

# Ornithological Observations



An electronic journal published by BirdLife South Africa and the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town



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.

**Editor: Arnold van der Westhuizen**

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## THE SEASONALITY OF THE AMETHYST SUNBIRD IN GROENKLOOF, PRETORIA

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Recommended citation format:

**Parker V. 2011.** The seasonality of the Amethyst Sunbird in Groenkloof, Pretoria. *Ornithological Observations*, Volume 2: 101

URL: <http://oo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=32>

Published online: 28 November 2011



## THE SEASONALITY OF THE AMETHYST SUNBIRD IN GROENKLOOF, PRETORIA

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All of the available information on the seasonal movements of the Amethyst Sunbird *Chalcomitra amethystina* in South Africa can be summed up by saying: "We think there are some seasonal movements but we know nothing about them". For example, Tree (1997) wrote of this species: "As with other sunbirds, it may be locally migratory to nomadic within its range," and a decade later he summarized the movements and migration of the species as "Sedentary, nomadic and locally migratory" (Tree 2007).

Data in the form of observed densities from transect counts were gathered over five years (August 2006 to July 2011). Counts were made both in the suburb of Groenkloof, Pretoria, and in undeveloped areas around the fringes of the city with predominantly natural vegetation. The data showed that, in the suburban area of Groenkloof, the species was predominantly a non-breeding winter visitor. The observed densities ranged from an average of 1 bird per 100 ha in the breeding season (October to December) to an average of approximately 50 birds per 100 ha in early winter (April to June). The species is thus predominantly a winter visitor in the suburban habitat of Pretoria.

Do these visitors potentially come from the fringe of the city? Observations in the undeveloped areas with natural vegetation revealed the same pattern of seasonality as the suburban environment. This rules out the possibility that birds from the surrounding undeveloped areas move into the suburban environment in winter. Data from SABAP1 (First Southern African Bird Atlas Project) and recoveries of ringed birds fail to shed significant light on the question (Tree 1997).

**I suggest that obtaining knowledge of the breeding range is the key to understanding the movements of this species.** Few, if any, Amethyst Sunbirds breed in Groenkloof (pers. obs). If we could determine the precise breeding range of the species we would begin to make progress towards determining where the winter visitors to Groenkloof, both the suburban and natural environments, might come from. Current distribution data for South Africa do not distinguish between the core of the breeding range and the non-breeding range. Breeding data from SABAP1 are not illuminating, largely because there were fewer than 700 records of breeding (Tree 1997). SABAP2 (Second Southern African Bird Atlas Project) is not collecting breeding data.

Data on the locations of nests of the species may unlock the secrets of its seasonal movements. Perhaps part of the answer is hidden away inside the collection of nest record cards at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town.

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### References

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