

Ornithological Observations

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



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Editor: Arnold van der Westhuizen

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Recommended citation format:

Symes CT, Rees T, Nelson K 2015. Chorister Robin-Chat *Cossypha dichroa* gleaning on Bushbuck *Tragelaphus scriptus*. Ornithological Observations, Vol 6: 44-45

URL: <http://oo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=174>

Published online: 07 March 2015

- ISSN 2219-0341 -



CHORISTER ROBIN-CHAT *COSSYPHA DICHROA* GLEANNING ON BUSHBUCK *TRAGELAPHUS* *SCRIPTUS*

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A review of African birds feeding in association with mammals, by Dean and MacDonald (1981), comprehensively documents a number of mammal and bird-feeding interactions. They report on the association of Brown Scrub-Robin *Cercotrichas signata*, Red-capped Robin-Chat *Cossypha natalensis*, and Chorister Robin-Chat *C. dichroa* feeding on insects flushed by foraging mole-rats *Cryptomys* spp. in KwaZulu-Natal (Oatley 1970), and the association of Red-capped Robin-Chat with Bushbuck *Tragelaphus scriptus*, Blue Duiker *Cephalophus monticola*, and cattle in forest (Oatley 1970). Terry Oatley recorded, "In the Natal midlands forest I once watched a Chorister Robin picking ticks from a Bushbuck ram" (Oatley 1959), while in Hluhluwe Game Reserve, "the Chorister Robin has been observed gleaning ectoparasites from the mane of a Nyala" (IAWM in Dean and MacDonald 1981). In addition, Skead (1997, p. 1159) notes; "Mr LG Bagshaw-Smith (pers. comm. 1978), watched one pick ticks off a Bushbuck ewe", and Vernon and Dean (1988) report on a Chorister Robin-Chat that hover-gleaned a tick from the tail of a cow on 1 August 1986 at Kambi Forest near Umtata in the former Transkei.



Fig 1 - Screen-shots of the film footage of a Chorister Robin-Chat visiting a Bushbuck. See footage on YouTube at <http://youtu.be/D87WA5zb-9A> (Uploaded 4 November 2014).

In this note we report on two additional observations of interactions between Chorister Robin-Chat and Bushbuck.

1. On Friday, 15 March 2013, at 05:38, a video recording was made using a camera trap at Winterskloof, Hilton, 10 km north of Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, in a section of mistbelt forest. The 15 second snippet records a Chorister Robin-Chat flying directly onto the forehead of a female Bushbuck. It perches there for approximately 3 seconds, where it probes the right ear twice. The Bushbuck nods its head and the Robin-Chat hops onto the shoulders of the Bushbuck, where it perches for approximately 7 seconds; here the Bushbuck seems unperturbed. In the last section of the clip (where the recording is cut short) it appears as if the Robin-Chat again flies onto the head of the Bushbuck (Fig 1).

2. On 19 July 2014, at Umgeni Valley Nature Reserve, in Howick



near Pietermaritzburg, Mike Spain was conducting a bird walk and encountered a Bushbuck with a Chorister Robin-Chat perched on its back (K Nelson pers. comm. with M Spain, 2014). The bird did not glean from the Bushbuck but rather appeared to use the buck as a beater, waiting for it to disturb something edible when it would fly down and then back on to the buck; this it did at least twice (K Nelson pers. comm. with M Spain, 2014). Unfortunately no one in the group had a camera so details of the event were not recorded in detail.

Bringing together these observations suggests that the association, in particular, of these two species, may be more common than previously acknowledged, where Chorister Robin-Chats glean from Bushbuck as well as use them as "beaters". Indeed, the manner in which the Bushbuck appears comfortable with the Chorister Robin-Chat visitor may even suggest that resident animals may have an "understanding", or possibly the recognition of "cleaning stations" for animals.

Acknowledgements

Terry Oatley is thanked for comments on the article and for noting that he has made no subsequent observations, since those we report here, of Chorister Robin-Chats and mammals interacting. However, for much of this time he has lived outside the range of the Chorister Robin-Chat.

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