

# Ornithological Observations

<http://oo.adu.org.za>



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



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**

---

## **EUROPEAN HONEY BUZZARD FEEDING ON YELLOW JACKET WASPS' *VESPULA GERMANICA* COMBS IN WELLINGTON, WESTERN CAPE**

**Edmund Oettle**

Recommended citation format:

**Oettle E 2015.** European Honey Buzzard feeding on Yellow Jacket Wasps' *Vespula germanica* combs in Wellington, Western Cape. Ornithological Observations, Vol 6: 24-25

URL: <http://oo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=167>

Published online: 22 January 2015

**- ISSN 2219-0341 -**



## EUROPEAN HONEY BUZZARD FEEDING ON YELLOW JACKET WASPS' *VESPULA GERMANICA* COMBS IN WELLINGTON, WESTERN CAPE

*Edmund Oettle* \*

Cape Falconry Club, Fisantekuil Farm,  
Blouville Rd, Wellington

\* Corresponding author: [info@organicwine.co.za](mailto:info@organicwine.co.za)

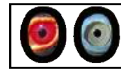
The Yellow Jacket Wasp *Vespula germanica* is an invasive species that has been found in the Winelands of the Western Cape. They were first noted on Fisantekuil Farm, Wellington, in 2013. In Europe where they originate, their combs and grubs are commonly eaten by European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*. These birds were first seen in the Wellington area in 1998 (Oettle 1999), about 15 years before the first invasive wasps were noted in the same area.

On 9 April 2014 I flushed a dark phase European Honey Buzzard from the road verge on the neighbouring farm when driving past. As it was late in the day, with poor light conditions, I got only a fleeting glimpse of the very dark raptor flying up. I mistakenly thought it was a melanistic black sparrowhawk, which are common in the area. I assumed that I had flushed it from its kill in the hedgerow adjacent to the road. I stopped, curious as to what the bird had been eating, but could find no prey remains of any sort. I noticed the wasp nest, but gave it a wide berth as the wasps can inflict unpleasant stings if disturbed. The next day I went past the place again, and the bird was in the tree overlooking the wasp nest. This time I was able to identify it as the European Honey Buzzard. When it flew off, it called a few times, a short "kew" similar to the resident Jackal Buzzard call, but shorter. It called at about 15 second intervals, and the voice



**Fig 1** – A European Honey Buzzard standing in the road next to the wasps' nest in the embankment.

could be heard after the bird had flown out of sight. On 11 April I went back to the same place, and this time the Buzzard was on the ground at the wasps' nest. I was able to watch it for about half an hour, during which it went right into the nest. The bird scratched out the combs and some soil with its claws, much like a chicken does when scratching for food. When the combs were outside the nest, it ate some. It kept going in and out of the nest, which was tunnel shaped, about 150 mm diameter, and about 300 mm deep. The bird was disturbed by some workers who were walking (and then running!) past the nest. I was able to take a few photos of the bird on a low resolution cellphone camera. I went back the next day to



**Fig 2** - Wasps' nest, showing entrance hole with grey combs that had been scratched on the road.

photograph the damaged nest with a better camera and hopefully get a better picture of the bird, but it was not seen again. Given the state of the nest, this is not surprising, as there was little left to eat.

The last sighting on 11 April seemed quite late for a migrant bird still to be present in its non-breeding grounds.

- oo0oo -

#### References

Oettlé EE 1999. Honey Buzzard in Wellington. *Promerops* 238: 18.