

## A NEW BIRD RECORD FOR THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

by

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The wealth of birdlife in the Kruger National Park has long been an attraction to scientists and laymen alike. Col. J. Stevenson-Hamilton, warden of the Park for over 40 years, kept careful note of the birds. The first authentic checklist and distribution records of birds of the Park was compiled by Col. M. Rowland-Jones in the 1940's. Some years later, in 1959, a systematic and comprehensive survey of the birds of the Park was launched by Dr. U. de V. Pienaar, then assistant biologist, in collaboration with Mr. O. P. M. Prozesky of the Transvaal Museum and the field staff in the Park. The result of this survey was a checklist of 412 species published by Pienaar and Prozesky (1961). Amendments to this list have subsequently been made to include new species. During 1971 Kemp (*in press*), ornithologist of the Transvaal Museum, revised all the available sight recordings and distributional data collected over the years.

Despite all the surveys done on birds through the years new species are still recorded in the Park from time to time. Many of these species include migrants or vagrants entering the Park during rather abnormal times such as cyclones or periods of heavy rainfall. Recently (26.8.72), two crimson-breasted shrikes (*Laniarius atro-coccineus* Burchell) – Roberts No. 711 – were spotted in the Makuleke area of the Kruger National Park. It was not deemed necessary to collect one of the birds as the observers were well acquainted with the South African avifauna and the bird itself – by virtue of its brilliant crimson breast and strongly contrast ing black back – making a misidentification almost impossible.

The importance of this record must be seen in its zoogeographical context as it is yet another addition to the steadily increasing list of faunistic and floristic links between the more arid and semiarid western fauna and flora with that of the eastern zone. Pienaar (1970) has drawn attention to the following floristic elements occurring in the extreme northern areas of the Kruger National Park illustrating an association with the western flora: *Baphia massaiensis* subsp. *obovata*, *Pterocarpus antunesii*, *Guibourtia conjugata*, *Dalbergia nitidula*, *Commiphora tenniopetiolata*, *Sesamothammus lugardii*, *Brachylaena huillensis*, *Diplorrhynchus condylocarpon*, *Ficus brachylepis*, *Xylopia odoratissima*, *Boscia rehmanniana*, *Combretum engleri*, *Pseudolachnostylis maprouneifolia*, *Salvadora persica*, *Aloe littoralis* and *Stipagrostis uniplumis*.

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There are also definite faunal elements suggesting a link between the west and the east. Of these Pienaar (1970) notes the following as significant: *Orinodoros savignyi* (sand tampan), *Xeroceustus burchelli* (land snail), *Phrynobatrachus ukingensis mababiensis* (a small frog), *Branchinellites ondonguae* (fairy shrimp) and two sand snakes *Psammophis leightoni* and *P. angolensis*. The most recent addition to this list of fauna and the most exciting discovery in the Kruger National Park in recent years, was the sighting and subsequent collecting of the bat-eared fox (*Otocyon megalotis*).

The area in which the crimson-breasted shrikes were seen is situated between the Levubu and Limpopo Rivers in the north-eastern extreme of the Park. This area, referred to as Makuleke, has only been under the jurisdiction of the National Parks Board for the last three years and was therefore not included in the bird surveys mentioned above. However, it forms part of the Levubu River complex which is adequately represented in the Park and which had been included in the surveys. Despite regular visits to the area over the last few years this was the first report of this species in the area.

Makuleke lies in the wedge between the confluence of the Levubu and Limpopo Rivers and comprises a large tract of flood plains with numerous seasonal pans. Adjoining the flood plains on higher ground the vegetation consists of rather arid plant associations including mixed *Colophospermum-Combretum* associations together with scattered clumps of Acacias and sandveld communities. It was in one of these stands of scrub *Acacia* where the shrikes were encountered.

Roberts (as revised by McLachlan and Liversidge, 1961) gives the distribution of *L. atro-coccineus* as "South West Africa as far as the Orange River, northern Cape, northern Orange Free State, Bechuanaland (Botswana), the western and north-western half of the Transvaal and Matabeleland as far east as Gwelo." It is therefore clear that this record falls well outside its known range. The most likely explanation for its occurrence in Makuleke is that in all probability it followed much the same route as the other western fauna representatives i.e. down the dry Limpopo valley through the south-western sector of Rhodesia. More distributional data on this species are, however, required to draw any definite conclusions.

#### REFERENCES

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