

# Ornithological Observations

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**An electronic journal published by 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**

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Recommended citation format:

**de Swardt, DH 2015.** Observations of African Jacanas at Rooidam, Bloemfontein. Ornithological Observations, Vol 6: 202-204

URL: <http://oo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=187>

Published online: 12 September 2015

- ISSN 2219-0341 -



## OBSERVATIONS OF AFRICAN JACANAS AT ROOIDAM, BLOEMFONTEIN

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The African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus* occurs widespread in southern Africa and is locally abundant at wetlands and along river systems such as the Vaal and Orange rivers (Tarboton 2005). The species is highly mobile and nomadic mostly as a result of the ephemeral nature of wetlands and wide dispersal of individuals have been recorded (Tarboton 2005). Data from the first Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP1) reveal that this species had high reporting rates (with high concentrations) in the Okavango Delta, Zimbabwe, the Caprivi Strip and south-wards into South Africa with the largest concentrations in the northern and eastern provinces (Tarboton 1997). Their populations also extend southwestward along the Vaal River with scattered localities in the eastern Free State on the Lesotho border, the Welkom area in central Free State and at localities in the Northern Cape/Namibia (the Richtersveld and in the Fish River Canyon) (Tarboton 1997).

The following observations of African Jacanas during regular SABAP2 surveys in pentad 2910\_2610 outside Bloemfontein are of interest. The pentad includes the wetland areas of Rooidam near the Ferreira Road and the eastern section of Leeuberg (highest point 1605 m asl) which borders the N1 highway in both the northern and southern directions. Rooidam is a manmade dam which is bordered by the suburban areas of Louierpark and the Ferreira Road



**Fig 1** - African Jacana foraging on mat of water hyacinth in one of the bays at Rooidam, outside Bloemfontein on 3 October 2014 – not the presence of plastic pollutants.

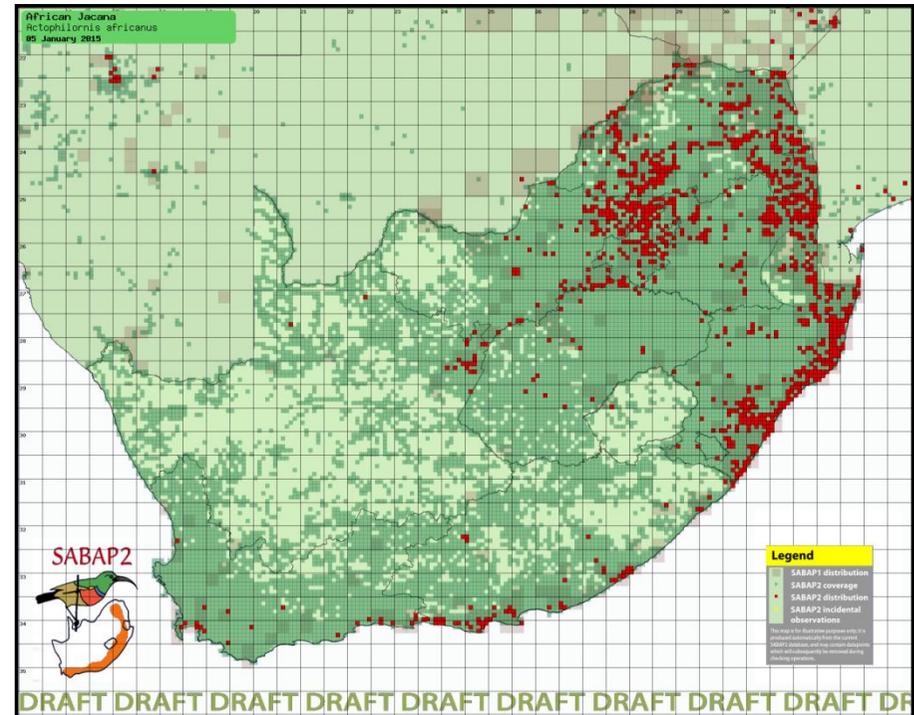
surrounded by grassland areas. The dam is a popular angling and recreation area but is sadly infested with the exotic invasive water hyacinth *Eichhornia crassipes* and is plagued by pollution of especially plastic materials.



**Fig 2** - The extent of the invasive water hyacinth along the shores of Rooidam outside Bloemfontein where the African Jacanas have been observed since October 2014.

The first observation of the species at Rooidam in a SABAP2 survey was on 3 October 2014. At the end of the dry winter season water levels had dropped considerably and a mat of water hyacinth covered the bays and extended areas of the dam. I observed a single African Jacana foraging on the mat of water hyacinth in one of the covered bays (Fig 1). It was observed alongside Squacco Heron, Little Egret, Cattle Egret and Black-crowned Night Heron. Later in the morning on my return along the same route the bird could not be located.

Subsequent visits to the pentad were made on 13 October 2014, 9 November 2014 (two birds - possibly 3 - were present) and the last



**Fig 3** - Current distribution of African Jacana according to SABAP2 distribution data – the grey squares reflect SABAP1 distribution. The yellow arrow indicates the Rooidam pentad (2910\_2610) on the outskirts of Bloemfontein.

sighting was on 30 December 2014<sup>1</sup> when the jacana was still present in the same area of the dam (Fig 2). In these observations the birds were observed foraging on the water hyacinth mat close to the dam shore alongside Common Moorhen and Glossy Ibis. At the time it seemed that the water hyacinth attracted considerable insect

<sup>1</sup> Author reported a last observation of the species on 10 August 2015. The species is included in 8 full protocol and 1 ad hoc data cards submitted to the SABAP2 database – Ed.



life which in turn attracted the foraging birds

During surveys for SABAP1 this species was regularly reported in areas along the Vaal River as far west as the area around Kimberley, Welkom and areas in the eastern Free State (Tarboton 1997). Currently, during SABAP2, they have been recorded at Krugersdrift dam (2850\_2555; 19 January 2013), Soetdoring Nature Reserve (2845\_2600; 14 December 2010), at pans near the Petrusburg road (2905\_2545; 15 February 2011) and further east near Dewetsdorp (2925\_2635; 22 November 2011) and in the Tweespruit area (2915\_2710; 19 January 2012) (cf Fig 3). These sightings at Roidam in the Bloemfontein area represent new distribution records for this species. It seems as if the species is slowly extending its range southwestward into the drier interior where manmade structures make it possible for them to survive.

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