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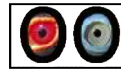
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CAPE SPARROWS NESTING IN A BLACK-COLLARED BARBET NEST CAVITY

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Bird nests are as important to breeding success as any other aspect of the biological needs for the reproductive cycle. They are also almost as diverse in structure and materials as the taxonomy of birds, ranging in structure from an open cup, enclosed ball, a saucer-shaped platform to cavities in trees or banks, either self-excavated or existing holes. The type of nest has evolved through time to suit the evolutionary constraints dictated by the biology of the species. It is therefore quite unusual for any bird species to have an array of nest structure types.

The nest structure of the Cape Sparrow *Passer melanurus* is described as a large untidy hollow ball of grasses, weed stems, and pliable woody material such as long leaf petioles, or woolly peduncles of Old Man's Beard *Galium tomentosum* creeper, with a side-tunnel entrance (Tarboton 2001). The nest is usually placed 2-20 m above ground in a bush, tree, hollow fence post, wire-netting fence, telegraph pole crossbar, under eaves of building or in an old swallow or weaver nest (Dean 2005). Or, Tarboton (2011) adds to the nest description by including nest boxes, and in holes in walls and earth banks.

Although there is mention of the nest being in a hollow fence post or the use of an old swallow or weaver nest, we have not found any record of this species using the excavated nest of a primary cavity nesting species (woodpeckers and barbets).

Previous to the spring of 2014, a pair of Black-collared Barbets *Lybius torquatus* had excavated a nest hole near the top of a wooden telephone pole at 3 Sangster Road, Howick, KwaZulu-Natal. The hole was approximately 11 m above the ground and faced east. During October 2014, a pair of Cape Sparrows claimed the barbet nest hole and proceeded to line the inside of the cavity in preparation for egg-laying. They successfully completed incubation and fledged their chicks from the nest.

Also of interest is that the same nest cavity was used by a pair of Southern Grey-headed Sparrows *Passer diffuses* during the summer of 2013/2014 and that the barbets have now excavated a new nest cavity above the hi-jacked cavity in the same pole.

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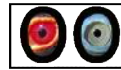


Fig 1 – A female Cape Sparrow at the entrance of the old Black-collard Barbet nest which they used for their nest site © Ian Little



Fig 2 – A male Cape Sparrow at the entrance of the old Black-collard Barbet nest which they used for their nest site © Ian Little