

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

COURTSHIP OF THE GREEN-BACKED CAMAROPTERA *CAMAROPTERA BRACHYURA*

Joël Roerig

Recommended citation format:

Roerig, J 2012. Courtship of the Green-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brachyura*. Ornithological Observations, Volum 3: 230-231

URL: <http://oo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=68>

Published online: 09 November 2012

- ISSN 2219-0341 -



COURTSHIP OF THE GREEN-BACKED CAMAROPTERA CAMAROPTERA BRACHYURA

Joël Roerig*

* Corresponding author: roerig@gmail.com

The Green-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brachyura* is a relatively common bird, but because it is a fairly secretive skulker in thickets and riverine bush in moist savannah woodland (Dean 2005) it is usually located by its "bleating" alarm call. Although the Green-backed Camaroptera and the closely related Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brevicaudata* have an extremely large range and a population that is estimated to be increasing (Birdlife International 2012), their courtship behaviour is seldom recorded. Dean (2005) states that "in display, male flies in loop over perch, wings making a whirring sound", citing GL Maclean's species account in Roberts' Birds of southern Africa (1993, 6th ed). Carnaby (2008) concurs that "in courtship display, the male flies or jumps with whirring wings in a 'loop flight' from his perch", possibly quoting from the same or a related source.

Green-backed Camaropteras are monogamous and strongly territorial (Dean 2005). The main breeding period is from October until December, with egg laying records ranging from September to February (Tarboton 2011). Right in the middle of this breeding season, on 5 November 2011, I witnessed a courtship and mating ritual of the Green-backed Camaroptera in the riverine vegetation in front of chalet 6 of Vuyatela Lodge (S24°42.350' E31°32.067') in Djuma Private Nature Reserve, located in the Sabi Sand Game Reserve in the Lowveld of Mpumalanga province.

To separate recorded from remembered observations, I first quote the notes I made immediately afterwards: "Initially male chased female at high speed through shrubs, mostly Magic Guarri.



Fig 1 – The Magic Guarri (middle) near chalet number 6 of Vuyatela Lodge in which courtship and mating between two Green-backed Camaropteras took place on 5 November 2011.

They don't seem to get injured. Male is calling continuously. Male then perches on horizontal branch within shrub, keeps calling and flicks wings and upright tail very quickly. He then bounces straight up and down very, very quickly – about 40 cm. He does this often and energetically. The female watches from a perch nearby and flicks her wings a little, almost like a shiver. After this the male mounts the female for less than a second and they fly off. Apparently the male starts the chasing again, but I lose track of them and also don't hear them anymore nearby."

If memory serves me correctly, the male was using several vocalisations described by Dean, including the "loud penetrating *kwit-kwit-kwit-kwit*", its bubbling (apalis-type) call and occasionally its "bleating" alarm call. During the spectacular, Broadbill-like bounces, the male produced "a loud *trrip* sound with wings", as described in



the field guide Birds of Kenya & Northern Tanzania (Zimmerman *et al.* 1999). This is most likely the whirring sound, mentioned by Dean and Carnaby.

I did not have photographic equipment with me at the time, but the dynamic ritual in the middle of the Magic Guarri *Euclea divinorum* would not have been very conducive to photography. The spectacle could be followed quite well with binoculars, since it has the capability to quickly focus on the moving birds *within* the shrub. Afterwards, I took a picture of the vegetation in which the courtship and copulation sequence occurred (Fig 1).

- oo0oo -

References

BirdLife International 2012. Species factsheet: *Camaroptera brachyura*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 25/9/2012.

Carnaby T 2008. Beat about the bush – Birds. Jacana Media, Johannesburg: 550.

Dean WRJ 2005. Green-backed *Camaroptera Camaroptera brachyura* in Hockey PAR, Dean WRJ, Ryan PG (eds). Roberts – Birds of Southern Africa, 7th edition. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town: 856.

Tarboton W 2011. Roberts Nests & Eggs of southern African birds. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town: 268.

Zimmerman DA, Turner D, Pearson D 1999. Birds of Kenya & Northern Tanzania. Christopher Helm, an imprint of A & C Black Publishers, London: 475.