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AN UNUSUAL MEAL FOR AFRICAN BLACK OYSTERCATCHER *HAEMATOPUS MOQUINI* CHICKS

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AN UNUSUAL MEAL FOR AFRICAN BLACK OYSTERCATCHER *HAEMATOPUS MOQUINI* CHICKS

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African Black Oystercatchers *Haematopus moquini* feed on a variety of marine invertebrates such as molluscs (mussels, limpets and snails), polychaetes and crustaceans (Hockey 1996). They are even known to forage for insects (Ryan and Visagie 2008) and possibly fish (Pajmans 2013). This diet may vary depending on the shoreline they occupy (sandy/rocky), as rocky shore individuals mostly forage on exposed prey while sandy shore individuals are known to probe for buried food items (Hockey 1996). There is further separation in chosen food items during breeding and non-breeding seasons as chicks are fed a variety of prey items (Hockey and Underhill 1984).

On 7 March 2013, while monitoring the oystercatcher nesting site at Noordhoek beach (S34°07' E18°20'), I noticed an earthworm (Oligochaeta) placed over one of the chicks in a pair (Fig 1). The worm was nearly clear of any debris until handled for this photo. Prey items are a common sight during these visits as adult oystercatchers will abandon the prey brought for chicks when potential danger is present. Prey items commonly seen are open mussels and limpets.

Although unusual for the African Black Oystercatcher, terrestrial feeding on earthworms is well documented in other oystercatcher

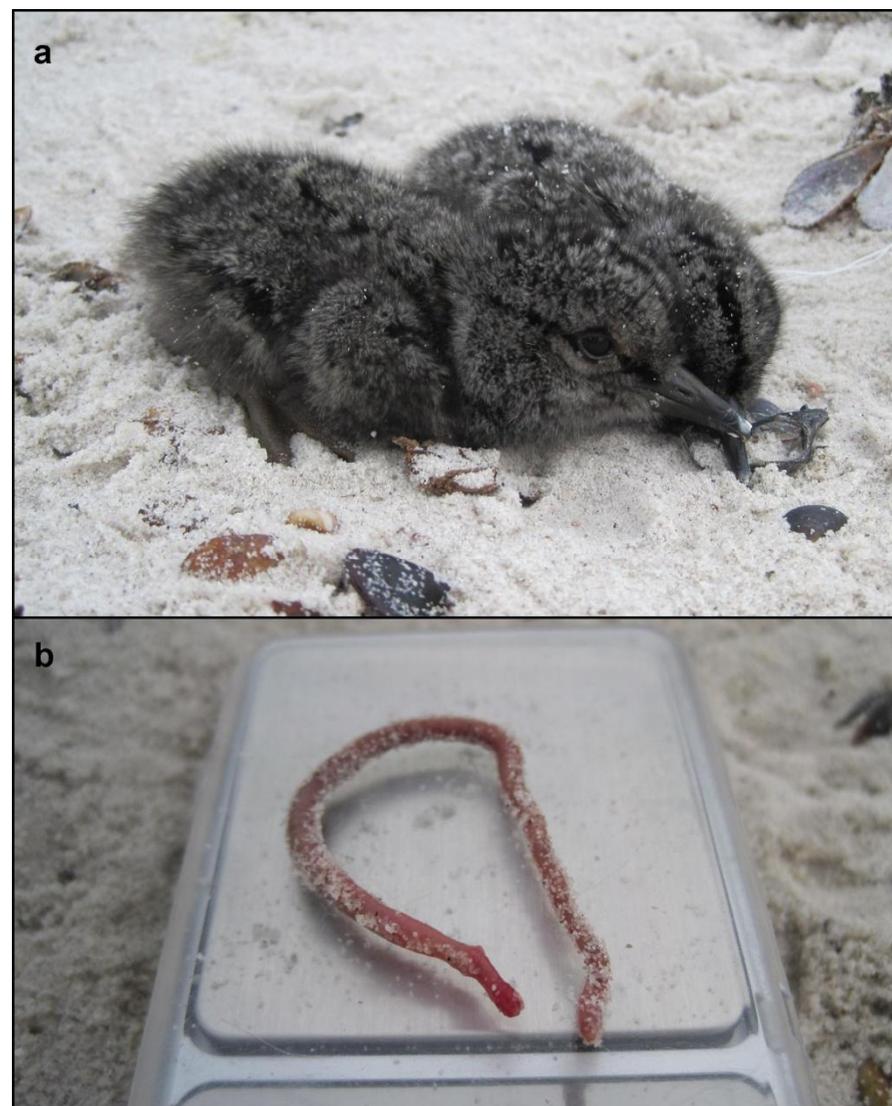


Fig 1 – a) Pair of African Black Oystercatcher chicks at Noordhoek beach, 7 March 2013, b) earthworm found on the second chick

species such as the Eurasian and Magellanic Oystercatchers (Hockey 1996). As the nest site is situated on a sandy beach and it is near the Noordhoek wetlands it is likely the parents came across this worm when probing the less saline soils, which they may have chosen as it required less effort than travelling to the nearby rocky shore.

Another interesting prey item was noted on 31 March 2013 while monitoring the nests on Jutten Island, Saldanha Bay (S33°04' E17°57'). In this case I found a chick feeding on a large (15 cm) polychaete worm (Fig 2). I retreated from the nesting territory shortly after photographing the chick to avoid causing further disturbance the chick and parents. On returning to the nest 2 hours later, the worm was finished (not visible) and both chicks were still there. Although not unusual (as polychaetes are common prey) it is interesting to see this in person.

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Acknowledgements

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Fig 2 – An African Black Oystercatcher chick on Jutten Island, 31 March 2013 feeding on a polychaete worm

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