

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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CHESTNUT WEAVER *PLOCEUS RUBIGINOSUS*, A BRAND NEW VISITOR TO SOUTH AFRICA

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On the morning of 9 January 2011, my husband and I started a SABAP2 atlas survey. We were very surprised by the number of birds recorded, especially after recording the first sighting of a Hadedda Ibis *Bostrychia hagedash* at Nossob. Abdim Storks *Ciconia abdimii* were everywhere and the numbers of species recorded increased rapidly if you compare with what we usually encounter. Later in the morning we were editing photos, but at the same time listening and observing our birdbath in the garden. A Brubru *Nilaus afer* called and both of us went around to look at the bird. To our surprise we saw a very different bird in the *Acacia* next to our bedroom window - a Chestnut Weaver *Ploceus rubiginosus* male, in full breeding plumage.

According to Fry and Keith (2004), only two distinct populations occur. The one is in north-east Africa, from Eritrea to the south of Tanzania, and the other in south-west Angola, northern Namibia and north-west Botswana. In southern Africa, these species are concentrated in north-west and north central Namibia, south of Windhoek. Their movements are said to be related to rainfall (Herremans, 1997). They are also a primarily dry-season visitor to north-west Botswana.

The Chestnut Weaver (Figure 1) was spotted among the Southern Masked Weavers making its way from one Shepard's Tree *Boscia albitranca* to another.



Figure 1: *The Chestnut Weaver in the Acacia erioloba*

For the next couple of days I tried to be extra vigilant to observe the mysterious bird. It seems to disappear into the thickness of the Shepard's Tree and only emerge slightly now and then. One of the observations was in the biggest *Acacia erioloba* in our garden singing away happily. I also observed the bird bathing in our birdbath (Figure 2). The bird was last seen on 12 January 2011.

Food mainly consists of seeds (primary grass seed), insects and nectar, especially of *Aloe* spp (Fry & Keith, 2004). However, we have witnessed that it enjoys the berries of the Shepard's Tree as well.

Pending acceptance by the Rarities Committee this sighting is the first record for South Africa. It also means that the total of the official South African list moves from 841 to 842 birds.



Figure 2: Chestnut Weaver bathing

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