TICKS ON AFRICAN MARSH WARBLER

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On 26 November 1995, two of us (HDO, RG) had a mistnetting session to trap weaverbirds at the CSIR constructed wetland in Pretoria (Oschadleus 1995). One of the birds trapped was an African Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus baeticatus*, which was found to have a large number of ticks. A total of 17 nymphal ticks (plus an additional two or three that were lost) were collected from the head of the warbler (Figure 1). In spite of this heavy infestation, the bird appeared to be in good condition. The ticks were identified by HH as large, coarse bont-legged ticks *Hyalomma marginatum rufipes* (Howell *et al.* 1978). This is a two-host tick: the immature stages (larvae and nymphae) are usually found on a wide variety of bird species (around the head of the bird), while the adult ticks feed on large domestic animals and wild animals. This tick is found in many parts of both Africa and Eurasia (Hoogstraal 1956).

Although many bird species act as host for this tick species (Theiler 1959), it appears to be the first published record for any *Acrocephalus* warbler. The lack of records for *Acrocephalus* warblers could in part be due to the habitat that these birds inhabit. The tick larvae are generally found in short grass where they quest (hunt) for their hosts (Rechav 1986, Spickett *et al.* 1991) and thus are not often found on waterbirds and birds associated with reeds.

Origin of the ticks

The CSIR wetland was constructed at the end of 1994 and African Marsh Warblers, an intra-African migrant, were recorded for the first time in September 1995 in a weekly survey. Small numbers of this warbler have been present since then, and breeding has been observed. Although the CSIR campus supports many potential hosts for the immature ticks, there appear to be no suitable hosts for

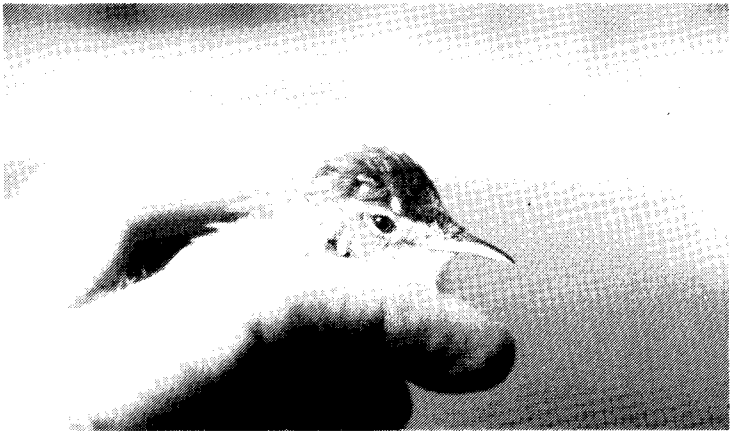

Figure 1. Head of African Marsh Warbler showing some of the tick nymphae, nearly fully engorged. More nymphae were on the other side of the bird's head.

the adult ticks. There is a small resident population of 94 Common Duikers *Sylvicapra grimmia* and 34 Steenbok *Raphicerus campestris* on the CSIR campus (1995 census). Although there is a single record of this tick from a duiker (Hoogstraal 1956), it prefers larger ungulates (Howell *et al.* 1978). Thus the tick infestation may have occurred outside the CSIR and the bird 'imported' the ticks. Migrant birds are known to be able to transport ticks some distance (Theiler 1959). Of the *ca.* 300 birds handled at the CSIR (mostly Masked Weavers *Ploceus velatus* and Red Bishops *Euplectes orix*) no others have been found to have ticks.

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