



Ornithological Observations

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An electronic journal published by the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town

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Editor: Arnold van der Westhuizen

A PHOTO REPORT: CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE CUCKOO KIND!

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Recommended citation format:

Cornish L 2015. A photo report: close encounter of the cuckoo kind! Ornithological Observations, Vol 6: 208-214

URL: <http://oo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=189>

Published online: 23 October 2015

- ISSN 2219-0341 -



A PHOTO REPORT: CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE CUCKOO KIND!

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We were leaving Marievale on New Year's day at about 10:00 – congratulating ourselves for seeing four Little Bitterns. We noticed a group of birds on the fence, and amongst the Southern Red Bishops was a female Diederick Cuckoo with a pale pink egg in her bill. We did not want to get any closer, in case we scared off all the birds, and unfortunately were just too far away to hear the altercation.

We were surprised. We never witnessed this before, and the egg was not the usual blue colour of the Southern Red Bishop, which is the same colour that the cuckoo is supposed to lay for that host.

Soon after, the cuckoo flew off, flying to some far distant trees across the other side of the water, closely followed by the male bishop. We did not see where the female bishop had gone. The whole encounter took about four minutes, although we did not know when it started.

In literature it is described that, after the female cuckoo enters the nest of the host, she takes one of the eggs already there, then lays were own egg. She removes the host's eggs from the nest, flies away and eats it (Davies 2000, Payne 2005 and Erritzøe *et al.* 2012). Payne (2005) mentions that sometimes the host's egg is removed earlier, but this would necessitate two visits to the host nest and double the chance of being caught. It still is an enigma why the egg was pink and not the usual blue color?

References

Davies NB 2000. Cuckoos, Cowbirds and Other Cheats. T & AD Poyser, London. p 88.

Erritzøe J, Mann CF, Brammer FP & Fuller RA 2012. Cuckoos of the world. Christopher Helm, London. p 345.

Payne RB 2005. The Cuckoos. Oxford University Press, Oxford. p 394.



Fig 1 – There were three male Red Bishops, a female and the imposter – a female Diederik Cuckoo.



Fig 2 - There seemed to be stalemate for a few minutes, then one of the male bishops flew down to the track and the cuckoo followed.



Fig 3 - Two of the other male bishops disappeared, but the female and the one male remained. Once on the road, the female bishop approached the cuckoo very closely.



Fig 4 - The cuckoo put the egg down twice, and immediately picked it up again. After a short while, the cuckoo flew back to the fence, and so did the bishops, but this time they kept their distance. Again, it seemed to be stalemate, until the cuckoo dropped the egg, and then the male bishop flew in really close.



Fig 5 - The male bishop was nearly on top of the cuckoo, and appeared to be harassing her. At this stage, the male bishop was most "fluffed up".



Fig 6 - After a short while, he flew up to join the female who had moved, but was still close.

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- ISSN 2219-0341 -