

expeditions. However, despite the unfavourable circumstances, we gathered valuable data.

Another one of the objectives of the Botswana Swallow Project was to count the number of waterbirds in the wetlands that were used by swallows as roosting sites. The waterbird counts that we conducted at every trapping site showed that the importance of the Boteti River for waterbirds had increased tremendously in 1995 because of the drought. They either concentrated in the few small sections of the riverbed that still contained water, or else had to leave the area. The drying up of the river will eventually result in their complete disappearance. The importance of permanent waterbodies increases during droughts

and this was apparent at Shashe Dam. In January 1995, the highest number and diversity of waterbirds was found since the counts started here in January 1993. This would also apply to the Okavango Delta.

This third expedition marked the end of the Botswana Swallow Project. During these three years, we ringed a total 19 584 birds of which 18 424 were European Swallows. The final report will appear in 1996, followed by some articles in bird magazines.

We express our gratitude to everyone who helped us in achieving this Project, in particular Marc Herremans in Botswana and Terry Oatley in South Africa.

FORCED REMOVALS, ABUSE OF MINORS AND VIOLENT DEATH ON THE CAPE PENINSULA

Mike Fraser & Liz McMahon

Sandbanks, Kenmuir Steps, Glencairn 7995

On 29 December 1992, a brood of well-grown Redwinged Starling *Onychognathus morio* chicks was rescued from a house being demolished in the Cape Town suburb of Wynberg. The birds then somehow found their way to the FitzPatrick Institute and almost got no further. The only suggestion as to what to do with them there was made by a venerable member of that institute who proposed that the unfortunate threesome should be "placed in the freezer until they succumb". You would have more sympathy for this unfeeling course of action had you heard the birds squeal. Possibly because of all the din, the birds' plight was heard of by Terry Oatley who, being more charitably disposed, rescued the refugees from a chilly, lingering death and brought them to us.

Redwinged Starling chicks are, like most young birds, vocal and rapacious. They were easy to feed (a cocktail of Pronutro, raw mince, chopped-up hard-boiled egg and various garden invertebrates, on demand), but

the noise was all but intolerable and having a shoebox-full of them on the dining room table was putting something of a strain on domestic relations. Through the good offices of Gill Wheeler at Rondevlei Nature Reserve we acquired a large cage and, with considerable relief, installed the orphans on our stoep. Here their squealings were mercifully less audible to us but soon attracted the attention of not only the neighbour's cat (small missiles in its direction at regular intervals kept it at bay) but also a pair of Redwinged Starlings. These birds were already collecting food in our garden for their own brood about 200 metres away, but such was the clamour of the orphans that the adult birds also came to investigate. The result being that within an hour of the chicks being ensconced on the stoep, the adults were attempting to pass food to them through the wire mesh. To facilitate their efforts and, we must confess, reduce our workload somewhat, we cut a small opening in the mesh, big enough for a starling but too small for a Siamese, and within a few minutes the adoptive parents took food through the hole. This generosity was not greeted with any enthusiasm by the chicks who, being accustomed to the arrival of the great food-bearing forceps, covered in silent terror at the arrival of an adult of their own breed. If

we approached, in contrast, they put on their customary noisy begging performance.

Their refusal to accept food from the starlings frustrated both us and the adult birds. In desperation we taped the begging calls of the chicks and played it when the adults next visited. This immediately had the desired effect and the chicks, on hearing their own begging calls, perked up, opened their beaks and accepted food from the adults. The latter then set up a regular pattern of feeding visits. To alleviate the strain of their catering for two broods, we continued feeding our chicks at a reduced level and provided supplementary food for the adults. Over the next three days the female made the majority of visits to the chicks, while the male continued to gather food but either transferred it to her, or went off to feed his biological brood down the road. The chicks also became increasingly wary of us, which was no bad thing. On 6 January, the parents stopped bringing food and the female led two of the chicks out of the cage at 11h00. The third left a little later but was immediately set upon by the male, who vigorously pecked and jostled it. We replaced the chick in the cage and it finally left unmolested at 17h00.

Although the successful fledging was a happy outcome, the story did not end there. The female of the adoptive pair had been ringed nearby on 6 January 1991 by Terry Oatley in

one of his pre-dusk swoops (see Oatley & Fraser 1992). She was retrapped by us while feeding the chicks and on New Year's Day 1994 she was caught again, this time with a different mate (also ringed by Terry, on 20 September 1992) collecting food for another brood. On 27 October 1994, she was electrocuted at Dido Valley, not far from Glencairn. A month prior to that, one of her adopted brood was found dead, thought to have been shot, across the valley at Glencairn Heights, 21 months after fledging. We would not be surprised, given the high recovery rate of the species, to hear of the other chicks in due course.

All quite a saga, and quite enough material for one of the more lurid soapies. More importantly we have, through ringing, demonstrated chick adoption, simultaneous double-broodedness (after a fashion), mate and brood infidelity, chick survival and anthropogenic causes of mortality. Not bad for three chicks which could have ended their days under a pile of rubble or in the deep freeze.

Redwinged Starlings continue to be remarkably productive in terms of recoveries and retraps and we encourage ringers to target the species whenever they can.

REFERENCE

OATLEY, T. & FRASER, M. 1992. Red-ringed Redwinged Starlings. *Safring News* 21: 43-49.

VOËLBERINGING KAN GEVAARLIK WEES

Dawie de Swardt

Nasionale Museum, Posbus 266, Bloemfontein

Wanneer ek nette oprig om voëls te vang, is my doelgroep gewoonlik Jangroentjies en ander middelslag voëls. Tydens 'n onlangse besoek aan Ficksburg was dit egter 'n ander storie.

Aangesien die klein veldaalwyntjies gedurende September blom, het ek dié keer my nette in die rantjies opeerig. Van Woens-

dag af was ek op my pos, wat ek al vir die afgelope vyf jaar besoek. Ek het vyf Jangroentjies gevang, maar Donderdag het ek moedeloos uur na uur na leë nette gestap. 'n Groot skok het vir my gewag in een van my nuwe, sterker nette - 'n Edelvalk ('n roofvoël vir die wat nie weet nie!) het vermoedelik 'n duif gejaag en is in die proses in my net gevang!

Wel, ek moet die voël uit die net kry (hulle weeg ± 600 g) en ek is daarby nog alleen ook! Roofvoëls se gevaarlikste wapen is hulle skerp kloue en ek weet dat ek hulle ten alle koste moet vermy. Met my linkerhand het ek die