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RECORDS OF FERAL COMMON PEACOCK *PAVO CRISTATUS* IN AMANZIMTOTI, KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA

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The first paper in Volume 1 of Ornithological Observations (Leshoro *et al* 2010) describes observations of the population of Common Peacocks on Robben Island in Table Bay, South Africa. The authors cite the authoritative Roberts Birds of southern Africa (Hockey *et al* 2005) claiming the feral Common Peacock *Pavo cristatus* population on Robben Island, Table Bay, South Africa as being "the only self-sustaining population" of this species "on the continent of Africa".

Leshoro *et al* (2010) also claim a first breeding record of an active nest for the species in 2008. They indicate that records trace the introduction of the species to Robben Island in 1968.

Records have been maintained of a feral Common Peacock population at the Amanzimtoti Bird Sanctuary (S30°02.100, E30°53.483), Amanzimtoti, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa since June 2002. No records could be found of the date of introduction of the species into the Bird Sanctuary, but a marketing pamphlet jointly published by the Borough of Amanzimtoti and the Publicity and Travel Department of the South African Railways (Anon 1953) mentions "Peacocks preening themselves on the lovely lawn". The introduction must, therefore, predate 1953.



Fig 1 – Common Peacock female with three chicks photographed in January 2011 in a garden adjacent to Amanzimtoti Bird Sanctuary.

As at Robben Island (Leshoro *et al* 2010) broods accompanying Peacocks were often found every year since records were kept (Fig 1). The first active nest was recorded in 2005 (2 eggs) within the Sanctuary in a depression in tall secondary grassland on the fringe of a patch of coastal forest. Active nests have been recorded on three additional occasions since then, in 2010 (3 eggs), 2012 (3 eggs) and 2013 (2 eggs), one within the Sanctuary and two in private gardens adjacent to the Sanctuary. All clutches at these active nests hatched successfully.



Fig 2 – Common Peacocks roosting in a Flatcrown *Albizia adianthifolia* in a garden adjacent to the Amanzimtoti Bird Sanctuary (July 2013).

Population estimates of Common Peacocks in the Amanzimtoti Bird Sanctuary have been difficult to determine due to their spread across neighbouring private gardens and lack of access to the Sanctuary at roosting time. Single roosts of as many as sixteen individual birds have been recorded in a tree outside of the Sanctuary in 2013 (Fig 2). Simultaneous roosts in two other known localities of five birds and three birds respectively, indicate a minimum 2013 population of twenty-four birds (with an unknown number inside the Sanctuary).

The claim made by Hockey *et al* (2005) that the Robben Island Common Peacock population is the only "self-sustaining" population of the species in Africa perhaps requires revisiting. Claims made to exclude Common Peacocks from KwaZulu Natal bird checklists indicate that the Amanzimtoti population of the species is artificially maintained. While seed is provided in a single spot at the Sanctuary on a regular basis, this is seldom used by the Peacocks and is



Fig 3 – Common Peacock males at Amanzimtoti Bird Sanctuary.

dominated by Spur-winged Geese *Plectropterus gambensis* and Vervet Monkeys *Chlorocebus pygerythrus*.

It is, therefore, believed that the longevity of the Common Peacock population in and around the Amanzimtoti Bird Sanctuary, their spread onto adjacent land, their obvious breeding success, and their ability to withstand predation by human, domestic animal and other predation provides sufficient evidence of a naturalised, self-sustaining population.

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