

# 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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## TWO KALAHARI SCRUB ROBINS MOBBING A PUFF ADDER

*Elsa Bussière*

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## TWO KALAHARI SCRUB ROBINS MOBBING A PUFF ADDER

*Elsa Bussière\**

Animal Demography Unit, Department of Zoology,  
University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7701, South Africa

\*Corresponding author: [elsa.bussiere@uct.ac.za](mailto:elsa.bussiere@uct.ac.za)

The Tswalu Kalahari Reserve covers 100 000 ha; it is the largest private game reserve in South Africa. Located in the southern part of the Kalahari, the codominant life-forms of the reserve are hemicryptophyte grasses and a variety of phanerophyte trees and shrubs, typical of the arid savannah biome, the southern African desert biome housing the highest overall faunal richness (Lovegrove 1993). Tswalu is located in the Northern Cape, 180 km south-east of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

At 18:45 on the 8 November 2012, a student field guide from Tswalu Kalahari Reserve was driving me on the dirt road leading to the staff village, a road regularly used by the employees of the reserve. The sunlight was slowly fading away, although it was bright enough for not switching on the lights of the vehicle yet.

We stopped the vehicle once we saw a snake and two birds in the middle of the road.

We halted about 5-6 m away, chasing the birds about 20 meters further, whereas the snake remained still on the red sand. Before we

slowed down, the two birds were about 30 cm from the snake, each on a different side, showing a particular interest in the reptile. The snake, a Puff Adder *Bitis arietans*, was immobile. We have not had the time to observe the detailed behaviour of the birds that appeared to be two Kalahari Scrub Robins *Cercotrichas paena*, a common bird species in the reserve (Fig 1). The snake was relatively small, about 50 cm long and 5 cm wide.

We turned the vehicle lights on, in order to take better photographs of the reptile (Fig 2). The snake remained still for about 10 minutes during which two other vehicles arrived and briefly stopped to have a look at it. The Kalahari Scrub Robins were no longer visible.

After the second vehicle left, the puff adder started moving slowly towards the grass, leaving a rectilinear track on the sand.

Photos: Elsa Bussière

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### References

**Lovegrove, B 1993.** The living deserts of southern Africa. Fernwood Press.



**Fig 1** – A Kalahari Scrub Robin at Tswalu Kalahari Reserve. Photograph taken on a different day.



**Fig 2** – Puff Adder on the road, photographed after being mobbed by two Kalahari Scrub Robins