

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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FIRST OBSERVATION: PIED AVOCET AT ROBBEN ISLAND

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FIRST OBSERVATION: PIED AVOCET AT ROB BEN ISLAND

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Robben Island (33°48'S, 18°22'E) is an Important Bird Area (Barnes 1998) located approximately 11 km north of Cape Town and 7 km west of the nearest mainland at Bloubergstrand (de Villiers 1971). The island has approximately 12 km of shoreline, providing breeding and foraging habitat for a number of marine and coastal species (Crawford and Dyer 2000, Sherley *et al.* 2011). The coastline mainly consists of slate, but a small beach, known as Sandy Beach, occurs on the east coast.

The Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* is a common breeding resident in southern Africa, typically found at coastal saltworks, sewage pans and coastal lagoons (Tree 1997). In South Africa, one of the critical sites for the species in the Western Cape is the Rietvlei Wetland Reserve (33°50'S, 18°29'E) on the mainland adjacent and about 10 km from Robben Island. The maximum sighting of 669 birds at that locality represents more than 2% of the southern African population, last estimated to be between 15 000 and 25 000 individuals (Delany *et al.* 2009). Data from the second Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2, <http://sabap2.adu.org.za>) and the Bird in Reserves Project (BIRP, <http://birp.adu.org.za>) indicate that Pied Avocet are routinely encountered at the Rietvlei reserve. However, despite the presence of several Charadriiform species on the island and bird observations spanning at least the last two decades, Pied Avocet have not apparently been recorded on Robben Island (Crawford and Dyer 2000, Sherley *et al.* 2011).

At 10:30 on 11 June 2012, one adult Pied Avocet was observed and photographed foraging alone at the water's edge on Sandy Beach (Figure 1). The bird was watched for c. 5 minutes, after which a close approach by the observers caused it to fly out to sea (c. 50 m) and then adjacent to the shoreline to a point c. 50 m north of its original location. Whilst in flight, the Avocet was repeatedly mobbed by a Hartlaub's Gull *Larus hartlaubii*. No apparent aggressive or kleptoparasitic interactions were noted and the reasons for this antagonistic behaviour were not clear.

This observation takes the number of bird species recorded at Robben Island to 165 (Sherley *et al.* 2011).

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Fig 1 – Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* foraging on Sandy Beach, Robben Island.

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