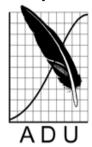
Ornithological Observations



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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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SOUTHERN YELLOW-BILLED HORNBILL BREEDING IN ELECTRICITY POLE

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The Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill Tockus leucomelas is a common species which is found in Acacia and broad-leaved savannas in the northern parts of South Africa. It is near endemic to southern Africa (Hockey et al. 2005).

It usually nests in a natural hole in a tree or one excavated by a woodpecker (Tarboton 2011). I could find no reference in the literature of a Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill breeding in a manmade structure.

During an atlasing outing in May 2008, I saw a Southern Yellowbilled Hornbill flying with a worm in its beak and entering a nesting hole in a wooden electricity pole. A week later I returned to the nesting site and obtained video footage of the male feeding its chicks.

The nest was about 5 m high with the entrance facing north. The nest site was in a pole alongside a gravel road used by cars and a pedestrian path which is used by hundreds of school children. While taking a video of the nest, children walked past the nest on the way to school for more than an hour. During this period the male waited patiently with a berry in its beak, not far from the nest, and just after 08:00, with all the children at school, it flew straight to the nest to deliver the berry.



Fig 1 - Male bird bringing a berry to the nest.

The nesting hole was plastered closed with only a narrow gap in the middle, as is the normal practice for this species.

I was unfortunately unable to see how many chicks were in the nest. I could see two bills – the one bill was that of the female and the other of a chick. However, there might have been other chicks which were out if view in the nesting cavity.

For a video of the nest as well as some feeding activity see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPOb9LSAI0c

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Tarboton, W. 2011. Roberts nests and eggs of southern African birds. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town. p301.