

# Ornithological Observations



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Ornithological Observations accepts papers containing faunistic information about birds. This includes descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and plumage. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, and any other interesting or relevant material.

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## WHITE-BELLIED SUNBIRD BREEDING IN GREENHOUSE

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## WHITE-BELLIED SUNBIRD BREEDING IN GREENHOUSE

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The White-bellied Sunbird *Cinnyris talatala* is a common species which is found in *Acacia* and other woodlands in the North West, Western Free State, Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal provinces of South Africa (Hockey *et al.* 2005).

It usually nests in plants which have thorns (Hockey *et al.* 2005), but it may occasionally hang its nests on artificial structures, such as washing lines (Tarboton 2011).

On 8 July 2013 I visited the farm Boscia which is located north of Brits (S25°32.117' E27°44.742'). Orchids are grown on the farm in a greenhouse. Nollie Cilliers, one of the farmers, showed me two White-bellied Sunbird nests in the greenhouse. The nests were attached to a wire that is part of the side construction of the greenhouse. Both nests were only a few centimetres from the sidewall of the greenhouse which is made of a plastic material.

The one nest was located in the front of the greenhouse only a few meters from the main entrance. In this instance it is quite easy for the adult and immature birds to enter and leave the greenhouse. However, the other nest is at the back of the greenhouse and the



**Fig 1** - Outside view of the greenhouse with the front entrance

birds have to fly through the 30 m long greenhouse to reach either the nest or entrance. It is also interesting to note that the greenhouse is closed during the night. Both adult and immature birds were seen to use the entrance even after the chicks left the nest.

According to Nollie Cilliers, a keen birder, the White-bellied Sunbirds used the nests during 2011, 2012 and 2013. His impression was that it was possibly the same pair that had built the two nests.

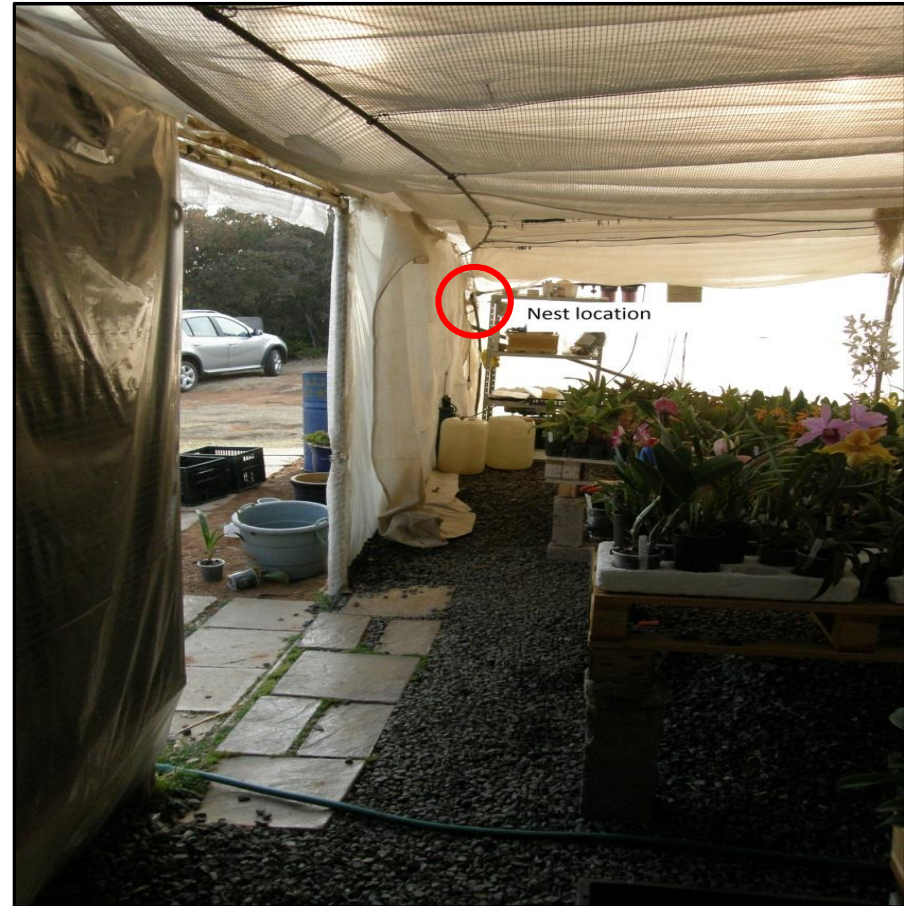
The nests look like normal White-bellied Sunbirds nests in structure and the materials used.



**Fig 2** - Close-up view of the nest in the front of the greenhouse

According to Cilliers, the immature birds did try to find nectar from the orchids' flowers.

It is not clear why the sunbirds would choose this site to breed. It does provide protection from the outside elements. The temperature



**Fig 3** - Nest location in the front of the greenhouse

in the green house is controlled (it never drops below 10°C) and it does provide safety from predators and parasitic birds. According to Cilliers there is considerable movement in the green house on a daily basis, but the birds do not seem to mind the activity.

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Fig 4 - Nest location at the back of the greenhouse

### Acknowledgements

I thank Nollie Cilliers and Thinus Oberholzer from Plantae Orchards ([www.plantae.co.za](http://www.plantae.co.za)) for showing me the nests and providing the relevant information.

### References

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