The young cuckoo was sooty black, lightly barred with whitish feather fringes above and below, and was unmistakably that of a Redchested Cuckoo, a common bird in Game Valley; identification was confirmed with a 20× Kowa spotting scope at close range. This is the first documented record of the Longtailed Wagtail acting as host to the Redchested Cuckoo in southern Africa, but this wagtail has been recorded once in East Africa as host to this cuckoo species (Irwin, M.P.S. 1988 in Fry, Keith & Urban (Eds) *The birds of Africa*, Vol. 3, London: Academic Press).

The nest site in Game Valley was about 50 m from the Karkloof River where the wagtails are usually to be seen, and right at the edge of a fairly dense patch of forest. It matched fairly closely the kind of nest site a robin of the genus *Cossypha* might use and its proximity to the forest would have made it more vulnerable to parasitism by the Redchested Cuckoo, a forest inhabitant, than if it had been in a more typical site in the river bank.

### Yellowbellied Bulbul Gleaning on a Klipspringer

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A number of bulbuls (Pycnonotidae) forage in close proximity to certain mammals, opportunistically catching cryptic invertebrate prey flushed from vegetation by the larger animal (Dean and MacDonald 1981). However, the Yellowbellied Bulbul, *Chlorocichla flaviventris* has been observed gleaning, presumably for ectoparasites, on the bodies of several ungulate species, including grey duikers (Vernon 1972), impalas (Chalton 1976; Steyn 1975) and nyalas (Dean & MacDonald 1981).

On 11th August, 1992, in the Matobo National Park near Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, a group of four resting klipspringers *Oreotragus oreotragus* were under observation in the grassland/woodland ecotone at the base of a granite kopje. At 07h21 a Yellowbellied Bulbul flew down from a nearby branch, alighting on the back of a standing subadult female. It pecked three times on the upper shoulders, hopped onto the head and pecked once around the left ear. The bird then flew back to the original branch, but returned to the subadult's back almost immediately. Without pecking here, it jumped back onto the head, pecked once at the

base of the right ear, and flew 25 m before disappearing from view. The entire sequence lasted only 23 seconds. The klipspringer appeared to pay no attention to the bird whatsoever.

This is the first record, to my knowledge, of a feeding association between *C. flaviventris* and klipspringers, and it seems probable that this was a further case of gleaning for ectoparasites. A recent examination of a dead klipspringer near Beit Bridge yielded a load of 58 ticks (S.C. Roberts, unpubl. data). A parasite load of this magnitude is potentially a very attractive food source; indeed, Redwinged and Palewinged Starlings are reported to glean ectoparasites from klipspringers regularly (Dean and MacDonald 1981). The growing body of records documenting gleaning behavior by the Yellowbellied Bulbul confirms that it feeds at least facultatively in this manner, and the precise location of this incident supports Vernon's (1972) suggestion that this form of bird-mammal relationship may frequently be overlooked due to poor visibility in thickets or forest margins.

### REFERENCES

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 STEYN, P. 1975. Yellowbreasted bulbul feeding on an impala. *Lammergeyer* 22: 51.  
 VERNON, C.J. 1972. *Chlorocichla flaviventris* perching on *Sylvicapra grimmia*. *Ostrich* 43: 137.